TOMMI KAKKO

Failures by Design

The Transparent Author in English Satire from Marprelate to Pope

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ACADEMIC DISSERTATION
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Summary in Finnish

Väitöskirjani tutkii englantilaisen satiirin keskeisiä kirjailijoita ja heidän metodejaan vierittää tekstin tulkinnan vastuu lukijoilleen. Hahmotan satiirin käyttämää retoriikkaa keskittyen fiktiivisen auktorin hahmon, kirjailijan ja lukijan väliseen suhteeseen. Yhdistän tutkimuksessani renessanssin sekä 1700-luvun englantilaisen satiirin perinteet ja osoitan, että niissä esiintyy yhteneväisyyksiä lukijan ja auktorin välisen yhteisymmärryksen ja vuoropuhelun muodossa. Kartoitan lukijoiden ja auktorien suhdetta käyttäen metodinani argumenttianalyysiä, narratologiaa ja hermeneutiikkaa. Väitän, että renessanssin ja 1700-luvun satiiria yhdistää satiirikon ironinen persoona, joka esiintyy lukijalle rehellisenä valehtelijana. Vertaileva argumenttianalyysi osoittaa, että vaikka auktorin läpinäkyvä vilpittömyys kertoo englantilaisen satiirin tradition jatkuvuudesta, hahmon käytössä on myös eroavaisuuksia, jotka voi johtaa julkisen debatin konventioiden muutoksiin, satiirin muuttuvaan asemaan propagandana, painoteollisuuden kehitykseen ja uusien julkaisumuotojen syntyyn.

Aineistoni koostuu pääasiassa englantilaisen satiirin klassikoista. Analyysin kohteina ovat renessanssikirjallisuudesta puritaanien ja runouden puolustajien väliset debatit, Martin Marprelatina tunnetun fiktiivisen kirjailijan satiiriset pamfletit sekä Thomas Nashen *Anatomy of Absurdity* ja *The Unfortunate Traveller*. Näistä tutkimus siirtyy John Drydenin kirjallisuuskritiikkiin, Daniel Defoen fiktiivisiin auktoreihin, Jonathan Swiftin *A Tale of Tub* -teoksen oppinutta lukijaa solvaavaan retoriikkaan ja Alexander Popen runouteen sekä hänen satiiriseen retoriikan manuaaliinsa *Peri Bathousiin*. Aineiston analyysin edetessä tuon esiin läpinäkyvän vilpillisyyden funktion tekstien argumenteissa sekä kommentoin niiden yhteneväisyyksiä ja eroavaisuuksia. Satiirin retoriikan historiaa lukiessani yhdistän sen myös valistusajan filosofian ja tieteen kehityskaareen. Monet satiirikoista tunsivat rationalisoituvan kulttuurin menettäneen loistonsa ja protestoivat maallistunutta ajattelua vastaan. Heidän

auktorinsa pyrkivät usein viettelemään lukijan retoriikallaan ja tuomaan heidät hetkeksi omaan mielipuoliseen maailmaansa. Renessanssin ajan satiiri otti osaa myös uskonnollisiin kiistoihin, mutta 1700-luvun satiirikkojen retoriikassa korostuu eeppisen runouden raunioille korotettu satiirin genre, joka pyrki pelastamaan jotain runouden lumouksesta.

Keskeiseksi kysymykseksi kaikissa teoksissa nousee tulkinnan mahdottomuus. Satiirikot pyrkivät lumoamaan lukijansa käyttämällä retoriikkaa, joka vastustaa tulkintaa ja kirjoittivat teoksia, jotka oli suunniteltu mahdottomiksi tulkita. Martin Marprelate -kirjailijat tekivät näin ärsyttääkseen oppineita kirkonmiehiä, Thomas Nashe viihdyttääkseen lukijoitaan. John Dryden, Daniel Defoe, Jonathan Swift ja Alexander Pope tarkastelivat läpinäkyvästi vilpillisen auktorin hahmoa abstraktiona, jolla oli monia käyttötarkoituksia. Kaikkia yhdistää kuitenkin tietoinen halu mahdollistaa lukijan oma kokemus epäonnistuneesta tulkinnasta. Väitöskirjan viimeinen kappale yhdistää epäonnistuneen tulkinnan modernistisen kirjallisuuden keskeisiin piirteisiin ja väittää, että renessanssin ja 1700-luvun englantilaisten satiirikkojen retoriikan traditio voi yhä valottaa keskeisiä kirjallisuudentutkimuksen teoreettisia kysymyksiä.

Contents

1. Introduction

When one first approaches the history of authorship, one quickly finds that authorship before the advent of Renaissance philology was perceived as polysemous, undetermined, anonymous or shared. Before the early modern period, according to the canonical story, texts were handed down to posterity without much regard to authorship and it was left to philology to sort out questions of authenticity and attribution wherever possible. The postmodern author is often similarly fragmented and diffuse in terms of identity as his or her pre-Renaissance predecessor was, albeit for different reasons, and pronounced dead in order to shift agency to the reader as the creator of meaning. He or she may also be constructed only as a nominalist link to various discursive practices. The early eighteenth century falls in between the unborn and undead Authors as the locus of the unambiguously agentic Author. The Author's power to determine meaning and regulate the interpretation of texts may be viewed, for example, as a necessary correlate to a new age of reason during which the agency of the subject was put on safe ground by Cartesian philosophy. The gradual erosion of authorial agency after the excesses of the Romantic subject now make dreams of Author-driven monosemic meaning seem naïve, or a remnant of an age whose utopian hopes have finally been exhausted. However, recently the figure of the Author appears to have been revived once again thanks to the waning of Theory and a new focus on literary history. One finds that the standard narrative, "a story of identity emerging out of anonymity,"[1] is regularly challenged by modern critics who wish to add further digressions or, as is often the case, question its premises.

[1] Griffin 1999, 878.

There is an element of caricature in synopses of this sort, of course, and they show that as one pulls back from historical facts to create broad outlines of literary history, there is a danger of creating stick figure narratives where actual case studies will tell a different story. This is not to say that mapping out literary history on a grand scale is not a valid way of approaching the subject, but that more detailed case-by-case work that focuses on the texts themselves may contradict received wisdom simply because it can highlight contemporary objections to a later consensus.[2] This dissertation follows one such twist in the tale by examining the tropical use of the Author as a way of relinquishing hermeneutic agency. That is, I want to draw attention to the "anonymizing and pseudonymizing gestures"[3] by which satirists shifted the responsibility of interpretation to fictional agents as well as their audiences. The hypothesis behind my readings is that due to the rise of criticism, eighteenth-century authors came to view satire as a form of moral philosophy that took advantage of poetic license. To deflect blame, they collectively looked back to earlier conventions in English letters in order to mock the figure of the Author. What unites the tradition of English satire, I claim, is the figure of the transparently deceitful Author who deliberately fails in trying to contain the meaning of his or her text and hands over the task of interpretation to the reader.

The self-conscious mockery of the roles of authors and readers in eighteenth-century satire was a continuation of a Renaissance tradition. Stephen Dobranski has shown that Renaissance writers "commonly wanted readers to collaborate in their texts—that is, to share

[2] Histories of literary criticism of course examine and take part in this process, but histories with a specific focus on literary history itself are scarce. A recent study by April London shows that in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century literary history, Johnson's *Lives* being the obvious whetstone for later historians, was perceived as a genre that had potential to enact social change through canon formation and so consciously fashion the aesthetic and intellectual tastes of citizens. This project, though hardly without controversy in itself, was paired with the analysis of public opinion as it was formed by popular literature and other "transformative modes of reading" (2010, 160). London argues that literary history was emptied of its radical potential after the 1820s as genre borders became more established first between history and literature and eventually within literature and literary studies.

[3] Bennett 2005, 54.

responsibility for the texts' meanings."[4] Later readers and authors taking advantage of the existing convention were equally drawn to the strange collaborative discourse it was able to generate. *Tristram Shandy* is perhaps the strangest example of an eighteenth-century text of this kind. Sterne, playing a trick on reader participation, incorporates the reading experience into his story. James Preston's conclusion on Sterne's strategy is worth quoting at some length, because it explains something very important about how eighteenth-century satire viewed reading:

> The text is both a process, the onward movement of the conversation between writer and reader, and a product, the substance of that conversation. Thus the reader is both inside and outside it. He is helping forward the imagining of a world in which he can then see this imagining reflected as a story. Thus the more he loses himself in the pursuit of the fiction, the more likely he is to be able to believe in his identity within that fiction. Sterne is bringing the reading situation into the compass of the book; he is asking us to see it as something discovered by the imagination, whilst at the same time it is work for the imagination to do.[5]

"Reading," Preston summarizes, "is not trying to be not-reading" when the author's critical awareness of textuality is made explicit.[6] Rather, it is an invitation to follow an author and, in some sense, to become one yourself. My readings progress from Puritan attacks against poetry to the Marprelate Controversy and the work of Thomas Nashe. From there, I will proceed via the criticism of John Dryden to the satires of Daniel Defoe, Jonathan Swift and Alexander Pope. I have chosen canonical authors and texts, because they have been judged to embody a self-consciously literary age reflecting upon the past and itself. As canonical authors, the ones included here are eminently readable and re-readable. There are also persistent and evolving questions surrounding their texts to which critics continue to respond, ambiguities by design which continue to demand answers. Those mentioned in the dissertation include the apparent aimlessness and unclear motives behind the Marprelate

[4] Dobranski 2005, 11.
[5] Preston 1970, 200.
[6] Ibid.

Controversy, the semantic hollowness of Thomas Nashe's prose and the complex and paradoxically empty literary persona of John Dryden. These I view as part of the satirical inheritance that was used by both Whig and Tory satirists, represented here by Defoe, Swift and Pope. As the texts are known to most students of English literature, the need for exposition is minimized and one can thus better focus on questions of interpretation.

The satirists and critics included in this dissertation tend to voice the inability of authors to determine meaning. Some of them try to erase themselves completely. In the most dramatic examples, the author explicitly commands the reader to assume responsibility for the meaning of the text and so forces hermeneutic agency on the reader. The effect is achieved by using various ambiguating tropes, rhetorical devices or by otherwise installing contradictions into the text. The most basic scenario—of which the authors included here present various iterations—involves, first, the author's voice heard in, for example, prefatory materials where the author's intentions and aims are stated clearly and, secondly, the body of the text which blatantly contradicts the author's original position. This also means that a degree of skepticism is expected of the reader. In many ways, this dissertation responds to James Noggle's study of the skeptical sublime and what he calls "the failure of human subjects to arrogate transcendent authority,"[7] but instead of transcendent authority and the reach of human reason it will focus on more mundane facets of the larger philosophical question Noggle explores. My aim is simply to locate methods by which authors shifted authority and agency. This leads to the naïve question behind my readings: Who takes responsibility for the meaning of the critical content of satire?

In reading the authors included in this study and reconstructing the contexts of the texts I shall not abide by the rigid methods advocated by most textual critics. The task at hand requires a more speculative hermeneutic approach. For example, I will of necessity break at

[7] Noggle 2001, 71.

least some of Robert D. Hume's basic principles for reconstructing contexts.[8] Due to the length of the period under examination, I will employ a broader history of ideas approach in order to place the analyses in context. A more speculative approach is also justified by the fact that the kind of diachronic rhetorical study presented in this dissertation—tracing changes in the uses of rhetoric—cannot rely only on an analysis of rigidly defined tropes and figures. If strict synchronic definitions were provided, I would eventually get entangled in anachronisms of my own making. Proof of these changes can be provided, but one can only justify the analyses if the argument makes sense to the reader through a shared reading experience. Such is the unease that accompanies any hermeneutic approach. However, given that the topic of the dissertation involves an evolving question of interpretation, it seems appropriate to arrange the argument in this way.

1.1 Thinking Dangerously

Harold Love identifies several "functions of authorship."[9] They reflect the set of activities that contribute to the creation of a text and are performed either collaboratively or by a single writer.[10] The practices and activities that must be uncovered for the purposes of attribution are conventionally simply glossed over by attributing them to an author and they are usually of little interest to readers who are interested less in tracing authorship than in finding out

[8] Hume lists the following: "(1) Avoid a priori assumptions; (2) eschew single viewpoint and uniformitarianism; (3) stick to a specific site and a narrow time range; (4) expect to have to take change into account if covering more than a very few years; (5) cite primary documents as your evidence and explain principles of selection or exclusion; (6) always remember that any context is a constructed hypothesis; that it is subject to validation; and that both contexts and conclusions drawn in the light of them must remain provisional" (1999, 71).
[9] Love 2002, 39.
[10] These would include, in Love's terms, functions such as precursory authorship, executive authorship, declarative authorship and revisionary authorship. Cf. Love 2002, 40–50.

what the authors had to say.[11] Authorship as agency, from Love's perspective, is finally a matter for the scholarly investigation of traceable textual practices. Authorship in this sense should be dissociated from "the author in the work" which according to Love is "always a textual performance."[12] The latter view of the author as a performative self or an act of self-representation—one who may also represent others within the work—actually agrees to a remarkable extent with classical and Renaissance views with which eighteenth-century authors were working. In studying authorship in these terms, however, one should keep in mind that Renaissance authors placed the representation of character within the domain of rhetoric, not poetry *per se*, under the broadly defined and competing practices of *prosopopoeia* and *ethopoeia*.[13] Representation as such is hardly an issue, although Puritan attacks on poetry do characteristically point out the moral ambiguity of the conscious use of figurative language, but the manner in which authorial self-representation is executed, the quality of the performance, is a different matter entirely.

Eighteenth-century satirists were disturbed by the birth of the Author and often quite aggressive in their skepticism. Skeptical satirists of the eighteenth century are also problematic for modern literary criticism, because the skepticism they exhibit tends to resonate very strongly with modern attitudes in literary criticism which is, on the whole, a discipline permeated by skeptical attitudes toward the notion of stable meaning.[14] This is why

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[11] Scholars in whose interest it is to trace the origin of texts and wrestle with questions of attribution will find an irony in Sebastiano Timpanaro's discovery that very little of Karl Lachmann's eponymous method for tracing the transmission of ancient texts was actually Lachmann's doing and that many of Love's terms apply to Lachmann's method as well. Cf. Timpanaro 2005, 115–8.

[12] Love 2002, 87.

[13] Alexander 2007, 97–112. It should be noted here that during the eighteenth-century the author's self-presentation was transformed drastically by the emergence of print culture. In her study *Christopher Smart and Satire: 'Mary Midnight' and the Midwife* (2008), Min Wild has shown that "it was through an opposition between classical rhetorical modes of self-presentation—modes which were designed to be used in attacking specific and local targets in the civic arena—and other, more recently available ways of writing about personal identity, that the persona arose and gained its ascendancy as the preferred way of addressing the periodical reader" (17). Wild argues that the new personas, including impersonations of the female voice in the periodical literature she examines, were derived in part from the new philosophies of the age. John Locke's theories of personal identity are of particular interest and will be discussed in later sections.

[14] Cf. Sedley 2005, 18–20.

I have been drawn to modern critical work that does not actively engage in what might be construed as the larger project of logocentric critique or what has been called the "centrifugal playfulness"[15] of certain texts. The topic rather requires a strict delineation of meaning and rhetorical intentionality that is somewhat out of place in the register of either, say, a poststructuralist mode of criticism or the forms of historicism still prevalent today. However, the dissertation does partake of their fruits and participates in their exploration of literary form and meaning in more general terms. What is needed is a focus on the rhetorical strategies of critics and satirists, the way they evolve as a function of argument and an emphasis on examples of their use to substantiate the claims made in the course of the dissertation. Without such a focus discussion concerning transparently false claims of sincerity and the like tends to become unbearably convoluted. This is also why I have tried to keep the methodological apparatus as light as possible.

I shall refer to two related rhetorical strategies identified by Irvin Ehrenpreis throughout the dissertation. The first of these is the mockery of what he calls the "standard of lucidity"[16] inherited by Restoration and eighteenth-century satirists. The examples Ehrenpreis presents include the 1731 pamphlet *The Doctrine of Innuendo's Discussed* which illustrates a paradigmatic use of the device. The pamphlet involves a polemical history presented in the form a transparent allegory where near-libelous links to courtly life can be drawn with very little interpretation in a scandalously transparent manner—not an allegory as a sustained metaphor but rather a string of provocatively arranged analogies posing as one. The pamphleteer pretends that the transparent allegory is in fact opaque and that should one draw such links, the author of the history is not to blame. In other words, the transparently false and satirical defense claims that any libelous meaning construed from the ridiculously suggestive history does not originate from the historian. The impish attitude of the

[15] Phiddian 1995, 4.
[16] Ehrenpreis 1981, 7.

pamphleteer, says Ehrenpreis, exhibits "an irony much enjoyed by Swift and Pope."[17] The pamphleteer asks: "If this method of construction be allowed, what writer can be safe."[18] The roguish author, despite his posturing, thus reserves the right to ask: "Who can write anything if any text can be construed to mean anything?" The false hysteria in the face of the tyranny of free-floating meaning also means that a writer opposing, as in this case, government agents can accuse his accusers of misconstruals and, indeed, even a libelous frame of mind. The device, Ehrenpreis states, leads readers directly to implied meaning: "The appeal to clarity ... becomes a method of teasing the reader into thinking dangerously."[19] Readers of Swift and Pope will recognize the device as a favorite and one finds Defoe and several other eighteenth-century authors using it as well. Ehrenpreis mentions Wycherley's 1677 dedication to *The Plain Dealer* as an even earlier example, but the roots of the mock-earnest author of satires of course go much deeper than this. Past practices also informed the way in which satire was read by eighteenth-century readers. The explosion of satirical rhetoric that occurred during the Marprelate Controversy almost a century earlier creates an important precedent for the manipulations of the standard of lucidity.

The second rhetorical strategy Ehrenpreis calls the author's "ironical persona."[20] It is a transparent disguise created by the author for the express purpose of contradicting himself or herself. In other words, "a disguise that is intended to be seen through."[21] Satirists use such transparent disguises in order to protect themselves and argue their case. As Dr Johnson (citing Castiglione) noted, using masks in this manner "confers a right of acting and speaking with less restraint, even when the wearer happens to be known."[22] When the mask is transparent, interpretation does not necessarily become any easier. The maxim behind the

[17] Ibid, 9.
[18] Anonymous 1731, 11. Quoted in Ehrenpreis 1981, 10.
[19] Ehrenpreis 1981, 14–5.
[20] Ehrenpreis 1974, 57.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Johnson 1825, 463.

interpretation of texts that play with transparent masks was perhaps best summarized by Balthasar Gracián: "He who observes with a piercing eye knows the arts of his rival, stands upon his guard, and discovers darkness through a veil of light. He unriddles a procedure which is the more mysterious in that everything in it is sincere."[23] On the concrete level of language, such attitudes manifest themselves in the art of combining "ambiguous moral sentiments with an ambiguous attitude to what [the author] is saying."[24] Commenting on *The Plain Dealer* (1676), Ehrenpreis characterizes the satirist's manipulation of language in more poignant terms: "Innocent nouns and verbs are contaminated by their neighbours until the reader's mind exerts itself to invent pornographic hints."[25] The masked author's moral ambiguity, in other words, has the effect of provoking the reader to look for hidden ironic implications that may or may not be real. The reasons behind the impulse to create meaning through implication, ironies and rhetorical inversions may be cognitive, cultural or historical to varying degrees, but it is not unreasonable to expect that they will begin to guide interpretation after certain minimum requirements of intelligibility are met.[26] Deciphering the intentions of the author's persona adds to the pleasure of the text, even if these intentions are never clear.

In the course of the dissertation, I will examine both successful and unsuccessful satires. What counts as success and what as failure is not always easy to decide. As is to be expected, satirical authors often deliberately fail to convince readers of their apparent intentions. Ehrenpreis dresses the problem in an interesting dichotomy: "If an author moves us to fight

[23] Gracián 1705, 12.
[24] Ehrenpreis 1974, 57.
[25] Ehrenpreis 1981, 17.
[26] Ralf Norrman argues that reactions to chiasmic rhetorical devices, inversions, irony and textual ambiguity in general where "two meanings are left to contend" (1998, 232) are surprisingly consistent over time. In satire in particular, it is fair to say that the overt meaning of the text already suggests a complementary meaning and that, following Norrman's theory, the reader is provoked to restore the incompleteness of the text by complementing its meaning with an inversionary reading "so as to create symmetry and thereby 'restore wholeness'" (ibid, 22).

against his doctrines, he may have lost as a rhetorician, but he has won as a poet."[27] Where rhetoric grows unreasonable, satire is possible. The satirist's rhetorical strategy of failure as formulated by Ehrenpreis can also be read, I claim, in terms of *amplification*.[28] By this I refer to various forms of extravagant reasoning by which satirists signal their satirical intentions to the reader and advance their deliberately faulty arguments. Clearly ridiculous reasoning seldom fails to elicit an ironic reading, but making schematic distinctions between satirical and non-satirical reasoning is not a straightforward matter. Irony and humor smooth out interpretation and often make the most menacing rhetoric pleasing. However, when satirical argument and argument proper are presented as near-identical and the task of interpretation is truly left to the reader, there is a danger that argumentative force is left wholly intact—one need only remind oneself of the disaster of Defoe's *Shortest Way With the Dissenters* (1702). In cases where the author's negated intention and intention proper come dangerously close to each other, where the satirist's rhetoric is successful, the poet risks failure. If the failure is complete, as in the case of *The Shortest Way*, and the satire remains menacing, the poet absorbs all the blame for the dangerous thoughts of the rhetorician.

Simon Jarvis identifies one variety of such amplification as "critically important" mock.[29] As its own form of argumentation, it is where "fantasies are not abstractly reproached, but entered into, in order to be destroyed in such a way that their remnants will cry out for true bliss, sublimity or magnificence."[30] There is a fine line between success and failure when one is determined to undertake a failing form of reasoning and to run it into the ground in order to make a point. This becomes clear when one examines Richard Popkin's classic study of skepticism which poses the claim that the Cartesian grounding of subjectivity mentioned

[27] Ehrenpreis 1974, 60.
[28] *Amplification*, in this sense, refers to a variety of general strategies in argumentation. It encompasses a number of tropes and figures used to increase the force of an argument, exaggerate its various elements, appeal to emotions, and so on. I will look at these strategies in terms of function and examine means of achieving the effect in the body of the dissertation in specific examples.
[29] Jarvis 2004, 6.
[30] Ibid, 17

above was not only a triumph of Descartes' skeptical method but also a response to a kind of skepticism Descartes himself saw as perverse. Or, at the very least, Descartes argued his case in terms that make it appear so. Popkin (summarizing a point made by Henri Gouhier) characterizes Descartes' philosophical method as it pertains to skepticism as a kind of constructed negation that depicts a form of reasoning he wishes to contradict and cast in an unfavorable light. Descartes, Popkin suggests, wants to set up such skepticism as the premise of his argument by amplifying it to the extent that the breadth of its reach becomes almost ridiculous:

> Descartes, in intensifying the doubting method so that whatever is in the slightest degree open to question is considered as if it were false, was able to develop a means of separating the apparently evident and certain from the truly evident and certain. By making his test so severe, changing ordinary sceptical doubt into complete negation, Descartes thereby set the stage for the unique and overwhelming force of the *cogito*, so that by no act of will is one able to resist recognizing its certitude.[31]

This means there is an element of mockery present in Descartes' chosen argumentative tactic which uses a kind of amplification in order to set up the main argument. The main argument is thus in fact a counter-argument against a hyperbolic skepticism. Whether or not recognizing the argument as one based on mockery reduces the force of Descartes' argument is a complex question that is difficult to answer in the abstract, but the history of philosophy attests to its influence.[32] In any case, it is clear that the effect of the chosen strategy is to build momentum toward the goal that is the *cogito*: as the force of the bloated skepticism Descartes inflates grows, so does the strength of the conquering counter-argument. What saves the argument is that skepticism remains plausible and stops short of becoming ridiculous or

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[31] Popkin 2003, 150. Appraising Barthes's "The Death of the Author," Seán Burke focuses on the very same kind of amplification with more literary flare: "How much, we should ask, of the joyous work of destruction consists in badly constructing the house? How much more suasive, more joyous, how much more effortless and apocalyptic is the demolition of an edifice built on the shakiest of foundations?" (2008, 25)

[32] Popkin recognizes that for all his efforts Descartes in fact left skepticism intact and perhaps even reinforced it, leaving modern philosophy with a skeptical core. Cf. Popkin 2003, 157.

grotesque.[33] All this is not to say that unsabotaged skepticism was not a real problem for Descartes and his contemporaries—Popkin's work is a monument to these problems—but to suggest at the outset that mockery is not always incompatible with serious philosophical argumentation. Satires use amplification in a manner that does not necessarily require the author to write out the counterargument. They rather try to provoke an interpretation.

While particular rhetorical strategies used by satirists may be easy enough to define in certain cases, the author's intentions are more often than not difficult to discern due to their intentional ambiguity. Ruben Quintero summarizes some of the problems of defining satire in a recent anthology, but not before noting the popular view that satirists are, at heart, eminently moral creatures who ritualistically rail against a hostile universe. As idealistic scolds, they want to force mankind to mend its ways and create a better society free of the common delusions that prey on the vanity of the masses. "Satirists," Quintero writes, "were our first utopians."[34] His point in labeling satirists the first utopians is to underscore the notion that "satire cannot function without a standard against which readers can compare its subject."[35] The notion that satirists are utopians does not agree with earlier views of the satirist's art. As the editors of the California edition of Dryden's works note, many Elizabethans viewed the satirist as a "scholar who has misused his gifts."[36] The character or ethos of the satirist came about, the editors continue (following Alvin Kernan's classic work on the subject), because "[t]he castigation of vice was held inevitably to require an unpleasant

[33] According to Popkin, an example of an overarticulated skepticism that does cross the line can be found in Henry Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim's *De incertitudine et vanitate scientiarum et artium* (1530). Popkin's reading of Agrippa has been challenged (unsuccessfully, it seems, judging from Popkin's refusal to change his reading in subsequent editions of his work) by Eugene Korkowski who reads *De vanitate* as "mock-epideictic literature." Cf. Korkowski 1976.
[34] Quintero 2011, 3.
[35] Ibid. Quintero writes: "It is assumed that the satirist has our best interests at heart and seeks improvement or reformation. Whether that standard is incontrovertibly right does not really matter. But what does matter is that the satirist and the reader share a perception of that standard" (ibid).
[36] Dryden 1974, 522.

and inconsistent character" to do the author's bidding.[37] Reading satires through Ehrenpreis's mock-apologies and transparent costumes enables one to focus on variations of this earlier view of the satirist's art without getting too involved in idealistic moral philosophy.

However, one should not dismiss the well-established links between satire and utopianism lightly, because the figure of the utopian author also provides an important bridge to the fictive or constructed subjectivity of the satirical ethos. Joseph Levine argues that the first indisputably utopian English writer, Thomas More, deliberately installed a fundamental ambiguity with a satirical element into his work that has caused trouble for More's readers for centuries:

> The quarrel, I think, has never really been about what *Utopia* says, but rather about what it means. More's description of the ideal state is plain enough; but its purpose remains obscure. Whether we view it as medieval or modern, Christian or secular, communist or bourgeois, serious or frivolous, it seems to me that much will depend on what we think were Thomas More's intentions in writing his work. ... More chose to publish his finished work as a whole and with deliberate calculation by posing a problem. He sets *Utopia* in a quarrel, ambiguously, but one must suppose intentionally. ... To assume that *Utopia* is the kind of social comment where clarity prevails is to assume the author's intention and not to prove it. Of two things only may we be reasonably sure: More's work *is* ambiguous in the form we have it (as the quarrels of the critics have shown) and *Utopia* is purposefully composed. Why may not More have intended ambiguity? [38]

Levine's argument is quite straightforward: if one demands monosemic meaning of the text and demands that it must contain the prompts to an interpretation that leads to a clear statement of purpose, one of the options in terms of authorial intention which might be overlooked is the author's intention to prompt an ambiguous response. More, if one reads him in Foucauldian terms, was consciously trying to fashion himself into a kind of

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[37] Ibid.

[38] Levine 1999b, 4. Levine is more or less in agreement with Stephen Greenblatt's reading of More's *Utopia*, but he doubts "that Greenblatt or any of the 'new historicists' would be very comfortable with [his] distinction between history and fiction," (24, fn 71) a theoretical distinction Levine claims emerged from the systematic efforts of a number of scholars he traces from the Renaissance to the eighteenth century.

transdiscursive author. An argument may perfectly well be presented in this way and its claim may be discovered by asking to what end the ambiguity is used in the text. In More's case, Levine thinks the point is that both sides in the debate concerning *Utopia* "agree about what the realistic *and* the idealistic alternatives are; we are left only with the problem of which to choose."[39] Real life and the political ideal are thus separated in a gesture that creates an indeterminate claim and an open-ended resolution. Levine argues further that the novelty of the work actually lies in More's realism and that *Utopia* is not "a philosophical tract, but a rhetorical one meant to persuade by its literary skill,"[40] skills meant to impress More's would-be patrons. In sum, its novelty and realism lie in the fact that it is self-consciously fiction: "[I]t was *meant* to be read and understood as a deliberate fiction."[41] Such a reading might, for some, reduce *Utopia* to a clever rhetorical trick designed to make readers run around in circles indefinitely by ensnaring them in circular reasoning. However, the fact remains that the work still continues to generate controversy.

Levine's own point in reading More is to argue that "Renaissance England badly required a new set of fictional ideals to replace the old ones that no longer seemed to matter."[42] Given Levine's assignation of fiction in particular to provide new ideals, the debates between Puritan critics of Renaissance theater and defenders of poetry like Sidney and Puttenham become somewhat clearer. One can see in the defenses a claim that rests on a practical need for fiction. From Levine's perspective the issue is not the morality of plays as such, but the center of the controversy appears to rest in the origin of these ideals. Again, there is a satirical element in More's approach to fiction, because "he pretends that his account is historical, and so doffs a satirical cap to an old convention, but he clearly wants everyone to know that it is a

[39] Ibid, 8.
[40] Ibid, 13.
[41] Ibid, 18.
[42] Ibid, 19.

pretense."[43] The recipient of the salute is Lucian and it is a gesture that clearly aligns the first English utopian writer with satire, or at least marks him as someone who wishes to use a satirical framework that requires a certain amount of skepticism from his readers. The reference to a satiric convention creates a transparent air of fiction and because the pretense is transparent, there is an element of insolence in the gesture that hands over (or thrusts) the responsibility for interpretation on the reader. Furthermore, it creates what Levine calls "the open subjectivity of the author"[44] and, even more importantly for the present discussion, the possibility of using the character of the author transparently as a constructed subjectivity to destabilize hermeneutic agency. Levine's view of More's importance as "the first English Renaissance individual"[45] is hyperbole, but More is nevertheless an important reference point in terms of satire's use of intentional ambiguity. He was no satirist, but the problem he presented to early critical thought was of great importance in the development of later English satire and criticism. If the political ideals of society could be sourced from fictions, he seemed to ask, what happens to the old concrete foundations of morality?

The problem one faces when one tries to apply utopian morals to satire is that one has to rely on assumptions of moral worthiness or unworthiness. In other words, one has to assume that the satirist is a moral person who acts according to ethical guidelines. Satirists are a moralist, yes, but their morals can be frighteningly flexible. There is not much reason to believe that the consummate Restoration court wit Rochester, for example, had particularly moral messages to impart to his audience. Even Dryden, who would defend satire as an instrument of moderation in public discourse, wrote his *Discourse Concerning the Original and Progress of Satire* (1693) at least in part as an attempt to vindicate himself after the malicious *Mac Flecknoe* (1676) and sycophantic *Absalom and Achitophel* (1681). However

[43] Ibid, 20.
[44] Ibid, 23.
[45] Ibid, 24.

one might imagine an ideal moral dimension for satirists in general, the lives of quite a few satirists simply do not warrant the assumptions and what is known of the character of many others simply negates the premise. They make claims like Quintero's utopia-theory of satire seem too reasonable. Most satirists, I would argue, needed means of circumventing contemporary moral standards in their work rather than means of following them. Reading their satire means focusing on the ways they transgress or fail to comply with the rules of discourse rather than concentrating on their moral messages. Moreover, the failures of satirists are usually purposeful, self-conscious, mostly intentional and often critical in nature.

In the latter sections of this dissertation, I will posit John Dryden and what I will call his *reasonableness* as the model of the satirist's protean character. Dryden has never been lauded for his moral consistency, but this—in addition to his satires and criticism—is precisely what makes him a central figure in the history of the genre. Dr Johnson famously wrote:

> He who writes much will not easily escape a manner, such a recurrence of particular modes as may be easily noted. Dryden is always "another and the same;" he does not exhibit a second time the same elegancies in the same form, nor appears to have any art other than that of expressing with clearness what he thinks with vigour.[46]

What Dr Johnson points out is that the author's style, what he calls the author's "manner," makes up the persona the author projects to the audience and that this persona will go through changes during a career as it is an extension of the author. When one breaks the established conventions that govern the perception of one's character, moral consistency is at risk. Hence Dr Johnson's appeal to lucidity, which anchors Dryden's work to the authorial persona he constructed during his immensely influential career. Dryden, quite willing to revise his principles according to where his loyalties happened to lie at a given moment, was the target of mockery for his moral ambiguity, and accusations of inconsistency also prompted the

[46] Johnson 1800, 205.

retaliatory *Mac Flecknoe*. Dryden's criticism in fact shows that attacks on his reputation (and against his notoriously digressive style) were a constant shaping influence on his writing. Steven Zwicker notes that "he generated more attacks, libel, gossip, and scorn than any other writer of his age, perhaps than any other writer, period."[47] Criticism of this sort prompted him to promote a standard of reasonableness throughout his career, viciously at times. Reasonableness, in its conventional sense and as Dryden's way of excusing his behavior, should also be kept in mind when reading Dryden's thoughts on satire. The rules of satire codified in the *Discourse Concerning the Original and Progress of Satire* were very specific rules for an English audience at a certain time in history and Dryden was fully aware of their contingency. They were nevertheless read widely and heeded surprisingly well by many of his fellow wits.

When one reads Dryden's criticism, one discovers that his long career eventually created an evolving and very human character in writing, one that was a clear step forward from the kind of moral transparency developed by More, and it was as important a legacy to eighteenth-century literature as his literary work. Dryden was also conscious of his role as an author early on in his career. As he remarks in the often-cited 1676 dedication to *Aureng-Zebe*:

> As I am a man, I must be changeable; and sometimes the gravest of us all are so, even upon ridiculous accidents. Our minds are perpetually wrought on by the temperament of our bodies; which makes me suspect, they are nearer allied, than either our philosophers or school-divines will allow them to be. I have observed, says Montaigne, that when the body is out of order, its companion is seldom at ease. An ill dream, or a cloudy day, has power to change this wretched creature, who is so proud of a reasonable soul, and make him think what he thought not yesterday.[48]

[47] Zwicker 2004, 283.
[48] Dryden 1808, 186.

If More is an important reference point for his use of intentional ambiguity, Dryden (following Montaigne's example) should receive some credit for creating a critical persona unsure of his reasoning, doubtful of his conclusions and ever conscious of his place in the great scheme of things. In reading Dryden as the central figure of English satire, I am conforming to a well-established tradition in eighteenth-century literary history. However, I want to link this changeability to another tradition in which one sees satirical authors denying their involvement in the production of meaning. The gesture is a simple way of absolving the author of responsibility and a way for satirists to argue their case, but when its use is examined as it develops in a broader context it reveals more complex and interesting features.

The contexts informing my readings are constructed around cases which in my judgment best illustrate the development of the satirical use of the trope of the author from the Marprelate tracts to Pope. My intention is not to write a complete history and I doubt if such a thing is even possible. But I have arranged the present cases in a way that provides an abstract history of at least one strand of early modern English literary thought. The arrangement is shadowed by the much-debated history of disenchantment, a history where figurality replaces the possibility of semantic transcendence. That is, the cases are aligned with a larger Enlightenment shift from a simple view of language as signs that relate directly to the world to a modern one that finds the link between *res* and *verba* severed. The subject is vast and scholarly work has long since accumulated to amounts impossible to master for an individual reader. This has made limitations of time and resources a comfort, as they would to any student of literature who would be exhausted long before his or her materials run out. Where the argument of the dissertation fails to convince the reader or is found faulty, I humbly refer to the example of Dryden and his insistence on one's right to change one's mind.

1.2 Problems of Defining Satire

Menippean satire, or rather definitions of Menippean satire as distinguished from Roman verse satire, often remain close to a view of satire as a raw and unpolished form of critical thought—critical in the sense that satire often criticizes the excessive ambitions of philosophers and critics with the aim of reigning in their galloping intellects. The two theories of Menippean satire still central to modern criticism are those characterized by Northrop Frye's view of satire as militant irony that "relies on the free play of intellectual fancy"[49] and Mikhail Bakhtin's description of satire as a carnivalesque genre manifesting "an extraordinary freedom of plot and philosophical invention."[50] Both theories have been subjected to criticism that makes them difficult to apply to the materials at hand. The critics can also be very blunt, but examining criticism of Frye and Bakhtin provides a quick way of surveying how critical views on satire have changed in recent work on the subject.

Most critics agree that Roman verse satire of the Horatian, Juvenalian and Persian varieties is easy enough to define as verse that chastises vice and praises the corresponding virtue. In eighteenth-century satire, verse can also be viewed through what Claude Rawson calls "buffer genres,"[51] such as the mock-heroic. Definitions of Menippean or Varronian satire, in contrast, allow for the character of the author to appear as a more complicated, idealistic and ethical creature. Definitions of Menippean satire are also notoriously difficult to compose.[52] Problems of definition are further exacerbated by the traditional etymology of the term *satire*.[53] Howard Weinbrot's recent study of Menippean satire argues that there should be stricter criteria for including literary works within the genre, but as Quintero also notes

[49] Frye 1957, 309.
[50] Bakhtin 1984, 114.
[51] Rawson 1994, 96.
[52] See Castrop 1983, 17–21, for a summary of the "Gattungsproblem."
[53] The standard modern account of the terminological confusion is Jolliffe 1956.

even Weinbrot has to acknowledge "that we can never be precise and never should be rigid with the products of licentious imagination."[54] Despite this qualifier, Weinbrot blames both Frye and Bakhtin of extending the category of Menippean satire to include too wide a variety of texts. Weinbrot thinks their views are too general and, in the case of Bakhtin, historically inaccurate:

> Bakhtin's synchronic rather than historical method ... forces him into generalizations regarding Menippean satire that are impossible to verify. Indeed, he does not even try to determine whether these authors or one after them could or did read Menippean works as he claims they did ... Bakhtin's broad and sometimes contradictory definitions dramatically enlarge the genre's reach. Indeed, he even surpasses Frye in creating a baggy genre into which almost any work can be made to fit.[55]

Weinbrot, who does not appear to share Wayne Booth's appreciation for Bakhtin's broad approach to literature,[56] also shows that "Bakhtin's theory of the Menippea is alien to actual events in literary history so far as we can reclaim them."[57] As a scholar of the eighteenth century he is fully aware of the interconnectedness of satire and the criticism of the period which informed readers of satire's true character:

> Even if eighteenth-century readers considered the [largely unknown] Menippean satirists, they were likely to have seen efforts far different from Bakhtin's vision of a jolly liberating carnivalized Varro. Instead, such readers probably noticed what Cicero-Casaubon-Dacier-Dryden told them to notice.[58]

These instructions would have included, for example, acknowledging the more polished rhetoric of the Roman Varro as opposed to the Greek cynic Menippus. Weinbrot's argument challenges Bakhtin on a factual basis and it also points to the actual critical and scholarly

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[54] Quintero 2011, 8. Cf. Weinbrot 2005, 303.
[55] Weinbrot 2005, 15. Cf. Castrop 1983, 18.
[56] See Booth's preface in Bakhtin 1984.
[57] Weinbrot 2005, 39.
[58] Ibid.

work that had a great impact on eighteenth-century practices of reading and writing satire—for the purposes of this dissertation the Casaubon–Dacier–Dryden axis is of particular importance. A general synchronic definition of satire is probably out of reach since the art form is intrinsically entangled with the thought of its age and, following Weinbrot's criticism, Bakhtin's and Frye's theories show that a theory which tries to give a general definition of satire will eventually have to broaden its scope so wide that the definition is in danger of becoming useless.

Weinbrot's alternative definition of Menippean satire states that its purpose is "to oppose a threatening false orthodoxy."[59] Weinbrot also includes in his own broad but qualified definition the fact that the classical works on which later Menippean satires were based all "in some way adapt multiple voices, or genres, or languages, or locales, or historical periods."[60] These features make general definitions of satire extremely difficult. However, they do take into account the need to write in disguise and to state one's motives ambiguously. Weinbrot's definition focuses on the tone of satire, which he takes to be either severe or muted, and an important part of it rests on Dr Johnson's view of literary influence:

> As [Johnson] says in *The Rambler* Number 125 (1751), "every new genius produces some innovation which, when invented and approved, subverts the rules which the practice of foregoing authors had established." We need rules in order to enjoy breaking them. We need foregoing practice in order to innovate and subvert foregoing practice.[61]

Satire does this the most explicitly of all the literary genres and its subversive power both on the level of form and argument make defining its practices and rules difficult to generalize. What satire can do will depend on its historical surroundings. Like moral standards, the rules of rhetoric and decorum which satirists break naturally change over time and are influenced

[59] Ibid, 297.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Ibid.

by the works of the satirists themselves. Restoration and later satirists were also quick to parody the very principles that made up the unwritten and written rules according to which satires were supposed to be written. Weinbrot thus identifies historicity as a central problem in the critical definition of Menippean satire. I shall further argue that the problem also extends to the question of the author's persona and the reader's interpretation of the author's character.

Dustin Griffin is also critical of Bakhtin's view of Menippean satire. He comments favorably on Frye's notion that Menippean satire plays with ideas and presents the world in a way that involves a variegated collection of learned ideas, but he criticizes Frye for not developing a more detailed analysis to explain the mechanisms behind such play.[62] Bakhtin did provide a carnivalistic polyvalent discursive model, says Griffin, but unfortunately it was the wrong kind of model:

> To rename the form "the Menippea" is to split it off from "satire." Indeed, Bakhtin is explicitly concerned to define Menippea as "ambivalent" and satire as purely "negative." His Marxism disposes him to idealize the "folk" and folkish ways. He does not see the element of erudition that Frye finds central or the tradition of "learned wit" that links Erasmus, Rabelais, Burton, Swift, and Sterne. For him "the Menippea" grows out of the marketplace, not the study.[63]

Whatever the consequences of Bakhtin's Marxism, neglecting the element of learned wit in English satire would surely be a mistake. Such claims would also undermine the importance of satire as an instrument of political debate. The marketplace for Restoration or eighteenth-century English satire cannot be thought to be of primary importance if one remembers that early Carolinian satire in England was to a large extent embodied in a manuscript culture of courtly wit. If one rules out the aspiring gentleman wit who wrote to please his wealthy patrons one rules out much of what guided the satires of the marketplace as well.

[62] Griffin 1994, 32.
[63] Ibid, 33.

Furthermore, if one cannot say that Dryden's *Discourse* was hatched out of this courtly environment, it certainly informed Dryden's approach to the subject. There are some signs in Dryden's early works that indicate he was suspicious of courtly life and courtiers even before the Glorious Revolution, so one may assume that the essay was a long time brewing. Dryden's work is the best summation of contemporary practices of satire and it speaks for the importance of scholarly rhetoric unavailable to all but the learned. Its learnedness, however elitist, should not be dismissed as a fault.

But even with these issues aside, if learned wit is not included as a central feature of satire, an examination of the tradition of eighteenth-century satire will be severely lacking. Griffin states: "Indeed, it almost seems as if Frye and Bakhtin are describing different forms."[64] Flaunting learning spiced with wit is of vital importance to the satire of the period: satirists made scholarship a spectacle to an audience who were able to assume a skeptical mode of reading toward learned discourse. The spectacle used hyperbole and strategies of amplification very self-consciously, as Griffin also points out.[65] Boileau, Dryden's preferred modern satirist, was certainly aware of the uses of such amplification in Juvenal and so were Boileau's many English admirers. Roman satirists saw the genre as a learned rhetorician's weapon and this did not change when satire took over England in the eighteenth century. In sum, as Charles Knight notes, "interesting as it is, Bakhtin's account of Menippean satire ... seems a synthetic form created by Bakhtin."[66] In his criticism of Bakhtin, Knight voices an objection that resembles Casaubon's argument in his landmark study *De satyrica graecorum et romanorum satira* (1605) against those who pass on improvised theories as scholarship.

Hume makes a similar point more generally in an essay discussing the development of Carolinian and later Augustan satire:

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[64] Ibid.
[65] Ibid, 75.
[66] Knight 2004, 217.

> The idea that there was a tidy "evolution" of English satire as a quasi-genre is basically an ex-post-facto critical construct. ... One can say useful things about formal verse satire (as Weinbrot notably has), but "satire" as practiced between 1660 and 1750 is essentially too various and compendious to reduce to a definition.[67]

Hume reiterates the point that breadth of definition promotes further confusion and cites modern work by, among others, Rawson, Knight and Griffin as examples. The broad view of Augustan literature that sometimes spans the time from the Restoration to the early Hanoverian period provokes Hume to write: "If I knew how to drive a stake through the heart of the concept of 'Augustan satire' I would certainly do so."[68] He surveys the Norton anthology and finds that despite numerous inconsistencies the term *Augustan* is nevertheless used carelessly in study materials—a quick look at the latest edition shows that this is still the case. Hume maintains that the practices of Carolinian satire were too different from those of later Augustan writers to warrant the use of a single term and makes a persuasive argument worthy of his hyperbole. In fact, Dryden makes a similar argument in the *Discourse* while dissecting Daniel Heinsius's definition of satire and states bluntly: "Why should we offer to confine free spirits to one form, when we cannot so much as confine our bodies to one fashion of apparel?"[69] This shows that at least since Dryden, the genre has been seen as fundamentally indefinable. Hume's criticism thus contributes to satire's long tradition of critical ineffability.

Hume stresses the fact that various forms of satire differ so wildly within the Augustan period that the moral theories espoused by critics merely confuse the (often lewd) practices found within the manuscript culture. Much of the material was anti-establishment and critical of the upper echelons of polite society, but a part of polite society nonetheless. Literary critics

[67] Hume 2005, 371.
[68] Ibid, 370.
[69] Dryden 1962b, 144. Cf. section 3.3 below.

got their share of the bile and were already incorporated into the genre as the stock figure of the pedant—a figure, I would add, complicated by the satirical pedantry of the likes of Martin Marprelate. Hume's criticism supports the argument that before trying to provide definitions of the varying practices of satire around the turn of the eighteenth century one should first try to discover to what extent this is possible in the first place, or else what historical definitions are and are not useful. If there is no actual continuity in the tradition, one should look to the definite breaks that can function as starting points to sketching developmental patterns that can be traced despite the lack of overall coherence or a general definition. One such break that critics, Hume included, agree on is Dryden's *Discourse*.[70] Dryden's work is vital, because, as flawed as it may be, it tries to rewrite the tradition of English critical satire to suit the times—Weinbrot goes as far as calling it "Dryden's tradition."[71] In this sense, it is not only a work of criticism and scholarship but a prescriptive document that has a clear if limited social and critical function. The other materials included in the dissertation fall on both sides of the historical continuum and Dryden's work provides a comparative point of reference for the study of their rhetoric.

A general synchronic definition of satire, then, might do more harm than good. Having these limitations in mind, it should be possible to proceed without one and rather to note that rigid definitions can easily implode into unnecessary confusion or, perhaps even worse, into the kind of speculative abstractions Casaubon himself found in the work of his predecessors. Two points should be kept in mind. First, that at least since Dryden satire has been deemed indefinable in absolute terms due to its historicity. Secondly, that satirists have always been in dialogue with rhetoricians and critics. The relationship has rarely been amicable, but emphasizing the critical and argumentative nature of the genre should enable one to focus on some of its central rhetorical strategies. Instead of a simplistic definition, the aim of this

[70] Hume 2005, 365.
[71] Weinbrot 1988, 8.

dissertation is to help the reader to acquire a grasp of a number of rhetorical practices that characterize the satirical writing of the period under examination. It is indeed easier to say what satire is not while focusing on specific cases than it is to say what it is in the aggregate. Even if this is the case, awareness of the current critical impasse can also be of use in understanding the nature of the genre. With these observations in mind, the dissertation proceeds in a case-by-case manner. While a completely smooth evolutionary account of satire may indeed be impossible, I hope at the very least to say something useful about the claims advanced by the texts included in the dissertation as well as the debates in which they were formed.

1.3 Interpretation and Argument

Given the problems of definition in satire criticism, it is hazardous to venture beyond heuristics that assist tracing the evolution of the kind of rhetorical devices this dissertation examines. Ehrenpreis's view of satire as failed rhetoric points toward a rhetorical method which requires some elaboration. The method I propose here is a sketch of a structural framework that enables satire to be read as satire. The strategy employed by satirists included in the dissertation, I propose, should be read as the kind of amplification discussed above. That is, satire provokes the reader to construct an argument in response to the author's extravagant reasoning. This is the task of interpretation that any reader must undertake lest they be fooled by the satirist's jest. Satirists may adopt the position of the ridiculed opponent and incriminate themselves as failed rhetoricians or create transparency by making their adoption of the opponent's position transparently false. They may also provoke a reaction only to deny the reader a chance to respond. In order to keep track of the arguments and

voices employed by satirists, one needs to introduce some elements of argumentation theory to interpretation. A second, narratological element in the form of the rhetorical figure of metalepsis should also be introduced.

The core of my argumentative methodology relies on Stephen Toulmin's classic work on argumentation. Toulmin's terms of informal reasoning are drawn from non-specialist language and few technical terms have to be introduced separately. Terms like claim, warrant, backing, qualifier, and so on should be familiar to most readers—many of them were used by Dryden himself. Overall, it is an analytic approach useful for creating some order into the arguments delivered by satires, both sincere and ironic. Toulmin's assumptions behind the theoretical apparatus of *The Uses of Argument* are more a matter of philosophy than philology, but in reading satire as an argumentative genre one important distinction or adjustment to the methodological perspective should be made. It will also clarify how expectations of monosemic meaning may come about and how these are subverted by the satirical voice. Toulmin writes:

> The words of some men are trusted simply on account of their reputation for caution, judgment and veracity. But this does not mean that the question of their right to our confidence cannot arise in the case of all their assertions: only, that we are confident that any claim they make weightily and seriously will in fact prove to be well-founded, to have a sound case behind it, to deserve—have a right to—our attention on its merits.[72]

The notion of reasonableness behind much of eighteenth-century satire is not unlike the one voiced by Toulmin, but rather than expecting sincerity one should expect satirists to abuse their right to the reader's attention. The task of satirists is to argue their case by trying to subvert such assumptions in various amusing ways. The same could be said about the reasonable expectations of Grice's maxims of quantity, quality, relation and manner. Satirists

[72] Toulmin 2003, 11.

are selective about what information they disclose, provide false and unsubstantiated information, go off on irrelevant tangents and their words are obscure and ambiguous if it suits them. Arthur Pollard reminds his readers in the very first lines of his *Critical Idiom* volume that "the satirist is not an easy man to live with."[73] If anything, satirists are difficult and unreasonable, or rather their rhetoric is. Satirists may tell the truth or trick the reader into believing something. They may also trick the reader into thinking he or she is being tricked into believing something. Satirical rhetoricians may also test the audience by presenting a claim they are either for or against depending on the way the audience reacts. In this, finally, lies the art of skeptical reading and the satirists' skills of manipulating their audiences who allow themselves to be manipulated to gain pleasure and instruction from their texts.

The aims of interpretation are convoluted and the possibility of a stable textual interpretation itself challenged by satirical rhetoric. Quintero, for example, is certainly right in saying that satirists must have a standard against which their argument is presented, but that standard is tied to historical circumstance and (to use one of Toulmin's terms) field-dependent, if by *field* here one refers to the circumstances in which the argument presented by the satirist is supposed to function.[74] In fact, one could argue that field-dependency also determines whether or not the satire will be read as satire. Subverting monosemic meaning will open up a number of possibilities for interpretation, but it would be unreasonable to think that this process of ambiguation is absolute or that it creates completely open-ended meaning in a frictionless hermeneutic space. Satire, even in its gentlest Horatian mode, has to provoke a reading and authors of satires must know their audience well enough to know how to adjust their rhetoric accordingly. Some apparently timeless texts like Swift's *Modest Proposal* still have readers as appalled and amused as they did when they were first published, but failures to gauge public opinion are as revealing and useful to criticism if not more so. As noted

[73] Pollard 1977, 1.
[74] Cf. Quintero 2011, 3.

above, if the argument of the satire is indistinguishable from sincere argumentation, misreadings may happen. Fooling some of his readers may even have been Defoe's intention in *The Shortest Way*, but if this was the case it was a tactic he certainly regretted later. If a satire is correctly indicated as satire by failed rhetoric, as the *Proposal* was and *The Shortest Way* was not, the knowledge that the text is satire will provoke readers to carry that knowledge to their interpretations.

The mechanism of indicating a satire as satire can also be explained through an argumentative model. Chaim Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca discuss the difference between facts and values—or analogous rules and standards—in terms of minimizing "the seriousness of opposition to a fact" where subjective opinion is seen as a "twist given to the truth."[75] Transposing one's standards to the domain of personal opinion may thus be used as a rhetorical device to "show that the speaker is *not* seeking to impose his standards on others."[76] Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca also note cases of transposition "in which argumentation is deliberately reduced to the level of value judgments ... the object being to show that it is only differences of value that matter, and that the debate is centered on them."[77] The satirist as a mock-authority can provoke a similar reaction in the reader by expressing an extreme opinion from a transparent position of falsely assumed authority. The gesture must be transparent and ridiculously severe if one is to signify that the text is in fact satire and that another meaning is implied. The reader is thus prompted to assume the argument requires a degree of skepticism—this is not unlike what happens to the inflated premise of Descartes' *cogito* and, as indicated above, the gesture does not in itself necessarily undermine the critical point made by the author. Rather, it creates the license to speak the truth in jest and makes the point less confrontational.

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[75] Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969, 182.
[76] Ibid; my emphasis.
[77] Ibid, 182–3.

The figure of metalepsis also requires some qualification. Two distinct but related types can be distinguished. For Renaissance rhetoricians like Thomas Wilson, Henry Peacham and Puttenham, metalepsis was a metonymical or metaphorical figure that employed a farfetched causal relationship to create a figure or trope that was often used for comic hyperbole.[78] Richard A. Lanham notes that it implies "a kind of compressed chain of metaphorical reasoning"[79] where present effects are given a humorously remote cause. He cites James Howell's *Familiar Letters*, where metaleptic reasoning is explicitly spelled out: "[G]ood wine makes good blood, good blood causeth good humours, good humours cause good thoughts, good thoughts bring forth good works, good works carry a man to heaven, ergo *good wine carry a man to heaven.*"[80] Readers of eighteenth-century fiction will recognize metaleptic reasoning of this kind in the scene of Tristram Shandy's conception, for example, and much of Scriblerian satire. Metalepsis in this sense opens up the possibility of engaging in the kind of extravagant reasoning typical of satire as a genre.

The second type of metalepsis pertains to the author. Gérard Genette restricts the use of metalepsis from the simple farfetched figure to what he calls the "author's metalepsis," to the metadiegetic movement of the author and narrator between intradiegetic and extradiegetic narratives. In this particular sense, metalepsis is related to figures of substitution such as metaphor and metonymy as well as hypotyposis and hyperbole. The two latter figures relate to ways in which authors may make themselves heroes of their narratives, where the author's description of the events transforms him or her into an active agent who produces events in the narrative instead of merely describing them. Although Genette is somewhat critical of the link, which he presents through a familiar reference to Pierre Fontanier and the death of Dido, hypotyposis presents the opportunity to label the transgressive method used when the

[78] Cf. Perelman and Olbrechts Tyteca 1969, 181.
[79] Lanham 1991, 99.
[80] Ibid, 100; my emphasis.

narrator's overwhelming enthusiasm in vivid descriptions prompts him or her to cast off the role of narrator.[81] When this occurs, the author may simply dictate meaning to the reader. Genette's own definition of metalepsis focuses on the author: "Henceforth, I believe it reasonable to reserve the term metalepsis to a manipulation … of the specific causal relation that unites, in some sense, the author with his work or, more generally, the producer of a representation with the representation itself."[82] Genette further elaborates his definition by noting that classical rhetoric considers metalepsis as an ascending trope.[83] That is, a trope by which authors insert themselves into narratives. The reverse of this, a characteristically modern metafictional device where fictional characters enter the world of the author, he terms *antimetalepsis*. In Genette's terms, this dissertation is concerned with the metaleptic movement of agency through the manipulation of the persona of the author. Specifically, and to reiterate, it examines the evolution of the metalepsis of the author as a rhetorical device in the theory and practice of satire. It also argues that authors used it as a way of transferring hermeneutic agency from authors, fictional or otherwise, to the audience in order to let the reader experience the failure of the satirist's argument in the act of interpretation.

What appears to unite the two, extravagant reasoning and the author's metalepsis, is the reader's pursuit and creation of meaning when he or she reads the text as a process ("the onward movement of the conversation between writer and reader") and a product of interpretation ("the substance of that conversation").[84] To modify Preston's point noted above, the more the reader loses himself or herself in the pursuit of the fiction or the extravagant satirical argument he or she is asked to accept, the more likely he or she is able to

[81] Cf. Genette 2004, 12–13. For a brief but informative discussion on Genette's earlier work on the figure, see Kukkonen 2011.
[82] Genette 2004, 13–14. ["[J]e crois raisonnable de réserver désormais le terme de métalepse à une manipulation … de cette relation causale particulière qui unit, dans un sens ou dans l'autre, l'auteur à son œuvre, ou plus largement le producteur d'une représentation à cette représentation elle-même."]
[83] Ibid, 27.
[84] Cf. section 1.

believe in his or her agency within that fiction.[85] Whether or not to accept the author's extravagant reasoning is thus left explicitly to the reader's discretion and, as in the case of Swift's *Modest Proposal*, he or she is often goaded to reject it as a faulty argument. That is, in satire the author's metalepsis is seldom a fully disruptive figure but reinforces the satirical argument: reading is not trying to be not-reading when metalepsis is used to incriminate the reader.

Ehrenpreis approaches the matter from a different angle, but he says as much when he expresses his wish to read satire without multiplying various intermediary agents between the actual author and the reader. Referring to the *Modest Proposal*, he writes:

> There is no intermediate person between the real author and us. Surely the inference we draw when a decent, intelligent man produces an abominable scheme is that he doesn't mean it, that he is ironical, that he speaks in parody. Surely we read the *Modest Proposal* as a wildly sarcastic fantasy delivered by the true author, whoever he may be. Surely the kind of literary disguise that is deliberately intended to be penetrated is a method of stating, not hiding, what one thinks.[86]

In other words, "if [the author] speaks through an intermediary figure, we must ask how he uses the intermediary."[87] By these appeals to the power of the piercing eye Ehrenpreis perhaps wanted to shield himself from his more extravagant fellow critics who wished to dissociate the textual persona of an author and the actual author, to create an ontological split between the two instead of exploring the possibilities of bridging them. An intermediary of the sort Ehrenpreis mentions might have been employed by some of the anonymous scribblers of Dryden's age, but even they do not qualify as fully textual beings that can only be interpreted as such. Disavowed figures released into the realm of textuality are never absolutely free—any valid denunciation of this kind would have to issue from an actual

[85] Cf. section 1.
[86] Ehrenpreis 1974, 59.
[87] Ibid, 54.

author which, in turn, would explicitly tie the textual author to the actual. Such denunciations, in other words, are transparently rhetorical in their denials and while they can be used as rhetorical devices for the purposes of satire, one who reads them literally has fallen into the satirist's trap. The intermediary figures I refer to are rather extensions of the author's argumentative intention and read as such. At the other extreme, Genette makes the radical claim that all fiction is intrinsically metaleptic.[88] Broad claims of this nature, though interesting, are unreasonable in the cases I wish to examine, because they either eliminate the textual play that makes up the body of the dissertation or else make it so diffuse as to render it irrelevant.[89] In the case of Genette's pan-metaleptic fiction, I simply fail to see the point of making a claim that destroys the figure's distinctive nature as a figure.

Ehrenpreis, no doubt a reasonable critic himself, writes: "It is easy but dangerous to assume that polarities in literary terminology refer to mutually exclusive divisions which encompass the whole of the literary realm."[90] The scholar of eighteenth-century satire who studies the manipulative ways of self-confessedly deceptive authors is used to being misled by false readings that seduce him or her into absolute judgments. Ehrenpreis's exemplary focus on particular acts and instances of literary interpretation instead of a general theory of hermeneutics is particularly apt to the topic. Hermeneutics, simply "the theory of achieving an understanding of texts, utterances, and so on"[91] or "the question of what it is that happens (what the practical consequences are) when we try to make sense of something"[92] is intrinsically linked to the problems discussed in the body of the dissertation and an absolute differentiation between method and subject matter is not possible. However, an examination of particular instances that also relate to the methodological questions of the dissertation may

[88] Genette writes: "All fiction is riddled with metalepsis" (2004, 131). ["Toute fiction est tissée de métalepse."]
[89] If Weinbrot is right in claiming that the turning inward of the Romantic subject destroyed genuine discursive satire that engaged with the outside world in order to effect change, abstraction of this kind might be a valid approach in the case of later satires. Cf. Weinbrot 1988, 186–203.
[90] Ehrenpreis 1981, 4.
[91] Forster 2007, 30.
[92] Bruns 1992, 8.

prove beneficial in other ways. The simple conception of hermeneutics cited above provides a window through which it is possible to approach what Ehrenpreis, following Dilthey and Schleiermacher, takes to be the mystery of implied meaning:

> The drawing out of implications depends on imaginative sympathy. The listener must feel he can put himself in the place of the poet (known or unknown) as the subject of an imaginatively shared experience. He must, as Dilthey says, penetrate the inner creative process itself and then proceed to the outer and inner form of the literary work. ... There is a mystery in one person's intuitively grasping what another means when he says, "I see something green," or "I am hungry," or in a woman's understanding of a child who complains, "I feel lonely." These mysteries are no smaller than the leap of imagination demanded of us when Wordsworth or Stevens responds to a woman's song, or when T. S. Eliot responds to Sappho.[93]

Although a formal explanation of sympathy of this kind does ultimately seem as unachievable as direct knowledge of other minds, I see no great mystery in the hermeneutic leap Ehrenpreis describes and my approach is more practical than that of more strict adherents of Dilthey's psychological tradition. Rather, the uses of an implied understanding of this kind provide an interesting field of study. Ways of thinking, the thought of one age after another, grow old and die out until their remnants can only be retrieved from the pages of books, but problems like that of imaginative sympathy need not confound the interpretation of texts in the present in any abstract sense when prominent patterns of arguments—including those forged by the satirists' amplification—can be traced with reasonable clarity. Rather, the reason why this should be lamentable is part of a greater mystery. While I do sympathize with the sentiment, I must leave such matters for others to decide. What I hope to achieve in this dissertation is to link the failed arguments of eighteenth-century satire to an earlier tradition beginning with Elizabethan Puritan criticism in order to show how the rhetorical strategies of these satirists evolved from earlier models.

[93] Ehrenpreis 1981, 6.

In doing so, I also hope to show how they taught the moderns, authors and readers alike, to fail better and why.

2. Transparency and Metaleptic Wit

By the beginning of the eighteenth century the Marprelate tracts, a series of pamphlets written in the late 1580s by a group of radical Presbyterians posing as their eponymous author, were already works of scholarly interest and their argumentative force had waned. Despite the fact that the tracts themselves had become of more antiquarian interest than politically subversive rhetoric, their presence was felt throughout the following century and they were regularly mentioned in personal correspondence as well as public debate. Joseph L. Black traces these references in his preface to a recent edition of the tracts and notes that they had come to signify a number of satirical conventions. The adoption of Martin's voice "could represent a scurrilous threat to social order, or exemplify cleverness and wit."[94] Brave rhetoricians could also use the persona to "signify cleverness or satirical bite."[95] In seventeenth-century pamphlet warfare Martin became "the archetypal bad polemicist, his name a convenient shorthand for somebody who had crossed acceptable polemical boundaries" or "an embodiment of various qualities inimical to the smooth workings of social order."[96] This was partly the result of counter-arguments against the Martinists which prompted the creation of a "complex, hostile stereotype,"[97] as Thomas Corns puts it, of the uneducated Puritan whose clumsy verbal gymnastics were ridiculed by hired anti-Martinist pamphleteers such as John Lyly, Thomas Nashe and Robert Greene. The controversy created a very recognizable figure that was widely used in English satire for various purposes. That

[94] Black 2008, lxxx.
[95] Ibid, lxxvi.
[96] Ibid, lxxxii.
[97] Corns 2007, 78.

is, Martin became an important satirical trope. It continued to exert its influence well into the eighteenth century, by which time the character of Martin was arguably better known than the details of the debate itself. As the character was a self-confessed satirist and emerged as a novel rhetorical device through the Marprelate Controversy, a discussion of Martin's dramatic character warrants a brief examination of pre-Marprelate calls for moral transparency from Puritan critics. Naturally, replies from defenders of poetry should also be heard before moving on to the controversy itself. This section will illustrate how relevant points of the author's relationship to language were presented by two Puritan critics; critical defenses of poetry; the effect the Marprelate satirists and their opponents had on the demand for lucidity, and how Thomas Nashe brought the author's transparency to its breaking point in *The Unfortunate Traveller*. These I take to be part of the rhetorical tradition inherited by eighteenth-century satirists. The fact that Nashe's experiment ended in failure is also significant.

2.1 Puritan Transparency

In broad terms, the metaleptic manipulation of hermeneutic agency in satire briefly transferred talk of transparency from moral philosophy to the realm of rhetoric. When one looks back to pre-Marprelate critical texts, they show, among other things, that the threat of leading readers into thinking dangerously was an important point of departure for the claims of Puritan moralists. Defenders of poetry and the stage, on the other hand, expressed puzzlement at the objections of the Puritans. Neither did the defenders see satire as contrary to moral instruction. Peter E. Medine writes: "Thomas Lodge and Sir Philip Sidney saw the

satirist not as the uncouth satyr figure but as the custodian of public and private morals."[98] Lodge, who did not seem to think there were any satirical poets in England, lamented the lack of an Ennius or Lucilius in the kingdom. Casaubon's view of satire as a genre that resembles moral philosophy was thus to some extent supported by earlier Renaissance criticism: "Lodge and Sidney were neither eccentric nor revolutionary in their remarks on satire: both were reflecting notions of satire which had become traditional during the Renaissance."[99] From this perspective, Casaubon's achievement was to give form to these earlier views and base them on philological evidence against false opinions concerning the satirist's art in contemporary criticism. But there is also an air of temperance in the rhetoric of Elizabethan criticism that is easily overshadowed by Casaubon's fierce opinions. G. Gregory Smith notes in his classic anthology that Elizabethan critics "have a genuine conviction of their inefficiency, and though they play with dogma, which in the immediate future became the creed of a militant criticism, they seldom forget that they cannot claim to be more than experimenters."[100] The reform the critics propose for English poetry is tentative and few rigid rules are advocated. In terms of morals and rhetoric, the battle heated up in a different arena. In order to see how the demands for transparency were met, negated and finally transcended by radical Puritans, one should examine the issues in context.

John Northbrooke's protests in *A Treatise Against Dicing, Dancing, Plays, and Interludes: With Other Idle Pastimes* (1577) against the arts and various other licentious activities are based on their general immorality. Northbrooke is very severe in his criticism of interludes and the like which are to him signs of a more fundamental corruption. According to him, society had "lost the true names of things"[101] and hence fallen into decadence. The various moral failings of his fellow men who have given their lives to luxury are to him evidence that

[98] Medine 1976, 271.
[99] Ibid, 272.
[100] Smith 1904, xxxvii.
[101] Northbrooke 1843, 9.

they have forgotten one has to eat in order to live, not live in order to eat; Northbrooke is very fond of inversions of this kind as moral reproaches and in them he conforms to stereotypical patterns of Puritan rhetoric. His task as he sees it is to wake people up from their moral slumber and show them that in their corrupt society drunk with luxury and excess means had become ends: this reversal had to be re-reversed. In terms of Levine's argument concerning Renaissance ideals, Northbrooke wants to locate these ideals in the real world and rejoin *res* and *verba*.[102] Due to the circular nature of Northbrooke's reasoning it can be difficult to see clearly whether he wants to say that the corruption of society is due to the abuse of the arts or that the arts are a sign of corruption. In any case, he argues that the first step in a moral program of the kind he advocates involves recognizing the corrupt excess which enables the superfluous gestures of plays and the false rhetoric of poetry. Excessive rhetoric creates a lack of transparency which in turn is responsible for falsehoods and corruption. Strangely enough, Northbrooke says he is not against plays in principle, but welcomes "good exercises and honest pastimes," including plays when they "benefite the health of manne, and recreate his wittes."[103] However, this seems like an untenable position that cannot allow for plays of any kind should one adhere to the severe requirements of his argument. In effect, he makes the moral demands for such plays too severe and so creates a rhetorical trap for his potential opponents.

Stephen Gosson's *School of Abuse* (1579) is more sophisticated in its moral points than Northbrooke's tract and its remarks initiated the famous literary debate between him and Thomas Lodge. Before becoming a moralist, Gosson was a playwright who wrote moral plays, pastorals and satires, and his aim in the *School of Abuse* was not to condemn theater

[102] Northbrooke discusses other arts such as music which fall between the two primary pleasures of sense and reason. In terms of history, like most early critics following a quasi-Aristotelian scheme, Northbrooke puts great weight on tracing the origins of various forms of drama and poetry. He makes some initial remarks about the antique origins of plays, but quickly states that their true origin is the Devil himself who supplied players with an art with which they were able to represent their corrupted gods and appease them whenever necessary. The origin of the other arts follows the same pattern.
[103] Northbrooke 1843, 44.

and poetry outright but to advocate reform; he draws an analogy between fire and water and the arts, all of which can be either beneficial or harmful depending on the way they are used. His attitude grew more severe as the debate with Lodge progressed and his next salvo would put aside any further hopes of reform. This is perhaps appropriate as he did draw on and temper Northbrooke's argument in the first one. His career as a moralist seems to have spiraled from playwright to reformer to scold. The first of these steps was probably hastened by harsh criticism of his plays, the second by the debate with Lodge. As critics of the Marprelate Controversy noted, this kind of hardening of lines and escalation in opinion was one of the detrimental effects that print had on public debate. Gosson's initial enterprise, like Northbrooke's, was an essentially critical one aimed at revealing moral corruption. Gosson states his point using his skills as a poet and satirist: "[P]ul off the visard that poets maske in, you shall disclose their reproch, bewray their vanitie, loth their wantonnesse, lament their folly, and perceive their sharpe sayinges to be placed as pearles in dunghils, fresh pictures on rotten walles, chaste matrons apparel on common courtesans."[104] His literary style is very varied and colorful, but not even Lodge would use this against him. Gosson's ornamental language, more elaborate than that of the defenders of poetry, may very well demonstrate a "paradoxical crisscross"[105] of attitudes toward rhetoric at the time. Since antiquity, defenders of the logos have often favored a plain style, but the historical irony of the adoption of Ramist ideas seen here is apparent. Thanks to the Ramists, rhetoric could be viewed as an expression of logic, discard the ornaments of elocution and require adherence to argument in a plain style, a style that would eventually develop into Dryden's lucid conversational prose manner. On the other hand, as Walter Ong points out in his study of Ramism, "[t]o the Ramists, Dryden's admission that he was often helped to an idea by a rhyme was an

[104] Gosson 1841, 10. For all his eloquence, Gosson can nevertheless be very crude at times.
[105] Wimsatt and Brooks 1957, 224.

admission of weakness if not outright intellectual perversion."[106] A very different application of the Ramist dissociation of invention and disposition from elocution was adopted by the early English tradition which emphasized vitality and character in poetic language.[107] The way in which authors were expected to reflect their individual character in their prose explains why Gosson demanded transparency in language that might appear quite florid to modern readers.

He outlines his case by making sure to mention that defenses of poetry are often based on a kind of amplification. He is going to reveal their strategy and pick on poetry until it yields to his criticism in order to show the defenders the error of their ways. He describes one classical example of criticism, by the Greek rhetorician Maximus Tyrius, on which he piles additional criticism:

> You will smile, I am sure, if you reade it, to see how this morall philosopher toyles to draw the lions skinne upon Aesops asse, Hercules shoes on a childes feet; amplifying that which, the more it is stirred, the more it stinkes ... as cursed sores with often touching waxe angry, and run the longer without healing.[108]

As tools for achieving an effect of amplification himself and inflating the target of his attack, Gosson is very fond of analogies and similes. The amplificatory strategy links his points together by way of a Pythagorean view of music which also reflects the metaphysical symmetry of the heavenly spheres—this analogy Lodge did later use against him. Gosson anticipates an important objection to his own claims while inflating the corruption he wants remedied. The idea voiced in the objection is that the moral rebuke backed up by Gosson through classical sources applies only to Old Comedy and antique plays. The opponent might continue by saying that contemporary plays have evolved into a much more refined

[106] Ong 2004, 289.
[107] This view is expressed by F. W. Bateson (1934), to whom Wimsatt and Brooks refer, as part of an organic view of language among the metaphysical poets.
[108] Gosson 1841, 11.

presentation of good manners and polite society. From them, the objection adds, spectators may gather the seeds of a moral perspective and cultivate them in private. What is more: "Nowe are the abuses of the worlde revealed: every man in a play may see his own faultes, and learn by this glasse to amende his manner."[109] The objection Gosson sketches seems reasonable enough as his rendition of the argument never becomes an outrageous caricature, but he retorts by asking why should one dress up moral education in the guise of drama and poetry. If there is a way of receiving instruction in a manner that does not deliver the message by distorting it in grotesque ways, as a deceitful physician might sweeten his potions, why make the message oblique? In Gosson's mind this is reprehensible because of the wasteful economy of moral instruction when it is dressed up in the decadent ornaments of poetry. Similarly, says Gosson, the arts of logic and fencing are useful and noble skills, but when they are used merely for "caveling" and "quarelling," as he claims was the case with many of his contemporaries, they lose their utility and nobility.[110] These excesses are not only immoral but dangerous, because a lazy and complacent population will forget moral vigilance.

Although he was cautious in his later writings, Thomas Lodge's reply to Gosson, *A Reply to Stephen Gosson's School of Abuse, in Defence of Poetry, Music, and Stage Plays* (1579), is anything but subtle. It is a defense filled with personal attacks many of which are needlessly crude. Lodge, a physician by trade in later life and no stranger to literary mask making, begins by noting that Gosson has completely missed the point of poetry and concludes by saying he should temper his rhetoric. Gosson, says Lodge, dispraises poetry, because he does not know what poetry is for or else presumes it to be something that it is not. Either one of the two is the case or Gosson's attack must be disingenuous. Poets, like physicians, sweeten their words to draw people into appreciating wisdom he says, rehearsing a familiar claim.

[109] Ibid, 21.
[110] Ibid, 36.

Lodge begins his direct attack on Gosson's argument by inundating the reader with examples of praiseworthy poetry and shows the extent of his learning in the process. This is direct textual evidence that counters Gosson's points and Lodge is very aware of his chosen method of rebuttal. He also knows that too much counterevidence can quickly turn on itself and make the argument seem rather too forceful: "I would make a long discourse unto you of Platoes 4 furies, but I leave them: it pitieth me to bring a rodd of your own making to beate you withal."[111] In a similar and rather patronizing vein, he briefly notes that the music of the spheres Gosson prefers to the lower kind of music played by men is nevertheless a kind of music, catching him in a kind of question-begging. But some of Lodge's remarks seem to miss their mark. Gosson does say there is an excess of poetry, not that it does not mend men's ways. In other words, the moral function of poetry is intact in Gosson's initial argument, although his attitude would later move toward the one Lodge mistakenly tries to repudiate in his reply to Gosson's first attack. Whether Lodge saw it or not, there was common ground between their claims and this was the role of criticism in appraising poetry: "Poetry is dispraised not for the folly that is in it, but for the abuse whiche manye ill wryters couller by it."[112] Lodge presents his readers with an etymological argument and advises them to use it in order to deduce the usefulness of plays for themselves. Far from abuse, says Lodge following Donatus' grammar, plays were the original vehicles for praising God—although here he does not make a distinction between pagan gods and the Christian God. The purpose of these rustic praises was to secure a good harvest, which Lodge demonstrates by trying to clarify the etymology of the term *tragedy*.[113] As time passed and "the witt of the

[111] Lodge 1853, 11.
[112] Ibid, 15.
[113] Lodge cites the well-known etymology given by Jodocus Badius that the term, often attached to the satyr play due to its literal Greek meaning "goat song," came to be because the players would receive a goat's skin filled with wine for their efforts. The link between the steps of Lodge's argument may appear weak, but if one thinks of the etymological goat as a sacrificial animal and catharsis as the end of tragedy, it becomes quite easy to connect these early plays and poetry to sacrifices to the gods of the harvest.

younger sorte became more riper,"[114] poets invented new forms which nevertheless kept the original name of tragedy, causing etymological confusion. Lodge unwittingly adds to this confusion by stating that the ancients began to play the lives of the satyrs, creatures of the woods who were able to monitor all the activities of men and reprehend "the follies of many theyr folish fellow citesens."[115] Satire especially sounds like a fairly dubious genre in Lodge's argument, because he does call the modern equivalent of the monstrous satyrs "parasites,"[116] writers who derive pleasure from abuse for its own sake. Crucially, however, the author's motives are what need to be discovered in order to appraise poetry and Lodge makes it clear that transparency is not a value unto itself.

Gosson's reply to Lodge, *Plays Confuted in Five Actions* (1582) took the form of a Platonic from-imitation-to-corruption argument framed by Aristotle's four causes: (1) efficient cause: plays are the creation of the Devil and drama has pagan origins; (2) material cause: lies, lasciviousness and corruption are seen in plays, which affect the conscience of the spectators; (3) formal cause: imitation is false, ergo the substance of plays is inherently treacherous; (4) final cause: emotions aroused by drama inevitably undermine rationality. The causes can be viewed as a mere structural solution for framing the thesis, but they nevertheless produce an air of formal criticism Gosson no doubt felt he needed after Lodge's derision. Gosson picks up on the topic of the heavenly spheres, but he does not address Lodge's objection directly. Rather, he uses the image for dramatic effect, constructing an analogy between the sound of the spheres and the sound of the moral rebuke of preachers: "[A]s the Philosophers report of the moving of the heavens, we never hear them because we ever hear them."[117] This dismissive attitude can also be seen in his amusing comment on why he took so long to reply to Lodge: "I answered nothing, partlie because he brought nothing;

[114] Lodge 1853, 24.
[115] Ibid.
[116] Ibid. For discussion on the parasite topos in continental satires see de Smet 1996, 115–150.
[117] Gosson 1582, 16. The page numbers here refer to the EEBO version of the unpaginated text.

partly because my hearte was to bigge, to wrastle with him, that wanteth arms."[118] Getting beyond the analogy, Gosson recognizes that Lodge does not distinguish pagan gods from God: "Lodge ... confesseth openly that playes were consecrated by the heathens to the honour of their gods, ... Being consecrated to idolatrie ... they are the doctrine and inventions of the Devill."[119] He equips the claim with a parting shot in which he sounds the Puritan distaste for Italian manners: "This will be counted newe learninge amonge a greate number of my gay countrymen, which beare a sharper smacke of Italian devices in their heads, then of English religion in their heartes."[120] Gosson then turns to the senses and uses digestion as an analogy for the effects of poetry and drama: "We knowe that whatsoever goeth into the mouth defileth not but passeth away by course of nature; but that which entreth into us by the eyes and eares muste bee digested by the spirite, which is chiefly reserved to honor God."[121] The analogy is made all the more fitting thanks to the shady origins of these arts:

> Two sortes of sacrifice were used among the Heathens, the one, to the Gods of their countrey, the other to the Spirites of the deade, they committed idolatrye in them both. Amonge such Idolatrous spectacles as they sacrificed to their Gods, Tertullian affirmeth that Playes were consecrated unto Bacchus for the firste findinge out of wine.[122]

In his forceful countercriticism, Gosson makes satyr plays into one of the archetypal dramatic and poetic forms, making all that were later derived from them morally suspect. Their origin, which involves inebriation and idolatry, is enough to condemn contemporary practices as well, no matter how refined.

It is obvious from Gosson's argument that he thinks something of the idolatrous nature of ancient ritualistic practices must be preserved even in dramatic forms that have evolved over

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[118] Ibid, 17.
[119] Ibid, 18.
[120] Ibid.
[121] Ibid, 22.
[122] Ibid. Gosson's source is Tertullian's *De Spectaculis.*

centuries and changed almost beyond recognition. To him, that speck of idolatry is enough to pollute the entire practice of theater and poetry. This turns Lodge's own argument against himself and underlines the ritualistic legacy of the art forms. Gosson also engages in direct argumentative criticism in the treatise. He refers to the anonymous author of the *Play of Plays and Pastimes* and notes that the author reasons by saying that "the action, pronunciation, agility of body are the good gifts of God. *Ergo*, plais consisting of these cannot be evill."[123] Gosson deems the argument faulty first by parodying it: "[T]he pricke of desire is naturally given unto man by God, ... *Ergo*, to covet another man's wife ... cannot be evill."[124] His second point is that while all the component gifts mentioned in relation to plays are good and there is nothing objectionable in any individual blessing, if they are compounded into a play, the invention of the Devil, the spectacle becomes loathsome. In sum, Gosson insists in his reply that the very nature of an author of plays is of necessity corrupt. It would take Sidney's elocution to counter such claims of religious corruption.

These arguments predate the publication of those of Puttenham and Sidney whose analytical refinement of the art of poetry, clarity of expression and scholarly mastery made them more formidable opponents. Contemporary continental work by the Scaligers, Justus Lipsius and, some years later, Casaubon, Nicolas Rigault and Heinsius moved the debate to literary history, etymology and questions of philological interest from the strictly moral debate that posited a clear distinction between poetry and transparently moral rhetoric.[125] Northbrooke and Gosson appeal to the transparency of language as a central requirement in the delivery of a moral message and while transparency remains an important subject of debate, Puttenham and Sidney argue for poetry that finds itself in agreement with nature. What seems to be at stake in literary argument of this kind is the threat of ambiguity in

[123] Gosson 1852, 44.
[124] Ibid.
[125] For a quick overview of continental criticism see de Smet 1996, 32–56.

interpretation, the possibility of polysemia and ways of reconciling it with acceptable forms of rhetoric. What writers like Northbrooke and Gosson claim is that authors cannot avoid becoming a part of their art and confused amidst their own fictions unless they diligently follow the principle of linguistic and moral transparency. Lodge, Puttenham and Sidney, on the other hand, try to reconcile nature and art, arguing that the artistry of the author is drawn from nature. For their Puritan opponents, one would imagine, this only verifies the author's corruption, but for more sympathetic readers the demand for transparency is thus tempered by appealing to the formal cause behind the work, nature herself. At least Lodge and Sidney were also aware of the Renaissance view of satire as a close relative of moral philosophy. However, one cannot but feel a sense of a loss as the debate is refined. It is as if the issues in the defenses are transported into another domain where sincerity and transparency are necessary fictions, fictive ideals that have less of a bearing on actual life. The immediate impact of poetry on morals, in other words, seems to be watered down by criticism. The feeling is only compounded in the case of satire whose pagan origins had furnished the genre with an added element of danger. Fictive satyrs are hardly trustworthy guides to moral reasoning and giving them moral authority *is* questionable, no matter how noble the author. Poetry, then, seems to move from the economy of direct moral impact into a game of negotiable meanings. These developments in English criticism can be viewed in conjunction with the Marprelate Controversy, arguably one of the most visible instances of satirical rhetoric at the time. The controversy put the scandalous ideas of the artificial satirical author into practice in criticism, but surprisingly it was the radical Puritans who took the initiative.

2.2 Martin Marprelate

Lodge is sometimes considered the first English satirist. In his *A Fig for Momus* (1595), he makes critical and apologetic remarks about his satires in a prefatory message to the reader which shed light on his approach to literature and satire in particular: "In them [his satires] (under the names of certain Romaines) where I reprehend vice, I purposely wrong no man, but observe the lawes of that kind of poeme: If any repine thereat, I am sure he is guiltie, because he bewrayeth himselfe."[126] He defends himself by appealing to the form of the genre and shifts the blame of any indignation to the reader. By this time the Marprelate Controversy had already passed, but the memory of the pamphlet war was still fresh in the minds of the reading public. Lodge's own view of Martin was that he was one of the "Devils incarnate of this age ... that delight to be vicious"[127] and he strongly condemned the threat posed by Martin and those he inspired to join his efforts to "innovate in religion."[128] Earlier on, Lodge's friend Robert Greene, an anti-Marprelate author himself, had warned him not to engage in personal satire but to retain a tone of generality—a defensive maneuver also mentioned by Puttenham and many others—and Lodge was perhaps voicing his friend's warning in his comment on his own work. The Marprelate Controversy had shown what disregarding Greene's maxim did to public debate. Martin, at least for Lodge, was dangerous precisely because he had no such qualms about the moral consequences of satire's potentially destructive rhetoric. On the contrary, Martin relished scandal, invective and personal attacks against the higher clergy and used the ensuing outrage to his advantage. Simply put, the Marprelate Controversy tested the rules of satire in public debate by breaking them. It introduced a character familiar from Juvenalian and Persian satires, what S. H. Braund terms

[126] Lodge 1595, unpaginated.
[127] Lodge 1596, 1. Cf. Black 2008, lxxxii.
[128] Lodge 1596, 68.

in an analysis of Juvenal's eighth satire a "pseudo-moralist" or a "moralist who reveals himself to be no moralist at all."[129] Such characters may be sincere, but the figure of the author is in this case often presented as absurd or mad. As the actual authors of the Marprelate tracts were unknown, Martin became if not a well-known author in the conventional sense then a name that promised the reader a certain kind of reading experience involving a certain kind of transgressive but amusing rhetoric.[130]

The Controversy began as a protest against the slow pace of Elizabethan ecclesiastical reform after John Whitgift, an old opponent of the Presbyterian Thomas Cartwright, was appointed Archbishop of Canterbury in 1583. Their disputes had already begun in the 1570s with the Admonition Controversy which Ethan Shagan calls "the first great debate between Protestants over the government of the Church of England."[131] Rising tensions and the enthusiasm of reform-minded opponents of Whitgift's conformist policies who advocated a Presbyterian system of church government led to the publication in 1584 of William Fulke's *A Brief and Plaine Declaration ... for the Discipline and Reformation of the Church of Englande* and the French Calvinist (and Calvin's successor in Geneva) Theodore Beza's *The Judgement of a Most Reverend and Learned Man ... Concerning a Threefold Order of Bishops* (c. 1585).[132] These two important early texts for the controversy were printed by Robert Waldegrave who would also print the first four Marprelate tracts before leaving the dangerous and illegal project that operated without the blessing of the Star Chamber. When

[129] Braund 1988, 108.
[130] Cf. Griffin 1999, 879. Griffin cites Mark Rose who uses the term "brand name" to refer to the author's name in relation to something akin to copyright. While Martin's name was not in this strict sense an origin of the work's value (Black records wholesale prices from threepence to sixpence), his name was a guarantee of quality satire and hence a kind of brand name. As for copyright, its use later in book publishing was more relevant to printers and book sellers and, as Love argues, relevant to the broad concept of the author only as one element of the textual practices that contributed to the production of texts. Martin Marprelate was more than anything a textual performance.
[131] Shagan 2011, 113. Whitgift was in a strange position where he had to borrow "arguments invented by Henrician reformists like Thomas Starkey against Protestants, and arguments invented by continental reformers like John Calvin against Anabaptists" (ibid, 119). He then had to use the borrowed arguments against members of his own Church in an effort to promote moderation.
[132] Cf. Anselment 1979, 34. Cf. Black 2008, xvii.

the Dean of Salisbury, John Bridges, produced an extensive learned retort against the enthusiasts in 1587, the battle lines were drawn. Black states that "the central issue was the question of interpretative authority" and, more specifically, who had authority over the justification of the episcopacy.[133] It is the former point that currently warrants attention.

The pamphleteer John Penry's illegal attacks against the clergy were joined by polemical attacks from noted Presbyterians. In 1588 Waldegrave had his printing press seized and the Puritan critics went underground. They reemerged under the pseudonym Martin Marprelate later that year with the *Epistle*, written as a response to Bridges's heavy-handed defense of the church. The comic irreverent mockery of the *Epistle*, the very opposite to that of Bridges's learned scholastic fourteen-hundred-page tome, was designed to popularize the cause of reform among the general readership. Marprelate was in fact a number of undetermined authors—these included Penry, John Udall and, the person currently seen as the most likely candidate for the main author, Job Throckmorton.[134] In the end, the pamphleteering proved so popular that Richard and Gabriel Harvey and even Francis Bacon joined the debate. What is of particular interest in the tracts for the present study is the self-aware use of mockery employed by the posturing Marprelate who explicitly states that he cannot engage in conventional criticism, as he writes in the *Epistle*, "unless I should be sometimes tediously dunstical and absurd."[135] That is, he frankly admits to his anarchic form of reasoning. The anti-Martinists and even many of the Puritans despised his tactics, but they were very much in demand among common readers. Martin states that he is to play the dunce, because the arguments he has to repudiate and criticize must be approached in this manner. The fault of the aggressive mockery, in turn, he places on his adversaries. Readers

[133] Black 2008, xxiv.
[134] Black (2008, xli) notes that unlike Penry, who was hanged, Throckmorton was the only writer formally accused of writing the texts and holds him responsible for Martin's distinctive voice. Cf. Poole 2000, 22. Cf. Hibbard 1962, 22.
[135] Black 2008, 1. Quoted in Poole 2000, 22. Anselment 1979 maintains that this echoes Erasmus' *Praise of Folly* and Proverbs 26:5 ("Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit"), but adds that Marprelate's folly creates its own distinctive decorum.

who find the absurdities of the *Epistle* excessive, the author states, should "thank his Deanship [Bridges] for it."[136] In other words, he claims that his opponents are absurd and merit such treatment: "I jested, because I deal against a worshipful jester, D. Bridges, whose writing and sermons tend to no other end than to make men laugh. ... Let them say that the hottest of you hath made Martin."[137] As Bridges had accused the Puritans of exceeding their authority by appealing to their interpretations of scripture, the claim appears to make a mockery of interpretation itself. The shamelessness of the Marprelate writers guaranteed the popularity of the mock-debate which finally seemed to take on a life of its own when the anti-Martinists joined in to create a caricature of a figure that was clearly a caricature to begin with.

The anti-Martinist side was not in agreement on the best way of responding to the clownish scholarly texts of the Martinists. According to Raymond Anselment, "biblical commentators of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries generally agree that strictly observed decorum should exclude the imitation of folly."[138] Thus one would think that one should not reply to a fool where silence would suffice, but the Martinist provocation and the Presbyterian critique of the moderation of their opponents proved too strong to resist. Since the main issue the Martinist argument pointed out was the passivity of the churchmen and their unwillingness to undertake reform, silence might have been construed as implicit agreement. The earnest replies presented by the conformists provoked yet more ridicule and as the Martinists became a public nuisance in their eyes, a counterargument in the form of satire was apparently deemed suitable. As the Martinist argument ridiculed the exceedingly serious reply of Bridges and later Thomas Cooper, maintaining seriousness seemed only to perpetuate ridicule. What is odd is that the anti-Martinists chose to imitate the fool who was

[136] Black 2008, 1.
[137] Ibid, 53–4.
[138] Anselment 1979, 37.

badgering them instead of ridiculing him in some other way. This approach led the anti-Martinists into a self-perpetuating quagmire of satirical rhetoric and counter-rhetoric that only publicized the Presbyterian cause further. The danger was recognized by Francis Bacon, but by then the controversy had already taken its course. Commenting on the Marprelate satire *Hay any Worke for Cooper* against Cooper and Bacon's attitude to the whole affair, Anselment writes:

> The satires' relentless stripping away of illusion pursues an ideal that Marprelate believes all would see if only they had the opportunity to view it. A conspiracy of silence ... condones a greater evil. The active love that *Hay any Worke* poses against Cooper's charitable passivity advocates an ultimate good which Marprelate assumes justifies any violation of conventional decency. This unyielding commitment to an ideal, which Marprelate refers to as love and his critics attack as presumptuous malignity, is characterized in ... a work unpublished until 1641 [by] Francis Bacon [who] groups Marprelate and his more extreme adversaries together and opposes their zeal.[139]

Bacon's proposed alternative in the work, *A Wise and Moderate Discourse, Concerning Church-Affaires,* was to decry the mixing of folly and argument and he instead proposed tempering the rhetoric of both parties. Bacon feared that amplifying the terms of the controversy in the way the new framework of the debate allowed for was unhealthy and produced violent faction. Perfect fictional ideals, he seemed to say from outside the mock-debate, created unreasonable demands for all and produced intolerance. In effect, he warned his readers not to engage in critical mockery, not to concede the terms of the kind the Marprelate debates forced on its participants. Despite reasonable protests from eminent authors like Bacon, the figure of the mock-critic came to exert a great influence on later critical debates by creating "a new satiric mode based essentially on character."[140] Bacon was of course right, but by the time of *Hay any Worke,* the fourth satire and the last one printed by

[139] Ibid, 57.
[140] Ibid, 59.

Waldegrave, it does not appear that the Marprelate tracts were any longer pursuing the stripping away of illusions as much as engaged in creating an illusion of their own. Whatever their original intention, the debate seems to have caused a general confusion between conventions of satire and earnest debate—which was precisely the point of Bacon's admonition. Martin's own advice to "take heed you be not carried away with slanders"[141] in *Hay any Work for Cooper* sounds positively ridiculous against this background and his vows to continue his rhetorical onslaught sound like a promise to continue the rhetorical and scholarly spectacle he had begun instead of a commitment to an ideal, despite the no doubt sincere idealism of the tracts' authors.

It should also be noted that not all Puritans agreed with the Martinists' methods. Martin begins the *Epitome*, the second tract, by including their protests in the debate: "The puritans are angry with me, I mean the puritan preachers. And why? Because I am too open. Because I jest."[142] The word "Presbyterian" never actually appears in the tracts, but in the *Theses Martinianae* Martin writes of his orthodox and puritan opponents: "Those whom foolishly men call puritans, like of the matter I have handled, but the form they cannot brook. So that herein I have them both for mine adversaries."[143] Martin addresses the Puritans directly in the final tract, *The Protestation of Martin Marprelate*, in a way that tells of his continuing loyalty to the cause but also of the tensions between the imaginary author and his Puritan audience: "For albeit there have been some jars of unkindness betwixt us, yet I would have you know, that I take the worst of you, in regard of his calling, to be an honester man than the best lord bishop in Christendom."[144] In essence, the Presbyterian project proposed by Martin was radical only in terms of its departure from the patience characteristic of Calvinism in matters of Church governance. As Black notes: "Martin's originality lay in his polemical

[141] Black 2008, 117.
[142] Ibid, 53.
[143] Ibid, 147.
[144] Ibid, 205.

aggressiveness, not his ecclesiology."[145] But his zeal was such that it seemed to engulf even the reasonable objections of his supporters.

What is striking in the Martinist approach is Martin's transparent claim to satirize his opponents at every turn, even at the cost of his own integrity. It demonstrates his willingness to jump to unwarranted conclusions and reason in a transparently false manner to amuse his readers and infuriate his opponents. As the controversy unfolded it became clear that Martin was ready to engage in any form of argument if it suited his satirical goals, ready to dismiss others and to mock his opponents' authority whenever possible. The inconsistency of his approach to the conventions of argument and counter-argument made him an unreasonable and unpredictable opponent who was only consistent in that "jesting is lawful by circumstances, even in the greatest matters."[146] He criticizes scholastic learning for its excessive reliance on method, but creates an overwrought argument through a mock-scholastic apparatus himself when it suits him.[147] He criticizes his opponents when they are too serious and dismisses them as useless when they engage in Martinist merriment in the satirical spirit of Martinist rhetoric. When his petty protests are not met by his adversaries, who quite reasonably and explicitly declined to respond to some of his wild allegations, Martin considers them validated by their silence.[148] In other words, the fluidity of his amoral rhetoric guarantees he will not be beaten in verbal combat. He is more than a difficult man; he is an impossible opponent as he allows himself to switch from banter to criticism and back to invective and folly as he pleases. This was no doubt a cause for much joy for his readers, as was the fact that his adversaries were blind to the futility of engaging in debate with him.[149]

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[145] Ibid, xix.
[146] Ibid, 115.
[147] Cf. Black 2008, 120.
[148] Cf. Black 2008, 97, 101.
[149] Black notes that "over twenty explicitly anti-Martinist tracts survive" (1997, 713) against the seven original Martinist pamphlets.

At its most formal, the duncery Martin claims to practice involves engagement with particular arguments where he interprets and responds to points made by the likes of Bridges. Martin's radical discursive freedom also means that he reserves the right to read his opponents' arguments in any way he pleases, to amplify them as he pleases and satirize them accordingly. It is not merely the inability of churchmen to distinguish between banter and serious argumentation that produces the humor of the tracts but Martin's explicitly stated radical indifference to the conventions of the English language. This indifference includes the license to read and translate the "cunning and mystical kind of English"[150] used by his targets. In *The Just Censure and Reproof of Martin Junior*, a mock admonition of Martin's younger son by his older brother, Martin Senior, Martin Junior is encouraged to study his father's publications, those he had and had threatened to publish:

> I would wish, that of the first money which thou meanest to bestow in books, thou wouldst buy thee thou father's Grammar and his Lexicon, with a brief thing called his *Capita condordantiarum*, and study these well but one month, and out o' doubt thou shalt, with the pretty skill which thou hast already, be able to overturn any catercap of them all.[151]

Study of this kind is necessary, claims Martin Senior, because the bishops' English is designed to "draw a meaning out of our English words, which the nature of the tongue can by no means bear."[152] Because of its critical nature, Martin's enterprise was as much fueled by the radical freedom to write as he pleases (as Martin Senior argues) as it was by the ability to read the treacherous language of the bishops in a way that reveals the true meaning of their words. The caricature of interpretative authority presented by the character posed a significant threat to those he read and "translated," despite the fact that the books Martin Senior mentions did not actually exist. It mockingly disregards the kind of conventional

[150] Black 2008, 184.
[151] Ibid.
[152] Ibid, 183.

apologies used by Lodge ("the reader is guilty, because he betrays himself"). The interpretative freedom abused by Marprelate also became part of the legacy handed over to Restoration and eighteenth-century satirists. They would also misuse rhetoric not unlike Lodge's apology for their own purposes. After all, the Marprelate authors had done so and flourished.

Martin's mockery, Kristen Poole argues, is not meant to deflate his own criticism in any way, but to subvert the authority of the opponent through ridicule and insult: "Rather than confute the authority of an episcopal church government through biblical analysis (the standard approach of most reform-minded authors), Martin endeavors to mar the prelates with more personal smears."[153] Contrary to what Poole says, there are arguments based on biblical analysis in the tracts, in fact they are central to Martin's mockery aimed at showing "pattern[s] of hypocrisy"[154] embedded in the reasoning of his opponents, but Poole's remark about personal smears underlines a more important point. The smears of the Marprelate authors would perhaps not have been but a nuisance for Martin's targets, but with the gesture of refusing to abide by the burden of rejoinder in the conventional manner the Marprelate tracts introduced a stronger critical argument against authority. The authors' avoidance of entering into a proper debate with the church was their greatest strength: "Martin inflicts the greatest harm on the clergy by simply not taking them seriously."[155] In other words, the Marprelate authors shift the ground on which the debate was previously managed by learned church authorities and bring artful rhetoric from a different topos into the debate. Martin's unstable and unpredictable antimetaleptic persona is a central element to this process.

[153] Poole 2000, 22.
[154] Black 2008, 72; cf. 110.
[155] Poole 2000, 23.

After apologizing for any absurdities in the first lines of the first tract Martin begs the readers to read the text "without choller or laughing"[156] and says he is no sectarian, but nevertheless cannot "keep *decorum personae*" if he is to criticize Bridges's work. The term *decorum personae* probably refers to Horace's *Ars Poetica* and its advice that action should be consistent with character.[157] Martin thus announces his transgression beforehand and names the conventional rule of discourse he is about to break. Further declarations of the nature of his character that are clearly inconsistent with Martin's declared intentions keep the reader titillated. His self-aggrandizement makes him "reverend and worthy,"[158] "learned,"[159] "Martin Marprelate the Great"[160] and a "Doctor in all Faculties."[161] On the one hand he flaunts his learning and on the other he presents himself as a humble man, "a simple ingram man"[162] who "must needs call a spade a spade, a pope a pope."[163] He feels it is necessary to advance his just cause despite his personal failings, but only after singing his own praises. He fluctuates between vicious invective, a willingness to cooperate with his opponents and indifference to criticism: "Call me libeller as often as thou wilt, I do not greatly care."[164] But perhaps the most disconcerting aspects of the Martinist voice are found in his constant threats. Although he at one point says he acts alone, he nevertheless styles himself a "Metropolitan of all the Martins in England"[165] of which there are legion. In order to undertake his project of revealing the knaveries of his opponents, Martin promises he "will place a young Martin in every diocese, which may take notice of your practices."[166] The many threats of rhetorical violence are substantiated by Martin Junior who states that "I am

[156] Black 2008, 2.
[157] Anselment 1979, 36.
[158] Black 2008, 5.
[159] Ibid, 9.
[160] Ibid, 145.
[161] Ibid, 120.
[162] Ibid,18.
[163] Ibid, 53.
[164] Ibid, 127.
[165] Ibid, 53.
[166] Ibid, 33.

sure he hath 500 sons in the land, of good credit and ability"[167] and Martin Senior who in turn wishes that "some continual spy may be in all those places which are most suspected [of misdeeds]."[168] The diffusion of agency between the satyr-like spies is compounded by the ambiguous presence of Martin himself on the page. He quotes himself repeatedly, refers to himself in the third person ("whoseoever thou art, and whosoever Martin is"[169]) and so perpetuates the myth of his own fluid and increasingly fragmented persona. There is a claim behind this trickery and Martin's inconsistency should be read as an argument for it. It drives home the point that Martin is a polemically constructed voice, a menacing figure in the form of a caricature of interpretative authority. The caricature of interpretative freedom or creative interpretation, when equipped with threats of action and an army of agents within religious communities, also becomes a frightening if ridiculous show of force for the Presbyterian cause.

Martin's critical mockery seduced the anti-Marprelate authors onto strange new ground where there was no established authority, where authors and their messages remained oblique and argument was free. The anti-Martinists themselves appeared to revel in writing against the impish character in his own manner, trying to appropriate the mock-critical tone of the satires for their own purposes. As the counterattacks against Marprelate increased, he could only grow more famous due to the oddly polite concession by the anti-Martinists to debate the issues through mockery. In other words, the planned dissemination of the Martinist argument found witless accessories in the anti-Martinists. Some time later the stock figure of the Puritan, a Falstaffian epicurean, grew popular and it clearly reflected the Martinists as a flesh and blood manifestation of their amoral conduct. By composing purposefully crude and insolent criticism, the Martinists themselves had created a character with an anarchic air of

[167] Ibid, 158.
[168] Ibid, 186.
[169] Ibid, 104.

mockery. They reinforced the association between the Puritans and a lack of common decency, building up a character with a grotesque frame of mind as well as body—it is difficult to tell where the Martinist caricature ends and the anti-Puritan caricature begins. Poole explains all this with a Bakhtinian notion of carnivalistic grotesquerie where discourse became a satirical free-for-all and everyone could have their say if they so wished without much regard to the actual issues of the controversy. This, I think, rather depreciates the chosen rhetorical tactics of the Martinists and even the motives of the anti-Martinists by creating a relatively aimless form of anarchic debate from what was a more principled and, at least in the case of the Martinists, forceful form of critical mockery. Surely lines were crossed and "the anti-Martinist attacks ultimately revealed the fragility of orthodox discursive control"[170] in a manner that agrees with Bakhtinian theory, but one should distinguish in this type of phenomenon ways of subverting debates and conceding implicit issues. While both the Martinist attacks which were self-consciously planned to subvert the rhetoric of clergymen through critical mockery and the anti-Martinist counterattacks were calculated efforts to convince the reading public, the spectacle of the whole affair did not benefit the anti-Martinists. The creation of the Puritan grotesque was surely a caricature created to mock the Puritans in general, but the great popularity of the very mode of the debate created consequences that were intentional and unintentional to varying degrees. That is, one should not confuse the debate with its final resolution, because one could argue that the Marprelate Controversy was never resolved in any conventional sense. It is doubtful whether the Martinist controversialists ever intended to reach a resolution in the first place.

[170] Ibid, 31.

2.3 Thomas Nashe

As one of the anti-Martinist authors employed by Whitgift to counter the Martinist threat, Thomas Nashe had a scholarly and strategic interest in manipulating the rhetoric of the new character-based satire. His language both before and after the Marprelate Controversy can seem challenging due to what Devon L. Hodges calls Nashe's "fragmented and fragmenting style."[171] Nashe's life as an author seems to have been a balancing act between courting wealthy patrons and offering his work to an emerging reading public. Neither provided much success and the compromise kept him in poverty. Scholarly estimations of his work differ widely, some praise him for his learning and rhetorical virtuosity and others emphasize his failures as a rhetorician and poet, but the unsettling nature of his language is recognized by all. What some see as faults in his writing, others see as innovations.

"The Nashe problem," although less popular in recent criticism, is seen as a central part of his work. In short, the problem is that Nashe's work seems to say nothing of substance or convey any stable message to the reader. That is, critics have often thought Nashe "has nothing meaningful to say"[172] and proceeded to either circle the rhetorical void he created or dive into the madness of his prose. "Regardless of their subject," writes Alex Davis in a recent study, "the vehicles of Nashe's metaphors constantly threaten to develop an interest independent of their supposed referents."[173] As one might expect, critics struggle with Nashe's oddly vacuous and unruly language. But it is nevertheless surprising that readers have seen in Nashe's prose issues varying from crises of authority to epistemological cataclysms. At times Nashe even seems to act as a sounding board for critics' own ideas about the very purpose of literature. Nashe's persona in writing is equally puzzling. He is

[171] Hodges 1985, 36.
[172] Baker 2010, 35.
[173] Davis 2011, 190.

inconsistent to the point of incoherence and tends to draw attention to the artificial nature of language in his works. Despite this, or rather because of it, he is of interest to anyone interested in authorship. Rather than stress the incoherence of his writing as many do, I want to emphasize in what follows one feature of Nashe's prose that seems to remain stable enough, namely his use of metalepsis, in two of his works written before and after the Marprelate Controversy, *Anatomy of Absurdity* (1589) and *The Unfortunate Traveller* (1594).[174]

In *Anatomy of Absurdity*, the young Nashe sought to produce a work of criticism. It is a patchwork text constructed from various classical sources and appears to present solid moral advice—"that which we thinke, let us speake, and that which we speake, let us thinke; let our speeche accorde with our life"[175]—interspersed with insults against those who embrace excess in any form. Those who are not virtuous are reprimanded, those who moralize to excess are put in their place; those who neglect their studies are deemed lazy, those who pursue studies because of vanity or in useless subjects pathetic. But above all the *Anatomy* is aimed at unmasking absurdity—it is an "anti-satire" directed against the austere economy of Puritan rhetoric.[176] It was also, of course, a way of courting readers and sponsors in high places. Hodges examines Nashe's chosen method of analysis, the anatomy, by comparing it to its medical counterparts and notes that "the dissection of vacuous linguistic bodies" has the advantage that "as Nashe exposes the superfluous matter of other texts, that superfluity fills up his work, *is* his work."[177] And Hodges is right. The anatomized materials have a distinct effect on the formal qualities of Nashe's prose which takes on an absurd form. Nashe lets

[174] According to McKerrow, *Anatomy of Absurdity* was entered into the Stationers' Register in September 19, 1588. The work was written some time before that: "On the whole I think we may date the work between the summer of 1587 and the spring of 1588 … The date of printing was probably February or March 1589-90" (Nashe 1966c, 1).
[175] Nashe 1966a, 46.
[176] G. R. Hibbard claims that Nashe's absurd rhetoric in the *Anatomy* was intended to "turn the weapon against those who had been using it for narrow and sectarian ends and to make it serve a more liberal and humanistic cause" (1962, 13).
[177] Hodges 1985, 37.

them take over his work, inflate and amplify his rhetoric quite freely. In doing so, he fails as a critic, but at least in his failure to appraise absurdities objectively he manages to show his readers what happens when the critic's pernicious materials overpower him.

Nashe says in a statement of purpose, which may also serve as an example of his heavy euphuistic style, that he is

> about to anatomize Absurdity, am urged to take a view of sundry mens vanitie, a survey of their follie, a briefe of their barbarisme, to runne through Authors of the absurder sort, assembled in the Stacioners shop, sucking and selecting out of these upstart antiquaries, somewhat of their unsavoury duncerie, meaning to note it with a *Nigrum theta*, that each one at the first sight may eschew it as infectious, to shewe it to the worlde that all men may shunne it.[178]

He sounds like he loathes undertaking the task at hand, sneering and hostile, but he also seems to relish the chance to dive into his subject. From the first pages, Nashe is very aware of the ways in which the slippery meanings of words may be abused and he seems to enjoy his spleen a bit too much. In order to fight corruption, Nashe is willing to compromise his own position. His is a task undertaken to de-Italianize Englishmen so that vice would "no longer maske under the visard of virtue."[179] Like Gosson, he wants to unmask the poets, but Nashe wants to do this by assuming the transparent mask of the critical satirist himself and by moving critical debate onto more playful territory.

Nashe begins with great fervor and quickly moves to an extended tirade against romances. The first part of the treatise also establishes Nashe's method of contradicting himself in his prose. He denies his willingness to write an invective against women in the manner of Mantuan: "[P]ittie makes me refraine from renewing his worne out complaints, the wounds wherof the former forepast feminine sexe hath felt."[180] After he denies his intention to do so, he immediately breaks his promise by writing an extended satire against women. Nashe's use

[178] Nashe 1966a, 9.
[179] Ibid, 10.
[180] Ibid, 12. Cf. Davis 2011, 69–71.

of an ironic paralipsis of this sort is a framing device that guides the reader's interpretation. He insists on his sincerity and yet confesses to being a liar. His strategically contradictory position serves a moral purpose. Nashe is arguing against the hypocrisy of moralists like Northbrooke who make stringent demands on the morals of others as if they were actually able to preach from a position of moral imperviousness—his direct Puritan target was Stubbes's *Anatomy of Abuses* (1583). He says they "extend their invectives so farre against the abuse, that almost the things remaines not whereof they admitte anie lawfull use" and condemns their impossibly severe ideals.[181] Nashe is no kinder to moralists who flaunt their false learning and know their sources only from translations—a nod to Erasmian philology—or to inept poets who he thinks should be "bequeathed to Bridwell, there to learne a new occupation."[182] Like Sidney, Nashe maintains that poets preceded philosophers and that the delight found in poetry encourages men to seek knowledge which will be absorbed more efficiently when it is embedded in poetic language. Stoics, says Nashe drawing a caricature of the Stoics of his time, do not leave any room for "affections" and absurdly want to discard poetry as a teacher of sound morals merely because of its affective qualities; in which Nashe says "they resemble them that cast away the nutte for mislike of the shell."[183]

Thus he manages to present himself as a sensible and practical critic all the while railing against dunces and idlers. He calls himself a "friend" of poetry and calls poetry "a more hidden and divine kinde of Philosophy, enwrapped in blinde Fables and darke stories"[184]—instead of revealing corruption, a careful reading of poetry may actually unveil hidden treasure. Further, he makes the search for edifying moral knowledge in poetry sound exciting, because corruption is in fact not revealed by a critical eye but on the very surface for all to see:

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[181] Nashe 1966a, 20.
[182] Ibid, 25.
[183] Ibid, 27.
[184] Ibid.

> I woulde not have any man imagine that in praysing of Poetry, I endevour to approove *Virgils* unchast *Priapus*, or *Ovids* obscenitie; I commende their witte, not their wantonnes, their learning, not their lust: yet even as the Bee out of the bitterest flowers and sharpest thistles gathers honey, so out of the filthiest Fables, may profitable knowledge be sucked and selected.[185]

The sharp contrast in the filthy pursuit of moral virtue makes inspirational reading for those who are interested in attaining virtue and learning through poetry. But the argument is nevertheless made by a self-proclaimed satirist in disguise raging at various forms of absurdity and, as a result, Nashe appears to get bogged down in his own countercriticism. It is hard to tell whether or not Nashe was committing a similar mistake as the anti-Martinists or merely using absurd rhetoric to his own advantage. Hodges, drawing on Kenneth Burke's discussion of reductive rhetorical strategies, remarks succinctly that the author and his work, criticism and criticized, or "subject and object merge"[186] in Nashe's prose. In other words, despite Nashe's admission of playing the fool and self-consciously adopting the rhetoric of the buffoon in order to achieve his goals, there is little difference between jesting and earnest argument, or at least not enough to prompt an unambiguously satirical reading. This gives the metaleptic dual role of the author an air of Martinist recklessness. The critic-satirist is willing to expose himself, or so he seems to say, and take his targets down with him if necessary.

It is interesting to note that for all his claims to transparency the Nashe of the *Anatomy* is nothing of the sort. The young Nashe talks of reforming honest Englishmen, but his own honesty hides him as effectively as the satyr player's costume. His claim of wanting to unmask the poets may be sincere, but in Nashe's text the author's satirical disguise remains intact. Whatever Nashe's actual motives were, it seems that the dangers of his chosen form of

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[185] Ibid, 29–30. Cf. Shakespeare, *Henry V*, act IV. sc. i.: "There is some soul of goodness in things evil, would men observingly distil it out. For our bad neighbour makes us early stirrers, which is both healthful and good husbandry: besides, they are our outward consciences, and preachers to us all, admonishing that we should dress us fairly for our end. Thus may we gather honey from the weed, and make a moral of the devil himself." Nashe uses the same metaphor in *Pierce Pennilesse*. Cf. Kinney 1986, 329.
[186] Hodges 1985, 40.

criticism were very real and attracted the attention of censors, that of Gabriel Harvey in particular. If his choice to write from an ambiguous position was, like Thomas More's, intended to showcase his rhetorical skills, his natural gifts for polemic might have been too great for his own good. Nashe informs the reader of his chosen satirical persona in order to gain the freedom to say what he has to say, which is actually very little, in the clumsy euphuistic style he chooses to say it. Simultaneously, he seems to criticize euphuists as well. Nashe's technique of the anatomy and his goal of revealing truth behind poetry in this manner could not succeed. The rhetorician dooms himself to failure or an ever increasing fragmentation of truth and meaning until he simply grinds to a halt. The *Anatomy* is a young man's work and thus it might be easy to claim that Nashe got entangled in his own inflated rhetoric. A more generous reading might see in Nashe's sincere insincerity a call for a kind of hermeneutic transcendence. Here one risks overinterpretation, but it can be shown that Nashe's approach to sabotaging his own texts appears to remain consistent when one compares the *Anatomy* to *The Unfortunate Traveller*.

Problems of interpretation after the Marprelate Controversy become even more challenging when the skepticism that fuels the *Anatomy* is transposed into the world of fiction. Once again, readings of Nashe's prose differ to a surprising degree. Many readers have noted that Nashe seems to break all the conventions of Renaissance prose in his later work. This disregard for convention led Jean Jules Jusserand, cited by Edmund Gosse in an 1892 edition of the text, to surmise that Nashe had sown the seeds of a completely new genre in English literature whose form he had borrowed from Spanish picaresques: "No one, Ben Jonson excepted, possessed at that epoch, in so great a degree as himself, a love of the honest truth. With Nashe, then, the novel of real life, whose invention in England is generally attributed to Defoe, begins."[187] In an often-cited essay on the influence of the Marprelate

[187] Nashe 1892, xxxiii.

Controversy on Nashe's rhetoric, Travis L. Summersgill states bluntly that Nashe's goal was simply to get published.[188] Raymond Stephanson, summing up a collection of a number of unsympathetic critical remarks, concludes that "the general consensus ... is that *The Unfortunate Traveller* is an interesting artistic failure."[189] He reads the story as a challenge to epistemology in general:

> [T]he world and human experience in *The Unfortunate Traveller* are disorderly and ineffable from the beginning, and the work's view of life is largely a statement about a *lack* of inherent form or meaning in the universe. … [Nashe's] willful distortions of language, his bizarre verbal antics, are all calculated to reflect the problem of form and meaning, to challenge any system of meaning or any concept of 'reality' and break it down.[190]

Arthur Kinney, who calls the *Traveller* "one of the most significant latter-day works of humanist poetics"[191] and ties it to the radical skepticism of Cornelius Agrippa, makes a similar point:

> Nashe is keenly suspicious of unified thought or of any normative practice of language before the sheer *randomness* of life. His ardent prose hammers at the confinements of a traditional syntax and forges strange compound words and neologisms to intensify the starkness of life, for, as he tells young pages in his preface to *The Unfortunate Traveller*, existence is merely a game of mumchance. Life, he means, is the reading of false (or loaded) dice thrown on the closed cover of the Acts and Monuments of life, denying the providential outlook that the Church Fathers proclaimed and that he tries, manfully, scornfully, to recover. Merely to be alive, he concludes in the preface, is to be unfortunate: that is his powerful, vaticinal theme.[192]

According to a more recent take on Nashe's story by Wendy Hyman, the *Traveller* can be read as "a kind of protodeconstructionist" work due to its mingling of genres, literary

[188] Summersgill 1951, 152.
[189] Stephanson 1983, 22.
[190] Ibid, 24.
[191] Kinney 1986, 329.
[192] Ibid, 333.

registers, narrative voices and bizarre rhetoric.[193] Hyman, tracking a reading of Nashe from a postructuralist perspective initiated by Jonathan Crewe, does not actually promote the argument that Nashe should be read as a deconstructionist *avant la lettre* but instead concentrates on Nashe's resistance to courtly models of literature and "his ambivalent self-promotion as the progenitor of a radical, new idea of authorship."[194] These modern readings of Nashe's work can be divided into two very different types of interpretations: those that judge Nashe's failure to compose a coherent text to be an accident and those that see it as an intentional strategy. Something new is afoot in Nashe's language in its playful yet problematic transgressions and opinions still vary. However one approaches the text, it is quite clear that its ambiguities create possibilities for radically different readings. The question, then, is whether or not one can assume, as Levine assumes of More's *Utopia*, that the radical ambiguity of Nashe's prose was intended to produce the effects the text has produced over time.

Nashe begins by dismissing his would-be patron Henry Wriothesley, the Earl of Southampton, in the preface, giving him only a marginal or functional role in the dissemination of the text. The protagonist, Jack Wilton, then introduces himself to "*the dapper Mounsieur Pages of the Court*" in a second preface with rough puns and by calling printers "madde whoorsons."[195] As the tale continues it veers off to sermons, social commentary, poetry and descriptions of exotic places and people, wars, crimes, torture and disease. Nashe repeatedly draws attention to language in these digressions. He does this by using, among other things, repetitive symmetrical chiasmic figures and amusing vocabulary ("Why should I goe gadding and fisgigging after firking flantado amfibologies?")[196] The narrator, who refers to himself as a page among other pages, appears to be drunk with

[193] Hyman 2005, 24.
[194] Ibid, 25.
[195] Nashe 1966b, 207.
[196] Ibid, 248.

language and invites the reader to partake of his prose. Jack Wilton's introduction contains a humorous appeal to his readers, presented in character and from within the narrative. He demands direct action by proposing a strategy with which readers should defend the text against critics: "[E]verie one of you, after the perusing of this pamphlet, is to provide him a case of ponyardes, that if you come in companie with anie man which shall dispraise it or speak against it, you may straight crie *Sic respondeo*, and give him the stockado."[197] Responsibility for the protection of the controversial text is given to the reader by the protagonist who suggests dramatic measures against scheming critics. The satirical voice of the author also reminds the readers that their actions are to benefit an absent author: "It standes not with your honours (I assure ye) to have a gentleman and a page abusde in his absence."[198] Nashe's mad and hyperbolic rhetoric is funny and directly engages the reader, but not everyone was amused by its violent tone.

The appeal to the common reader in *The Unfortunate Traveller* is made at the patron's expense—the author is rude to the patron and very gentle with the common reader despite his outrageous demands. The traveler's noble companion, the famous Earl of Surrey, is also subjected to authorial abuse when the protagonist assumes and eventually steals his identity. Acting out a heated exchange in a brothel, Jack refers to Surrey as "my servaunt, or my master, which you will."[199] All are subjected to serve Nashe's prose, his patron as the paymaster and the characters of the story as abstractions that can be discarded and resurrected at will. As Hyman puts it, "each narrative event exists because of the triumphant literary exercise it creates."[200] The dedication actually contains a shocking breach of decorum which complicates matters further. Nashe tries to extend his satire to the sensitive space of the dedication. He explicitly questions what he calls the "blinde custome [of] methodicall

[197] Ibid.
[198] Ibid.
[199] Ibid, 257.
[200] Hyman 2005, 37.

antiquity"[201] which dictates that he has to dedicate his work to a worthy and protests by writing the dedication in a throwaway manner. Thus the author and the narrator both appear in their satirical guises in the dedication and inside the narrative. In effect, Nashe's violation of decorum consists of his attempt to leave on his satirical disguise even when he addresses Southampton. His attempt at wit was not only dangerous but foolhardy, and there were repercussions. It was an actual break with decorum and good taste that required correction. The result of his excessive rhetoric was not a breakdown of the conventional discursive order of the age, but the quiet deletion of the offensive passage from the next edition of the work. Talk of Nashe as a prophet of nihilistic chaos sounds hollow when one of the defining moments of the work could be swept away so easily. Even if Nashe's other failures as an artist can be turned into successes through interpretation, this is the one undeniable failure that cannot be explained away.[202] The appeal to the "paradoxical patron" is yet another well-known baffling aspect of Nashe's work, almost as baffling as the "Nashe problem" itself.

One possible explanation can be offered if one reads the address as an amplification of Nashe's unfortunate metaleptic, or rather antimetaleptic, rhetoric where features of Jack Wilton's persona from within the text's fiction are extended to that of the dedication. In an essay on Jonson's prefatory writing, Paul D. Cannan argues that Jonson was at the time among many playwrights experimenting with prefaces in print. Their experimental rhetoric created what Cannan calls the "almost schizophrenic"[203] contradictory nature of prefatory statements of the time. Cannan claims that the contradictions in these statements stem from

[201] Nashe 1966b, 201.
[202] One should note that the deleted preface is categorically different from the kind of intentional omissions Dobranski, for example, examines. Even Kinney recognizes Nashe's blunder: "Just why Nashe appeals to a known patron of the arts, who was nevertheless a Catholic, an open supporter of the untraditional Essex, and badly in debt himself, is a nice question; apparently no money was forthcoming—as it hardly could have been from the impecunious Southampton—for the dedication was omitted from the second edition later the same year" (1986, 498, fn 50).
[203] Cannan 2002, 186. For discussion on Jonson's approach to authorship, see Loewenstein 2002.

the rhetorical conventions related to the manipulation of the modesty topos. This is certainly the case with Nashe as well. Nashe writes in the dedication to Southampton:

> Of your gracious favor I despaire not, for I am not altogether Fames out-cast. This handfull of leaves I offer to your view, to the leaves on trees I compare, which as they cannot grow of themselves except they have some branches or boughes to cleave too, and with whose juice and sap they be evermore recreated and nourisht; so except these unpolisht leaves of mine have some braunch of Nobilitie whereon to depend and cleave, and with the vigorous nutriment of whose authorized commendation they may be continually fosterd and refresht, never wil they grow to the worlds good liking, but forthwith fade and die on the first houre of their birth.[204]

His professed unworthiness is evenly matched by his arrogance. Nashe twists the modesty topos by considering his patron a mere utility. The arrogance of his narrator overflows into the dedication and brings a trace of the fictive elements of the narrative into the paratext. Nashe does the unthinkable, forgets his Horace, and mates the savage satirist of his narrative with what should be a polite address, deflating the hubris of noble patronage. The dedication thus becomes yet another narrative event that exists only to serve Nashe's fiction.

Nashe's satirical intent becomes clearer when one compares the tone of the dedication to Jack Wilton's hyperbolic descriptions of the noble Earl of Surrey and his poetic prowess:

> O, it was a right noble Lord, liberalitie it selfe (if in this yron age there were any such creature as liberalitie left on the earth), a Prince in content because a Poet without peere. … [I]f there bee anie sparke of Adams Paradized perfection yet emberd up in the breastes of mortall men, certainelie God hath bestowed that his perfectest image on Poets. None come so neere to God in wit, none more contemne the world … Despised they are of the worlde, because they are not of the world: their thoughts are exalted above the worlde of ignorance and all earthly conceits.[205]

He continues by claiming that Surrey is exceptional even among the "double souled" poets and concludes his praise with familiar Nashean hyperbole:

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[204] Nashe 1966b, 202.
[205] Ibid, 242

> My Heroicall Master exceeded in this supernaturall kinde of wit; he entertained no grosse earthly spirite of avarice, nor weake womanly spirite of pusillanimity and feare that are fained to bee of the water, but admirable, airie, and firie spirites, full of freedome, magnanimitie, and bountihood. Let me not speake anie more of his accomplishments, for feare I spend all my spirits in praising him, and leave my selfe no vigor of wit or effects of a soule to goe forward with my historie.[206]

Thus the sublimity of Surrey threatens to exhaust the narrator, or so he says. The irony of the situation should not be lost on anyone. Nashe's dedication to Southampton is blunt whereas the language describing Jack Wilton's master is precisely the kind of saccharine rhetoric one is used to reading in flattering dedications. The ironic reversal that is being hinted at actually turns the flattery into the most repulsive sycophancy. It is quite easy to read a thinly veiled insult against the noble patron in the hyperbolic description of Surrey when it is framed by the book's terse dedication—as the author flatters Surrey he amplifies the insult of the dedication. The analogy between the two noblemen is revealed when in a moment of candor Jack ironically refers to Surrey as "a good purse-bearer"; Surrey, in turn, echoes Jack's rhetoric in the beginning of the tale by calling him "my little Page."[207] Given that prefatory writing was a field open to new innovations, Nashe was probably taking a conscious risk by challenging and frankly mocking accepted conventions of polite address. To his credit, modern editions of the work do seem to always include the dedication of the first edition, judging it to be an important part of the work. It is indeed more than a simple dedication and more intimately tied to the narrative than is apparent at first glance. It is not only a paratext but part of the tale itself. As Jack Wilton is an extension of Nashe or his alter ego, so Nashe momentarily fashions himself into an extension of his fictive creation. One can thus

[206] Ibid.
[207] Ibid, 243.

recognize a metaleptic and an antimetaleptic movement in Nashe's prose that is both innovative and very disturbing. Sadly, the innovation did not work in his favor at the time.

Nashe certainly learned something about breaking decorum from the Marprelate Controversy.[208] However, he was engaged in the manipulation of his authorial persona early on in his career and hence one cannot give all the credit to the influence of the Marprelate authors. The obvious difference between them was of course Martin's anonymity. As a clearly fictive author, one could count on Martin to lie about anything and everything. That is, it is not difficult to believe Martin when he says he will mock anything if it suits him and do so indiscriminately. Nashe, on the other hand, performed under his own name and demanded a different kind of approach. His audiences quickly grew accustomed to reading him as an author who spoke through his characters. However, when one considers Nashe's use of the author figure in the light of the Marprelate authors, one can see in his work a far more delicate requirement for readers who wish to engage with the text. Commenting on Swift, Fredric Bogel points out what occurs when the author is not merely a ridiculous fiction but tied, however ambiguously, to a fellow human being. His point could be applied to Nashe's satire and Nashe's novel ideas about authorship as well:

> In addition to pretending, as Swift says, that the satire is not about us but someone else, we also frequently refuse to see the satiric voices within texts as compromised, partial, in problematic relation to their own aggression and to their satiric objects, and thus as figures to be identified with only insofar as we permit them to mirror our own flawed aggressiveness, partiality, contamination, and so on. By aligning our reading selves, instead, with a satirist whose ambiguity we refuse to acknowledge and whom we take to be ideal or normative (or, conversely, *unintentionally* flawed, a failed attempt at the normative or ideal), we cast out our own ambiguity of identity and our ambiguous relation to both satirist and satiric object.[209]

[208] Crewe, for one, thinks the Marprelate controversy offered Nashe "a rhetorical model of calculated indecorum" (Crewe 1982, 34).
[209] Bogel 2001, 66.

One can infer from Bogel's point that radically excessive or amplified rhetoric in satire makes it easier for a reader to distance himself or herself from authors. The more grotesque the character, the easier it is to forget possible ambiguities and shared internal conflicts that plague both the author and the reader. Martin Marprelate is a distant and mad character with whom readers do not have to identify. Nashe, however, demands acknowledgment even as he entangles the reader in confusing and contradicting rhetoric. It is easy to speak of the madness and incoherence of Nashe's prose. It is more difficult to approach the idea that its madness and incoherence are something one knows intimately from one's own experience. Examples of Martin Marprelate's and Nashe's uses of the authorial persona are illuminating, but they also require a somewhat abstract discussion about rhetorical figures in order to examine how the distance between the author and reader may be generated in satire, how amplifying the extravagance of the author or his or her argument may affect what Ehrenpreis calls the "imaginative sympathy"[210] between the two. In conclusion to this section, I want to build on recent critical work on Renaissance rhetoric in order to explore briefly the figure of metalepsis in the abstract and suggest two concrete ways of bridging the gap between the examples of Renaissance satire discussed above and eighteenth-century satire. The first of these concerns Horace as a common source for the metaleptic satire of both ages. The second concerns disenchantment and the sublime. These observations will pave the way for the eighteenth-century authors of satire discussed in the later sections of the dissertation.

[210] Cf. section 1.3.

2.4 Renaissance Metalepsis of the Author

As is apparent from the fate of Nashe's dedication, the use of metaleptic rhetoric can sometimes be pushed too far. The reasons behind this are explained in a recent essay on Renaissance notions of metalepsis by Brian Cummings:

> Metalepsis is a miniature language game: with a little patience the figure can be worked through, perhaps even with some pleasure in the ingenuity of the effort. But at other times metalepsis seems to question the possibility of ever figuring it out. Metalepsis is a borderline figure, one that sometimes goes beyond the bounds, or strains the understanding and the patience of the reader or auditor.[211]

Genette, making a similar point more generally, aligns figurative language with fiction by maintaining that, at least in some cases, "a figure is (already) a little fiction … or, if you prefer, an outline for a fiction."[212] What is hinted at by the metaleptic sign is a possibility of transference or substitution which is deliberately open-ended and uncertain. As Cummings observes in a quotable phrase, it "exists in a metaphorical hinterland"[213] where it is difficult to know which substitutions are warranted and which are inappropriate. One might as well call it a gateway to fiction. Instead of semantic closure the device points to a fabric of interlinking meanings that can produce metaleptic chains of reasoning. These in turn provide further possibilities for fictive rhetoric, because they release rhetoric and argument from the burden of monosemic meaning where *res* and *verba* have to meet. As Cummings puts it: "It makes space for imagination, for language as fiction and fantasy."[214] But audiences who enjoy such language games can be expected to follow the author's extravagant figurative reasoning only to a certain degree. The same could be said about their willingness to assume

[211] Cummings 2007, 222–3.
[212] Genette 2004, 17. ["[U]ne figure est (déjà) une petite fiction ... ou, si l'on préfère, une esquisse de fiction."]
[213] Cummings 2007, 224.
[214] Ibid, 230.

responsibility for the text's radical message as per the author's instructions. How far they will allow themselves to be provoked, in turn, must depend on the kinds of established rhetorical practices that can be safely subverted, rules that can be broken, and satirists must take care not to push their provocation too far. Certain figurative derivations, as one can see in the above examples, remain out of bounds. Someone reading Nashe as a protodeconstructionist might be tempted to say that Nashe's failure also shows that when new tropical innovations are attempted in satire, at least in the case of metaleptic satire, their novelty emerges from an explicit critique of the genre's own figurality and artistry. It makes it possible for authors, as Martin Marprelate says, to be too open about what they are doing.

Nashe's use of metalepsis draws attention to itself as a figure of failure, so it can be said that as a rhetorician Nashe certainly uses failure as a strategic device. This is obviously true of the Marprelate authors as well. But Nashe's failure as a poet, the deleted dedication to Southampton, elevates his failure beyond rhetoric. His excessive rhetoric, in effect, leads to the stylistic sin of satiety, because readers have to assume that it is the actual author whose voice they hear. The antimetalepsis of the author in the dedication, in other words, involves an unnecessary rhetorical ornament whose only function seems to be to complete the symmetry in Nashe's scheme of figurative authors within and outside the main body of the narrative. Cummings notes that the Erasmian view of metalepsis as a trope of transference was clear on the fact that the trope itself does not signify a thing, but rather it enables a movement from a mode of signifying things in the world by words to signifying words by other words. That is, in *De copia* Erasmus is exceptional in his emphasis on "how [metaphorical] language comes to be able to create figures in the first place."[215] Cummings's Erasmus suggests that when a transference into the realm of figures happens, the result is not unlike a structuralist conception of signification where signs acquire meaning by way of

[215] Ibid, 2007, 229. Cummings's remark pertains to metaphor in particular, but he groups metalepsis together with other metaphorical figures of substitution.

referring to other signs.[216] In the case of Nashe's *The Unfortunate Traveller*, the author who speaks in the dedication and Jack Wilton both become chiasmic tokens emptied of agentic power and so draw attention to themselves as figures—genuine authorial agency is confused and hidden from view to all but those who know that the rhetorical disguise is intended to be seen through.

Abuses such as Nashe's transgression in *The Unfortunate Traveller* can be detected because they draw attention to themselves by leaving out crucial steps in metaleptic reasoning. That is, they demand that the reader actively interprets the text and attempts to lift the veil of rhetoric to uncover the author's true intention. Readers still puzzle over the baffling semantic anarchy of Nashe's language. Jennifer Richards's observations on how civil rhetoric evolved in early modern England offer further insight into why Nashe's language remains controversial. She notes the admiration of the plain-speaking husbandman over the dissembling courtier in modern scholarly work and elaborates on what the piercing eye of a careful reader might see in claims of transparency:

> [T]here are good reasons why such plain-speakers are not to be trusted, not least because there is no way of knowing whether the claim to be telling the truth, or the promise of transparency, however plainly put, is not also a rhetorical ploy which aims to occlude the interests of others.[217]

Honesty, here the air of civility achieved through art, is thus accompanied by the recognition that "straight-talking is not adequately honest."[218] Many late sixteenth-century authors were apparently of the same opinion. The reader's judgment, even now, must be used to determine

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[216] Cummings notes that "Erasmus is not saying, as deconstruction seemed to be saying when it became interested in metalepsis a few years ago, that anything can be substituted for anything" (2007, 230). He refers to de Man, Bloom and the Yale school earlier in the essay, but does not name names in this particular passage. One should note that Erasmus also appears in *The Unfortunate Traveller*. In the work, he is said to have been inspired to write *The Praise of Folly* by "the indiscretion of Princes" (1966b, 245). Thomas More is mentioned in the same passage as someone whose classic work, *Utopia*, was motivated by indignation.
[217] Richards 2003, 5.
[218] Ibid, 6.

where the reader and the speaker stand and more often than not, says Richards, "we are more likely to agree with early modern anti-court satirists" than courtly honesty and its "profoundly dishonest," almost mannerist rhetoric.[219] The issue is in part semantic as the modern meaning of honesty presupposes plain-speaking and transparency, but dismissing the problem as a mere question of semantics without taking into account how the concept came into being and evolved would be to oversimplify the matter.[220] As a figure of reasoning that uses interlinked figures of substitution as its material, metalepsis is a limiting case for honest rhetoric. It can be used to great excess in order to produce a comic effect and bring about the kind of anarchic confusion Nashe and the Martinists created. In other words, its excessive use can reveal the mechanisms behind the conventions of public debate and, apparently, the extent to which figurative language can be abused in satire before it becomes mere offensive nonsense. Nashe, for one, aggressively confronts the assumption that the author of the dedication should not be a rhetorical ornament in *The Unfortunate Traveller*, that the voice of the actual author should be heard in honest and lucid prose. Mocking the convention highlights its ridiculous seriousness, the dubious role of the patron and no doubt carried with it an air of Martinist mockery unsuitable for the occasion. The Martinists of course had no problems being ridiculous and offensive due to their relative anonymity.

In trying to find a classical source that influenced the metaleptic satire of both Renaissance and eighteenth-century satirists, one can (as is often the case) look to Horace. One can see in the epistolary style of the *Art of Poetry* a mingling of authorial roles despite its advice to keep one's character in line with one's actions. Shaftesbury, to cite one famous eighteenth-century reader of Horace, notes the self-conscious subversiveness of Horace's epistolary movement

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[219] Ibid, 91.

[220] Honesty was an issue in the Harvey–Nashe quarrel as well. Richards points out that when Nashe's quarrel with Harvey escalated, Harvey, much to Nashe's annoyance, "failed—or pretended to fail—to understand the irony of his persona Pierce Penilesse, thus making him responsible for his creation's parodic supplication to the devil. Nashe *is* Pierce Penilesse, Harvey implies" (117). Nashe's response was to reveal Harvey's pretended ignorance, his courtly *sprezzatura*, and refuse Harvey's appeals to reasonableness as disingenuous.

from poet to critic: "It is this Manner alone which professes Method, dissects it-self in Parts, and makes its own Anatomy."[221] In other words, Horace breaks his own rules of simplicity and unity by writing as a poet and a critic, but for good reason. Horace's critical method did not escape the attention of scholarly readers who also noted that the rules of decorum Horace breaks are actually spelled out in the work. One can read in Horace's *ut pictura poesis* a distinction between a style required to address a large audience, such as the common readers of Jack's story, and a more careful style appropriate for a more intimate setting, such as an address to a patron.[222] The author should remember, Horace instructs, that the two will be judged differently: the former audience will allow a much wider berth in terms of style than the latter. In the *Advancement of Learning* Bacon makes a related point: "Certain it is, though a great secret in nature, that the minds of men in company are more open to affectionns and impressions than when alone."[223] Bacon implies that groups of people may be easier to manipulate, but one can read his comment as a technical point about rhetoric. In terms of rhetoric, Bacon's observation, too, relates to the balance between proper decorum and a certain type of audience. A larger audience allows for more ornament and a general approach to the subject, a smaller audience requires a more refined style and a single addressee requires the most sophistication. The rule of decorum Nashe breaks in the dedication of *The Unfortunate Traveller* maintains that as the distance from the text (or the numbers of the audience) increases the more freedom authors have to use ornate figures and rhetorical

[221] Shaftesbury 2000, 115.
[222] Wesley Trimpi's reading of Horace's *ut pictura poesis* shows that the passage can be interpreted on the basis of an Aristotelian precedent. Aristotle draws an analogy from painting of which Trimpi in his reading notes that "the artfully verisimilar painting [is associated] with epideictic speeches and the skiagraphic picture with political oratory" (1973, 29). In other words, there is "a scale of diminishing degrees of refinement which corresponds to the increasing distance from which the work of art, in words or colors, is experienced" (ibid, 5). In the Aristotelian scheme where there is more scope for delivery, there one finds the least precision. Frank Stack supports the double reading of Horace by saying that in Horace's epistles "we find him at once being himself and being Horace," (1985, 128) and find him struggling with his own textual representation of himself and, one would assume, between two modes of propriety. That is, in Horace the roles of critic and poet are meshed together as Horace moves from writing as a poet to writing as a critic against poets. The separation of these roles is implicit in the images he uses to frame the *Art of Poetry*: the painter who paints hybrid monsters and the mad poet whose words cannot be trusted.
[223] Bacon 1902, 116

trickery in their oration. This means that if one addresses a large public, one may indulge in rhetorical figures more freely and paint with a broad brush. If, on the other hand, the setting is more intimate, unnecessary figurative language may cause dismay in the listener or reader and the pleasures of language quickly turn against the orator. The Martinists, on their part, managed to address an impressively large audience by pretending to engage in learned debate with individual conformists while simultaneously mocking their interlocutors with flourishes of nonsensical arguments.

Finally, Renaissance rhetoric that plays with the agency of the author, exemplified by the cases discussed above, leads one to the early signs of the disenchantment that would trouble eighteenth-century satirists. David L. Sedley's proposed dynamic between Renaissance skepticism and sublimity presents another possibility of bridging the gap between Renaissance and eighteenth-century satire in terms of disenchantment. Even as a method of achieving Stoic *ataraxia*, "a tranquility undisturbed by the trauma of having to abandon beliefs in a world where beliefs are constantly overturned,"[224] skepticism disturbed Renaissance sensibilities. Sedley claims the sublime appeared to fuel the need for wonder that had been overtaken by ever stronger skeptical attitudes. In his analysis of Montaigne's *Journal de voyage*, sublimity (which for Sedley is pre-Boileauvian sublimity) seems to become an elaborate *adynaton*, unfulfilled wonder or an expression of the impossibility of the speaker to achieve knowledge of the object of wonder.[225] The sublime thus utilizes skepticism by creating increasingly elaborate expressions of the impotence of language to capture meaning. The sublime ideal, in other words, is constituted by the failure of the observer to grasp its essence. Nashe was a caricaturist of what he saw as "senseless stoicall austeritie" and hence he draws attention to the chaos that ensues when hermeneutic agency is

[224] Sedley 2005, 11.
[225] Ibid, 43. Cf. Nashe's description of Surrey above.

lost by exaggerating the formal features of his mock-anatomy.[226] This sublime ineffability is also an element of the rhetoric of the Presbyterian Martinists. The spectacle that ensues from the loss is meant to leave the reader puzzled, defenseless and perhaps even speechless. The satirical use of the ineffability of the sublime is explored further in the sections below, but while reading even the most radical satires of the eighteenth century by the likes of Swift and Pope it is important to remember that they owe a debt to the rhetoric of Renaissance satire.

To conclude, one should emphasize what was exceptional in the way the Martinists and Nashe wrote literature that was not really meant to make sense. Heinsius, for example, saw satire rather conservatively as a way of achieving a catharsis analogous to that of tragedy. In this he was no doubt correct to a great extent, but apparently he was less sensitive to the developing feeling of disenchantment expressed by those like Montaigne. Sari Kivistö describes Heinsius's theory in a way that reveals the contrast between his conventional view of satire and the innovations of Nashe and the Martinists: "[S]atire first raised and stimulated specific negative emotions, exposing a reader to their excess, until they reached a saturation point, and then relieved them by the more pleasurable emotion of laughter."[227] Reading the Martinists and Nashe in the light of Heinsius's later theory, one can see that stimulating a negative response in the reader may indeed create the experience of catharsis. However, when the saturation point is reached without affording the reader relief and the author merely postpones closure, only puzzlement, perpetual wonder and anger remain. In *The Unfortunate Traveller*, the satirical picaresque was of course a suitable vehicle for denying catharsis; the

[226] Nashe 1996a, 27. Nashe declares himself an anti-Stoic in the *Anatomy of Absurdity*: "It is an old Question, and it hath beene often propounded, whether it were better to have moderate affections, or no affections. The *Stoicks* said none. The *Peripaticians* answered, to have temperate affections; and in this respect I am a professed *Peripatician*, mixing profit with pleasure, and precepts of doctrine with delightfull invention" (ibid).

[227] Kivistö 2009, 49. Kivistö focuses on Neo-Latin satires as "satirical therapy" and shows how extensively satirists "diagnosed vices, endeavoured to prevent them and also heal the patients" (171). The model was based on Stoic thought, Seneca in particular, and not the Ciceronian idea of civil discourse analyzed by Richards. However, a related point about the therapeutic use of sixteenth-century vernacular medical regimens has recently been made by Richards, although in the case of vernacular literature the books appear to have been used more as self-help books. See Richards 2012.

emblem on the Earl of Surrey's ridiculous armor as he prepares to defend Geraldine's beauty in the Florentine court is a fitting description of the arc of the comical tale*: Ex lachrimis lachrimae*.[228] As the satirical description of the tournament rambles on attacking everything in sight, one is left wondering what, in the end, is being satirized and for what purpose. In other words, readers are left to their own devices to create closure and unless they assume agency in a radical manner they experience the failure of interpretation instead of catharsis. It is closure that is missing in Martinist as well as Nashean satire. They may create a feeling of wonder that counters disenchantment, but the experience does not necessarily abide by the rules formulated by Heinsius. As the relief of laughter is postponed indefinitely and the reader looks for a punch line in vain, negativity accumulates. The experience does not end in tears, but a catharsis is denied. Dryden, for one, was not convinced by Heinsius's theory, but by Dryden's time the grounds on which satire functioned in public discourse had shifted remarkably. Examining Dryden's perspective on the previous age and his comments on his own should reveal what in the developments sketched above resonated with the satirical practices of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. In Dryden's case, the figure of the author is of particular interest, because despite his great influence as a critic and author, Dryden, not unlike Nashe's creations, has eluded generations of readers.

[228] Nashe 1966b, 272. The humiliation of Surrey follows yet another one where Jack is caught red-handed impersonating the nobleman. Jack's apology takes the form of a non-apology: "A noble mans glory appeareth in nothing so much as in the pompe of his attendants. What is the glory of the Sunne, but that the Moone and so many millions of starres borrow their light from him? If you can reprehend me of anie one illiberal licentious action I have disparaged your name with, heape shame on me prodigally, I beg no pardon or pittie" (ibid, 269).

3. John Dryden and Reasonableness

George Farquhar's note on Dryden's funeral says a lot about his public persona at the end of his life: "And so much for Mr. Dryden; whose burial was the same as his life, variety and not of a piece:—the quality and mob, farce and heroicks; the sublime and ridicule mix'd in a piece;—great Cleopatra in a hackney coach."[229] Pinning Dryden down in terms of his moral position and as an author in general is notoriously difficult. Although he was old-fashioned in many ways, he was truly a modern author in that one has to approach him in a way that risks the creation of a fragmented interpretation of his character. He seems to disappear as a man and his work replaces his person. As an absconding author, one that refuses a stable persona and forces interpretation on his readers through his silence, he resists reading and in his resistance raises questions about reading and interpretation. Because of his odd silence, one has to read him critically, try to converse with his texts and create an awareness of his deliberate use of the reader's failure to grasp his final position on a given issue. Alternatively, Dryden's character can be read as thoroughly satirical. As James Winn puts it, satire was for Dryden "a way of being."[230] Winn's hyperbole does demand some explanation, because at the same time Dryden also remains, as Bloom calls him, an overtly double man.[231] In this section, I want to illustrate how Dryden achieved all this through the use of his fluid persona and argue for a view of Dryden's character as one designed by the author himself over a long career during which its shifting nature demonstrated an adherence to the admitted uncertainty of literary argument also seen in Elizabethan critics. I do not wish to argue that Dryden is

[229] Kinsley and Kinsley 1971, 242.
[230] Winn 1987, 470.
[231] Bloom 2011, 137.

another Martin Marprelate or a figurative Nashean author emptied of agency, but to show how similar accusations of inconsistency and moral relativism might have come about during and after his career. These link what may be regarded as his most important literary legacy, his character in writing, intimately and indeed personally to the theory and practice of eighteenth-century satire. As in More's calculated ambiguity, there is a baffling nothingness in Dryden's language that would have his reader circle the author until exhaustion, but unless one attempts to do so one cannot grasp what Dryden's character finally became and why it provokes such a range of interpretations. The odd conclusion one must draw from this is that, as shifting as his character is, it nevertheless accords with his manner of writing and vice versa.

3.1 The Dryden Problem

Critics sometimes emphasize Dryden's inconsistency and elusiveness instead of delving into the muddy waters of his arguments, some condemning them as moral weakness and others praising them as a sign of a deeper moral commitment. The former approach prefers to emphasize Dryden's amorality. For example, in a recent study of Whig poets, Abigail Williams points out that Dryden and the Tory satirists "effectively aestheticized a political attack on Whig writers."[232] Williams tries to repoliticize the field which has remained distinctly Tory for so long and cites the work of Samuel Pordage with whom Dryden argued over Shaftesbury's honor. She points out that Pordage's claim against Dryden's wit involved an appeal for "honesty and justice" by the Whig writers: "Pordage lays claim to the topos of

[232] Williams 2005, 18.

plain speech in preference to the empty flourishes of the Laureate's wit."[233] Zwicker, another esteemed modern reader of Dryden, discusses the succession of poems Dryden wrote in the midst of the Exclusion Crisis and the Popish Plot—*Absalom and Achitophel*, *The Medall*, *Religio Laici*—and sees Dryden as a fairly straightforward propagandist. Dryden's "self-conscious amateurism"[234] he sees as a ruse: "The device of the innocent narrator is, of course, only part of this [Royal] strategy of the middle way."[235] This is certainly true, but there was an art to Dryden's arguments. Dryden was no doubt aware of Whiggish claims to sincerity and, more importantly, aware of the ways in which poets and defenders of poetry like Sidney had circumvented them in the past. In this sense, the debate surely became aestheticized, but the field of political debate had already shifted toward the realm of aesthetics as the theater of royal power not long after the Restoration. The Whigs, in a sense, were looking back to a time when plain speech was still possible and their rhetoric was nostalgic, perhaps even outdated. One may see in his chosen strategy a Dryden taunting his Whig opponents by providing a mockery of the kind of moral transparency they demanded—although to what extent this is the case in *Religio Laici* (1682) is problematic. Giving the audience what they wanted was not an option, since skepticism of the ends or the motives of the Laureate would have been strong even then, but feigned transparency, on the other hand, would have enraged some, perhaps convinced a few readers and certainly confused everyone long enough to find a solution to a given issue.

The second way of approaching Dryden is advocated by, among others, Harold Bloom who in a recent work calls Dryden a "Lucretian poet"[236] who thrives on Lucretius' contradictions and admires his forthrightness, but Bloom does not explicitly extend what he terms the Lucretian sublime to Dryden's critical work and quite casually dismisses Dryden's

[233] Ibid, 69.
[234] Zwicker 1987, 182–3.
[235] Ibid, 183.
[236] Bloom 2011, 136.

conversion to Catholicism. The Lucretian or skeptical sublime, voiced by Leopardi in Bloom's analysis and tentatively explained in the preface of *Religio Laici* by Dryden himself, is a great temptation to one trying to capture something of Dryden's character, but it is one that should be resisted to some extent here. The "nothingness of things,"[237] the hope that is born of hopelessness and disenchantment, would lead one to assert of Dryden as Kinney and others have of Nashe that what remains of Dryden in the final analysis is a void or a celebration of the something-in-nothingness familiar to the modern radical skeptic who longs for a kind of transcendence by extolling the negative. As much as a sublime emptiness might be seen at the root of Dryden's persona and the force that elevates him into a higher kind of subjectivity, his stance as a verbal pugilist points to something else. I shall return to the latter point in the following section.

For the modern reader, Dryden's life comes in threes: "from puritan to Anglican to Catholic, from young Cromwellian to loyal laureate to injured and insistent Jacobite,"[238] from courtier to professional author to man of letters. The breaks in Dryden's life as a critic of course overlap, more or less, with changes in Dryden's public character. In his study of Dryden's criticism, Michael Gelber writes of the difficulties of summarizing Dryden's position on a given topic. The problem he identifies is in many ways typical of Dryden's criticism:

> Whenever he writes about or refers to mixed literary forms, whether heroic drama or tragi-comedy, he makes what is in fact an about-face: he rejects completely what he had once ardently championed. And he modifies (sometimes radically) his every conception and treatment of the rules governing not only, as one might expect, the three unities but also character types and inevitably the moral function of a good poem or play. The first phase of Dryden's criticism and the second are of the same piece; but there are discontinuities. Dryden himself calls them to our attention; and he does so with candour, firmness, conviction. He shifts some of his perspectives, modifies a few of his opinions, reverses himself on three or four

[237] Ibid, 165.
[238] Sherman 2004, 16.

> others. To explain or account for these changes is no easy matter, though it is always possible to speculate.[239]

The very first work of Dryden's criticism, the letter to Roger, Earl of Orrery prefixed to *The Rival Ladies* (1664), is an immature work and includes at least two of what George Watson calls "Dryden's howlers in literary history ... which became less common with the passing of years."[240] One of these names Shakespeare as the inventor of blank verse in English poetry, the credit of which is usually given to Henry Howard, the Earl of Surrey, whose likeness appears in Nashe's *Unfortunate Traveller*. In the face of such inaccuracies, Dryden's first major work of criticism, *Of Dramatick Poesy* (1668), written during the Great Plague of London, is amazingly erudite and allows Dryden to flaunt his learning through the use of prosopopoeia. Dryden's first serious attempt at literary criticism in prose unembellished by fictive devices, the preface to *Annus Mirabilis* (1667), already contains the first mention of the "little critics"[241] he would purposefully disparage throughout the rest of his career. His contempt, Preston argues, can be read as a way of "asking for a new kind of reader" or asking readers to assume a new kind of agency.[242] In it one also finds the young Dryden in search of patronage. In the case of *Annus Mirabilis* the little critics in question were those of his brother-in-law Sir Robert Howard, the direct addressee of the preface, but Dryden would soon get many of his own due to his public role as Poet Laureate and Historiographer Royal. Instead of his learning, they would more often attack his person which he sometimes defended and, as was later the case, often left undefended to stand on its own. Due to his shifting loyalties and willingness to follow his interests and commitments, Dryden's character is indeed a fragmented one. This, however, is saying very little and if one does not take the time to converse with Dryden's texts, its finer features will remain unknown.

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[239] Gelber 1999, 161.
[240] Dryden 1962a, 6, fn 1.
[241] Ibid, 100.
[242] Preston 1970, 210.

The rather plain style Dryden chose for *Religio Laici* might have forced him to condense his points, but one can nevertheless learn something about his character from its evasive rhetoric. His views are written out in clear terms in *Absalom and Achitopel* and *The Medall* in the rhetoric of verbal combat, in mock-dedications and mock-apologies. The ease with which these works may be interpreted says something about public debate at the time, because their urbane wit and parodies of sincerity appear to be more readable than genuine sincerity. Dryden's own position in *Religio Laici*, however, is puzzling because it lacks the transparent posturing present in the other two works and because it is replaced by a Montaignean conundrum: the impossibility of attaining truth through the use of reason is proven through the use of reason. Its invective against the enthusiastic "Crouds unlearn'd," (l. 417) on the other hand, seems quite sincere. In a recent selection of Dryden's poetry, Zwicker and David Bywaters note that "it remains something of a mystery why Dryden began to write in this genre, to compose a confession of faith at a time when we have no indication of spiritual crisis, or of a reflective pause in his career."[243] Commentators note that he "weaves carefully between the argumentative extremes that he himself has arranged in order to emerge the cool skeptic"[244] and recognizes "the difficulty and even impossibility of univocal interpretation, or of discerning all the authors' intentions."[245] Dryden withdraws from the immediate issues to give the reader a view of the terrain and promotes a calm approach to the debate, but this, however, does not stop him from pointing out the corruption brought forth by enthusiasm in forceful terms. If Winn is right and Dryden "was not by nature an ideologue,"[246] certainly an odd quality for the celebrated literary spokesman of Charles II if true, the poem may be read as mockery of a debate where both sides of the argument are subtly amplified and made

[243] Dryden 2001, 547.
[244] Zwicker 2004, 9.
[245] Engell 1989, 36.
[246] Ibid, 68.

ridiculous by an author who had the role of an ideologue of moderation thrust upon him and who responds by ambiguating his own position to the point of incoherence.

Dryden also gave his opinion about the Martinists in the preface to *Religio Laici*. There was little love lost between him and the radical Presbyterians, as is very clear from its fairly humorless miniature ecclesiastical history. The brief description touching on the Marprelate Controversy (which summarizes the events as described by Richard Hooker) presents the reader with the Anglican Dryden in a candid but calculated mode of confessional writing that drew on the Puritan tone of voice. The argument, however, is Dryden's take on Hooker's call for moderation and its language is colored by Dryden's recent reading of Catholic controversialists and Anglican apologetics:

> From the dislike of cap and surplice, the very next step was admonitions to the Parliament against the whole government ecclesiastical, then came out volumes in English and Latin in defence of their tenets, and immediately practices were set on foot to erect their discipline without authority. Those not succeeding, satire and railing was the next. And Martin Marprelate (the Marvell of those times) was the first Presbyterian scribbler who sanctified libels and scurrility to the use of the Good Old Cause. Which was done (says my author) upon this account, that (their serious treatises having been fully refused answered and refuted) they might compass by railing what they had lost by reasoning; and when their cause was sunk in court and Parliament, they might at least hedge in a stake amongst the rabble, for to their ignorance all things are wit which are abusive; but if church and state were made the theme, then the doctoral degree of wit was to be taken at Billingsgate; even the most saintlike of the party, though they durst not excuse this contempt and vilifying of the government, yet were pleased, and grinned at it with a pious smile, and called it a judgment of God against the hierarchy.[247]

In *Religio Laici* Dryden writes a Horatian epistle in a plain style that supports the moderate message of the work. In other words, he does exactly what he says he is going to do and

[247] Dryden 2001, 170–1. Winn notes that in 1680 Dryden bought a number of books of theological controversy from the widow of George Digby, Earl of Bristol: "[M]ost of the works he acquired were Catholic treatises in Latin and French concerning the issues that would loom large in his poetry and life during the later 1680s: reason, revelation, faith, authority. … he was evidently buying and reading Anglican apologists as well. … Close parallels of argument and language … make it virtually certain that he used two treatises by Anglican laymen: *The Reasonableness of Scripture-Belief* (1672) by Sir Charles Wolseley, whose country estate he had visited in 1680, and *Considerations … relating to the Churches Power in deciding Controversies* (1651) by Hamon L'Estrange, the dead elder brother of his Tory ally in party controversy" (1987, 374).

writes a defense of Anglicanism against zealots, both Puritan and Catholic. Taking into account his conversion and the views he would present in *The Hind and the Panther* (1687) just a few years later, it is no wonder Dryden baffles critics even today—his apparently genuine sincerity is a problem for those who see in Dryden a rhetorical chameleon who never reveals his true colors. The same could be said about those who would reduce his character into nothingness. Surely, one may wonder, his claims to plain speaking must be yet another mask that covers his true motives, those of defending the status quo in his official capacity? But a Montaignean mutability of character appears as a constant theme and indeed praxis in Dryden's critical as well as poetic writing and should be taken into account here as well. If he is always "another and the same" in his manner as Dr Johnson described him, he seems to warrant an ever-present doubleness of interpretation. This appears to be contradicted by the converging form and message of *Religio Laici*. His ambiguous and ambiguating rhetoric has ensured a centuries-long negotiation between internal and external evidence, of the Dryden of the text and the author himself, of whom not much is known outside his work. The problem is not so much a discrepancy between the poet and his praxis, but the ever-changing nature of the poet and perhaps too rigid a reliance on the Horatian dictum: the character of the poet in Dryden's case follows his pen rather too well.

Were he not Dryden, one might think he knew Martinist rhetoric only by reputation, because he places himself in exactly the same position as Martin does in the *Epitome* and the *Theses Martinianae* in *Religio Laici*. He claims to defend the moderate Anglican position against attacks from two fronts, insisting on his sincerity:

> But, by asserting the Scripture to be the canon of our faith, I have unavoidably created to myself two sorts of enemies: the papists, indeed, more directly, because they have kept the Scripture from us, what they could, and have reserved to themselves a right of interpreting what they have delivered under the pretence of infallibility; and the fanatics more collaterally, because they have assumed what amounts to an infallibility in the private spirit and have detorted those texts of

> Scripture which are not necessary to salvation to the damnable uses of sedition, disturbance, and destruction of the civil government.[248]

He mocks the Catholics for keeping scripture from the people and misreading it to their own advantage, and he accuses the Puritans of relying on subjective interpretations much like the anti-Martinists did—the menacing caricature with which the Martinists responded to such accusations does not appear in any other way than accusations of raillery. What is more, he spells out his view of the limits of human knowledge early on in the preface in the form of a fideistic argument, which on the face of it looks like a concession to the kind of relativist reading of scripture he admonishes:

> That there is something above us, some principle of motion, our reason can apprehend, though it cannot discover what it is by its own virtue. And indeed, 'tis very improbable that we who by the strength of our faculties cannot enter into the knowledge of any being, not so much as our own, should be able to find out by them that supreme nature, which we cannot otherwise define than by saying it is infinite, as if infinite were deducible, or infinity a subject for our narrow understanding. They who would prove religion by reason do but weaken the cause which they endeavour to support; 'tis to take away the pillars from our faith and to prop it only with a twig: 'tis to design a tower like that of Babel, which if it were possible (as it is not) to reach heaven, would come to nothing by the confusion of the workmen. For every man is building a several way, impotently conceited of his own model and his own materials. Reason is always striving and always at a loss, and of necessity it must so come to pass while 'tis exercised about that which is not its proper object.[249]

These subjectivist and skeptical views resemble some interpretations of Nashe's purported worldview, but they also bring to mind a number of tempered Enlightenment ideals in which the modern reader will hear Pope, echoes of Kant and perhaps even those of Voltaire. On the other hand, a pessimist following a Schopenhauer might read in Dryden the maxim that the intellect is only fulfilled when it is striving for something.[250] They might also be read as Dryden's formulation of what Noggle identifies as "one of the Restoration's foundational

[248] Dryden 2001, 167.
[249] Ibid, 165–6.
[250] A tradition of pessimism may sound counterintuitive, but see Dienstag 2006, 121.

epistemological gestures,"[251] referring to the existence of a transcendent realm of experience from which one can derive absolute authority in matters of reason and faith but no knowledge as such. Such statements are as much intellectual crossroads as they are statements about the limits of interpretation due to their ambiguity and, in this case at least, place in literary history. Dryden ends the preface by saying: "A man is to be cheated into passion, but to be reasoned into truth,"[252] which only highlights the fact that after disarming reason he wishes to use reason to convince his readers of the necessity of faith, or to reason them into not reasoning about matters of faith. Again, one finds the fideistic Montaigne of *An Apology for Raymond Sebond* in Dryden's argument. Montaigne's treatment of Pyrrhonism which creates an active doubt of epistemological certainty is indeed a better model for Dryden's rhetorical engine of ambiguity than More's *Utopia*. Montaigne, Noggle notes, tricks the reader into asking whether or not it is the case that "either we can absolutely judge or absolutely we cannot." As Noggle puts it: "Our efforts to do the former, Montaigne implies, teach us the truth of the latter."[253] Dryden disappears, as it were, into a similar dynamic dichotomy. The fortuitous connection with the inefficiency of the previous tradition of Elizabethan critics appears to match Montaigne's skepticism and one can see both at work in Dryden's criticism.

Bloom notes elsewhere that faith as it is conceived of by the first major post-Miltonic poet in his *Religio Laici* is actually "a yearning for revelation, rather than ... the revelation itself."[254] Truth as meaning in these scenarios becomes unattainable as a solid ground for argument after Milton, because even if there once was pristine truth in the world, as Milton eulogizes in *Areopagitica* (1644), it has been lost and cannot be procured intact from a text written down and passed on by the corrupt and fallen. Milton takes the unattainability of truth as a given and Dryden echoes this sad truth in his works. The ironic longing for singular

[251] Noggle 2001, 41.
[252] Dryden 2001, 173.
[253] Noggle 2001, 6.
[254] Bloom 1987, 5.

truths and monosemic meanings is in fact one of the few things Dryden shares with Rochester, although Rochester's pessimism is expressed through a nihilism foreign to Dryden's melancholic temperament. Dryden's brand of ineffability is different from that of More in that whereas More's *Utopia* functions as a perpetual debate between the actual and the ideal, Dryden's shifting position has to do with the interplay of mutability and stagnation. Reading him, one must get used to the roll of his mind as it moves from one position to the next, rarely landing on an unqualified conclusion. The same can be said of his various critical opinions, although here one does find some consistency. What might otherwise seem like a rhetorical conjuring trick—as *Utopia* may be reduced to a riddle—is backed up by a long and illustrious career. It is also consistent with his satiric character, because as one reads Dryden one must examine one's own ways of reading as well.

Dryden's willingness to break previous commitments—or to align his character with disparate arguments, which often amounts to the same thing—forces the reader to choose a line of interpretation with the full knowledge of the possibility for error. In a sense, More's (or Montaigne's) calculated ambiguity is thus transplanted into the realm of criticism whose purpose is to recognize the limitations of human reason and provoke the reader into accepting the radical uncertainties inherent in his or her own thought. The truth Dryden speaks of as a post-Miltonic poet must be a provisional truth that reason is able to reach despite its impotence. Absolute authority in the Cartesian vein in matters of faith, on the other hand, is by these standards a ready target for mockery.[255] Even when Dryden's explicit words give only a hint of satire, his critical praxis, sustained over the rest of his career, provides clear evidence of his suspicion of the possibility of an infallible epistemology. When one recognizes the intended ambiguity in *Religio Laici*, one begins to see it in much of Dryden's oeuvre. The problem in Dryden's case is that both views of Dryden as a propagandist and a

[255] Noggle notes that Dryden, "like his fellow Royal Society members, praise[s] Descartes's method even while hinting that his rationalism exceeds our own postlapsarian powers" (2001, 51).

poet of sublime skepticism can be shown to be true. This can be done by examining the context in which he had to perform his duty as the Laureate and, on the other hand, his views of truth in art.

The reasons behind much of Dryden's ambiguous rhetoric are related to the political climate of Restoration England. *Religio Laici* is in some ways a sign of the emerging culture of politeness that became prevalent in England during the eighteenth century and one of whose primary exponents Dryden was in his official capacity after the Restoration. Love's study of scribal publication in the seventeenth century offers some insight into Dryden's odd mixture of public and private personas and ways in which official satirical rhetoric was adjusted to fit the new monarchy. An examination of the ways in which Dryden portrayed the King reveals the kind of synthetic unmasking he used when constructing his own character as well. From an analysis of the exercise of power through scribal legal documents, Love argues that seventeenth-century "fictions of authority are to be understood as topoi or combinations of topoi organized in relationship to themselves and the world in terms of figures."[256] These figures are for Love figures of substitution: metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche and irony. Rhetorical figures in this sense have an extended use in metaphorical reasoning that clearly exceeds their importance as rhetorical ornament. Government, in Love's analysis, is thus reliant on a rhetorical pageant where the sovereign is given a figurative mandate that coincides with his actual power over his subjects. The chain of reasoning behind the legitimization of royal power is implicit whenever the sovereign does not exercise power directly—Love states the latter could happen through speech or, perhaps somewhat anachronistically, touch. There were good reasons for constructing a simulacrum of political authority of this kind. Parliament and the King both looked to the written record of the common law tradition to validate their power, the transferring of which tradition from script

[256] Love 1993, 161.

to printed records was often met with reluctance, because this meant fixing the laws on an exceedingly public record. That is, in order to gain political authority the judiciary and parliament had to submit to giving away some of the rights to confer meaning on the letter of the law to the public.

The King's situation was slightly different. Love writes:

> When the constitutional break with the authority of the crown was made in 1642 it was on the basis foreshadowed by the Common Lawyers rather than the Puritan theocrats. ... With the coronation of Charles II in 1660 a fiction of authority based on the originary power of the royal utterance was again in place, but it was a fiction that made little attempt to disguise its fictive nature.[257]

In other words, it was imperative that the King's power remain a transparent fiction. As Christopher Tilmouth puts it, Charles was "a Hobbesian monarch in a Hobbesian world, an environment in which others' intentions were inscrutable" unless one had the skill to read one's surroundings.[258] Earnest ideals which had been distributed and adopted as true before the Civil War had had disastrous consequences and Dryden, as an agent of the transparent fiction of royal power, had a duty to find a balance in his work between the actual and fictive persons of the King. Love cites *Annus Mirabilis,* showing how Dryden first creates a very human figure of the King (ll. 593–6) and follows this demystification with iconographic language (ll. 1041–4) so grossly hyperbolic it must have been read as deliberate affectation. The difference between the two images, the hands-on leader of his people versus the royal martyr, creates a semantic gap in the King's character that underlines the transparent substitution of one figure to the other and, I would add, its transparent function in the description of the sovereign. They created a fiction that was not to be believed, but sustained nonetheless. Love notes that the hyperbolic depiction of the King falls into a mannerist mode

[257] Ibid, 163–4.
[258] Tilmouth 2007, 302.

of description. In some sense the entire scene is an exercise in mannerism in that it is clearly an aestheticized image that makes no qualms about its strange and violent shift from the first image to the second. There is an independent aesthetic in language about the King that commands respect, even if it is deemed mysterious or even hollow at its core by its practitioners and interpreters. It is perhaps ideological in that there is an implied understanding between large numbers of people who seem to intuitively grasp how the King's person should be read and respected. Such fictions are obvious targets for satirists and aggressive critics, but they are better able to resist mockery due to their transparent and self-confessedly figurative rhetoric. If Love is right, in Carolinian propaganda these metaleptic maneuvers became not only tolerated but entangled with official policy.

The task of positioning oneself between moral transparency and authority, one not made any easier by the conduct of the Restoration court, also informed if not validated Dryden's own literary persona and determined his literary practices to a great extent. Love examines *Absalom and Achitophel* and reads the bawdy opening of the poem which comments on the libertinism of the allegorical and the actual King as yet another rhetorical device of the same type. He notes that the licentious rhetoric of the first lines of the satire would have been perfectly acceptable in manuscript satire which conventionally used a different register from that of printed texts. Rochester is perhaps the best example of the flexibility that was available to manuscript poetry; Rochester is of course also exceptional in that his verse was printed as well. Dryden's poem, however, was printed as royal propaganda and the rhetoric implying the scandalous activities of the King would have raised an eyebrow precisely because it brings the rules of decorum of manuscript poetry into the genre of printed verse. What Dryden does, following Love's reading, is roughly analogous to the transgression committed by Nashe in *The Unfortunate Traveller*. The author addresses the reader, as it were, as a metaleptic author emerging briefly from the manuscript genre into the alien

environment of print. What Dryden does later on in the poem, however, reveals that his characterization of the King was yet another artful way of providing humanizing features to the representation of the King's person. He reverts back to print decorum, normalizes the reading and "by the end of his poem Dryden has become engaged in a full-scale exercise of resacralization."[259] The mixed sacred and the profane, the obscene and the proper, and the transgression of the decorum of the print medium are intentional in that they follow the depiction of the King as a transparent fiction: "Dryden's poem is one whose unity lies in its acceptance of disunity, in its being a counterpoint of irreconcilable voices."[260] Unlike Nashe's actual transgression that prompted censorship, Dryden's is a literary device that was apparently in agreement with accepted practices. It supports the portrayal of the King as man and fiction and is supported by the established rules of manuscript and print satire.[261]

In approaching Dryden's character, one should keep in mind that his confessions of his own frailties in, say, the dedication of *Aureng-Zebe* may be read as the use of a similar device on his own person. Dryden was ready to recycle his rhetoric and always aware of the many ironies such strategies created. He was not above using comparable arguments to praise both Cromwell and Charles II, for example. As Zwicker notes in a recent appraisal of *Absalom and Achitophel*, these ambiguities and ironies are never completely under the control of the poet, but this is precisely why they titillate audiences: "Such uncertainty makes these moves exhilarating, a satiric high-wire act."[262] The audience senses the dangers inherent in the satirist's rhetoric which might at any moment explode into invective or other violently transgressive modes of writing. After his conversion, Dryden became even bolder in his rhetorical choices and here one again finds one of Dryden's few failures, one that put an end

[259] Love 1993, 295.
[260] Ibid.
[261] Winn argues that as early as *Annus Mirabilis*, "the alternation between 'Epick' grandeur and 'Historical' reality [was] a large-scale version of that rhetorical device" which Dryden had already found so useful in *Astraea Redux* (1660): the tempering of the traditional image of the ruler with human frailties (1987, 176).
[262] Zwicker 2008b, 81.

to his career as a court poet. Again, examining the poet's failure is instructive. It might also illustrate something of the motivation behind readings of Dryden as the poet of skepticism, because it suggests his faith in reason was intimately linked to his views on the possibility of finding truth in art.

In *The Hind and the Panther*, which Winn describes as "a fascinating, risk-taking failure,"[263] he had to mount a defense against the arguments he had presented in *Religio Laici* and he did so, oddly enough, with some help from Protestant rhetoric. In addition to noting the strangeness of the Poet Laureate arguing against himself as his religious commitments changed, his readers had to withstand the misappropriation of his new opponents' language. The Aesopian allegory created ironic distance and provided a buffer for the argument, but Dryden seems to have nevertheless overreached himself. Commenting on a passage that argues for the strength of the Church (ll. 499–514), Winn writes:

> Again, the power of the poetry is meant to make us willing to accept the analogy between Christ and the Catholic Church, but the language is of course a pastiche of phrases from Milton, a poet inveterately opposed to Catholicism. As several other passages suggest, Dryden probably took a sly pleasure in using materials drawn from Protestant poetry and polemic for his own Catholic purposes. The confidence and ease with which he appropriates the Miltonic sublime to rhymed couplets may remind us that he had also used the imagery of weightlifting in literary controversy, mocking aristocratic amateurs for their inability to "raise the weight of such an Author" as Horace and taking pride in his own professional "Sinews."[264]

Dryden's poetic inventions eventually became severely convoluted. In fact, says Winn, like Nashe Dryden was a victim of his own creative imagination and in an effort to achieve brilliance he descended into obscurity and confusion:

> Stimulated by the spiritual turmoil of his own conversion and challenged by the daunting task of defending that conversion while criticizing the policies of his

[263] Winn 1987, 423.
[264] Ibid, 425–6.

> Catholic King, Dryden responded by cramming his poem with fables within fables, metaphors within metaphors. ... Dryden must bear some of the blame for the long history of misreadings this difficult poem has endured, but his failure to control and unify his poem was an inevitable consequence of trying to do too many things at once. ... In *The Hind and the Panther*, he was betrayed by too many inventions, too many styles, too many conflicting purposes.[265]

Too many inventions and too many devices make the poem obscure and difficult to read. In short, Dryden committed the error of saturating his poem with excessive rhetoric. Despite the lenience toward metaleptic satire displayed by the Carolinian court, transgressions were of course still possible, although it must be said that the religious aspect of the poem was probably a more important element in its eventual failure. As poetry, it is fascinating in its labyrinthine argument and its hallucinatory images have always had their admirers, most notably Pope, but due to its labored complexity it simply did not work as propaganda.

Even so, it is probably not the case that the mature Dryden was so detached from his audience that he would transgress rules of decorum accidentally. Rather, the poem can be read as a sign of his stubbornness. In old age, Dryden grew to despise what art and criticism had become.[266] His critical stubbornness led him to refuse the Lockean revolution in epistemology, although he was aware of it and even appreciated Locke's philosophy. Instead, he continued to see art and poetry not as simple reflections of nature or projections of ideas in the mind furnished by experience but rather as a way of reaching truth. In the spring of 1695, Dryden published a prose translation of Charles Alphonse Du Fresnoy's *De arte graphica* (1668) in which he writes:

> Truth is the object of our understanding, as good is of our will; and the understanding can no more be delighted with a lie than the will can choose an apparent evil. As truth is the end of all our speculations, so the discovery of it is the pleasure of them; and since a true knowledge of nature gives us pleasure, a

[265] Ibid, 427.
[266] Winn calls Dryden's final play, *Love Triumphant* (1694), "self-consciously out of style" (471). In the play, Dryden "was being deliberately old-fashioned" (ibid) and thus his "nostalgia for a bygone era of high heroic virtue implies satiric contempt for current corruption" (472).

> lively imitation of it, either in poetry or painting, must of necessity produce a much greater.[267]

According to Dryden, pleasure actually comes from recognizing a higher truth in the imitation of nature. Dryden thus shifts Aristotle's emphasis from the process of comparing the artwork to nature to the discovery of truth in art. In contrast to those who promoted a Lockean view of aesthetic experience, the model preserves the possibility of genuinely novel discoveries via the artistic medium. On the other hand, it also opens a semantic space of freeform speculation that enables a kind of artistic failure unrelated to representation in the conventional sense of mimesis. This also explains, at least to some extent, what drove Dryden to lose himself in the argument of *The Hind and the Panther*. His failure may be seen as one caused by a sincere and intense artistic exploration of an argument through figurative means within the allegory of the poem.

When one looks for a predecessor for Dryden's views in past literature, one need look no further than Sidney who noted the fact that poetry as a linguistic medium does have an influence on the design of any particular poem. This quality of poetry was once thought divine, Sidney remarked, as if the poet's hand was guided by an unknown force. In his *Ode to Anne Killigrew* (1685) Dryden had already said this much: "Her pencil drew whate'er her soul designed, / And oft the happy draught surpassed the image in her mind" (ll. 106–7). As the poet writes language moves and guides her to higher expressions and thoughts above nature that were not planned beforehand.[268] This is what seems to be missing from the Lockean ideational and similar reductive theories of art which are noticeably absent from Dryden's work. In other words, in his stubbornness Dryden protested against the omission of

[267] Dryden 1962b, 193–4. The preface of Dryden's *A Parallel of Poetry and Painting* was famously called "the first writing at any length by a very distinguished Englishman of letters on the subject of pictorial art" by George Saintsbury (1902, 385).
[268] J. Hillis Miller makes the point in rather less uplifting terms in the case of criticism in a recent essay: "The writer feels his way like a blind man without seeing for certain where the writing is going" (Miller 2008, 561).

the influence of the medium on the creative act. This goes to show that Dryden was very aware of the ambiguities that resulted from the very nature of his chosen medium. It is hardly surprising since he had to manipulate them in his daily work as the Laureate. He was also surprisingly consistent in his approach to the medium even as the epistemological environment around him changed significantly with the advent of Lockean philosophy. His Renaissance views ran against the grain of contemporary aesthetics, but Dryden was undeterred, perhaps out of spite, habit or both. In reading *The Hind and the Panther*, one can hardly dismiss the poem's official function, but Dryden's detachment from public opinion appears to have grown from defiant posturing to genuine irreverence at this point. His insistence on poetic license, his view of public life as spectacle and his unwillingness to be swayed by the opinions of his critics make his final refusal to submit to changes of decorum self-consciously and defiantly old fashioned. In his refusal to change, of course, Dryden was as elusive as ever.

The kinds of transgressions employed unsuccessfully by Nashe and relatively successfully by Dryden might be said to manifest a growing tolerance for dissonant satirical rhetoric in the reading public. Previously grievous transgressions became more acceptable literary devices as the respective rules of manuscript and print satire solidified. In terms of metalepsis, there was now perhaps more room for a poet like Dryden to follow his thought in figurative language and nevertheless insist on consistency. It made it possible for him to appear in his dual role, as the propagandist and as the contemplative skeptical poet who would follow his conscience and his pen wherever they may lead him. His refusal to change his manner in some of his final works also makes it clear that not following fashion may also lead to the creation of a satirical character—strictly speaking, this kind of rhetorical trickery is of course only possible if the author has had a long public career and hence is not available to just anyone. It also presents yet more problems for pinning down Dryden's character in writing,

which one would have to view as one that changed again by his refusal to change. Perhaps the most revealing thing about it is that many of his ambiguities appear to be carefully calculated manipulations of his public persona. When one tries to collapse his personal history into an emblem, or an agent of meaning in a synchronic structural schema, he becomes, like a Martin Marprelate in debate, an impossible adversary for a critic. It should not be surprising at this point to find Dryden himself using similar tactics in characterizing his opponents in *Religio Laici*, where he "rhetorically ignores class lines and collapses history, equating the fashionable freethinkers among his contemporaries with the leveling Calvinist radicals of his boyhood."[269] If satire was indeed "a way of being" for Dryden—and I see no reason to argue against Winn—examining his views on his audiences in detail, both "the quality and mob," is probably as fruitful a way of approaching his persona as trying to encapture him through a direct confrontation. This should also reveal something of the kind of audience he intended to address in the *Discourse Concerning Satire*, with which I shall conclude my discussion on Dryden.

3.2 Reasonableness and Invective

By the time of the *Discourse* Dryden had been, as an author and public figure, the target of numerous attacks from the "little critics" he loathed. His oeuvre shows that even though he wrote heated replies in his satires, something Dr Johnson saw as a flaw in his character, he warned against writing satire in his critical work for fear of confusing satire with criticism. His criticism also shows that he became disillusioned with the critical thought of his age as he grew older. Another threefold development in his career took him from a fawning novice

[269] Winn 1987, 378.

to a forceful and fearless adversary, and finally an embittered attitude toward his peers shines through quite clearly. He never tired of showing how some of his more unreasonable critics relied excessively on the spirit of method. This resulted in extravagant and often hyperbolic reasoning on their part which Dryden caricatured in an effort to make them look naïve, immature, dull or simply foolish. Hostility and contempt seem to characterize his relationship with the public as well. This can be seen quite clearly in his views on comedy, farce and satire. It is on character and judgment that Dryden focuses in many of his critical retorts where he shows that immoderate use of judgment leads to unwarranted satire, and he is much more contemptuous of the mob. Whereas Dryden's contempt of dull and simple-minded critics is a way of agitating readers to assume agency, the unreasonable hysterics of the crowd are for him a cause for serious concern. When one reads Dryden's body of criticism chronologically, one finds in it an escalating tone of hostility and contempt before his attitude devolves into indifference. The source of his despair is, quite simply, the merging of public and critical opinion. There are several examples of Dryden's hostility toward his fellow critics, but a few of these where Dryden tries to negotiate his way between excessive rhetoric and excessive decorum may suffice to illustrate his brand of invective. After examining Dryden's attacks and responses, one gets a fairly clear picture of a public intellectual, one whose voice was worthy of emulation to many whether they agreed with him or not.

In what Watson notes is the first documented use of the term *criticism* in its modern form, Dryden includes reasonableness in the very definition of criticism:

> In the first place, I must take leave to tell them that they wholly mistake the nature of criticism who think its business is principally to find fault. Criticism, as it was first instituted by Aristotle, was meant a standard of judging well; the chiefest part of which is to observe those excellencies which should delight a reasonable reader.[270]

[270] Dryden 1962a, 196–7.

The essay, *The Author's Apology for Heroic Poetry and Poetic License* (1677), was a work Dryden wrote at the height of his powers, but his position is foreshadowed by claims in his earlier essays and prefaces. The topos of economy becomes an important device to advance the argument of the *Apology for Heroic Poetry*. Longinus, as Dryden famously paraphrases him, compares the sublime genius

> to a man of large possessions who has not leisure to consider of every slight expense, will not debase himself to the management of every trifle: particular sums are not laid out or spared to the greatest advantage in his economy, but are sometimes suffered to run to waste, while he is only careful of the main.[271]

Thus the Puritan virtue of transparency as the most efficient method of delivering a moral message is made into a poetic vice. While the careful writer shuns extravagant figures to a fault, in the sublime genius the resulting errors from not doing so are rather "only marks of human frailty: they are little mistakes, or rather negligences, which have escaped his pen in the fervour of his writing."[272] The careful writer is not to be either blamed or praised but he merely plods along in dullness. The sublime, perhaps contrary to expectations, holds in itself a kind of reasonableness much nobler than the timid carefulness Dryden eschews. But if the writer is not to be blamed for dullness, the implication is that the audience must be in some way culpable.

In comedy and satire the poetic vice of dullness becomes more apparent. The task of these is to make folly and vice ridiculous through exaggeration, hyperbole and amplification in general. Dryden commends Wycherley for doing precisely this in *The Plain Dealer* and the author's obliging of "all honest and virtuous men by one of the most bold, most general, and most useful satires which has ever been presented on the English theatre."[273] Preferences for tragedy, comedy and satire Dryden gracefully acknowledges to vary as culinary preferences

[271] Ibid, 197.
[272] Ibid, 198.
[273] Ibid, 199.

do, but he also notes that poetry in each should not be judged by critics ignorant of the rules of the genre. Elsewhere, in the *Preface to All for Love* (1678), Dryden formulates the point more clearly:

> Poetry, which is a picture of nature, must generally please; but 'tis not to be understood that all parts of it must please every man; therefore is not tragedy to be judged by a witty man, whose taste is only confined to comedy. Nor is every man who loves tragedy a sufficient judge of it: he must understand the excellencies of it too, or he will only prove a blind admirer, not a critic. From hence it comes that so many satires on poets, and censures of their writings, fly abroad.[274]

In Dryden's praise of Wycherley one should take careful note of the way he prefaces the comment with "all honest and virtuous men." Those not meeting the requirements should not attempt an appreciation of the play or, even less so, criticism that will only miss its mark. Dryden thinks naïve transparency and universal intelligibility are not standards by which to judge art and literature. Such universalizing Dryden wants to portray as misguided and unreasonable.

In Dryden's *Apology for Heroic Poetry*, Herodotus' account of the battle of Thermopylae shows that in history as well as philosophy, excessive hyperbolic rhetoric can be a vital component of the text's message. Herodotus is willing to report even possibly apocryphal stories in his history precisely because he is ready to confess that while they might not be true, they are nevertheless reported in the context of the events he wishes to record. In making his point (which he borrows from Longinus), Dryden makes use of one of his favorite devices by impersonating an imaginary critic who tries to turn accusations of unreasonableness against his adversary:

> It is not reasonable (continues the critic) to believe that men could defend themselves with their nails and teeth from an armed multitude; nor that they lay

[274] Ibid, 226.

> buried under a pile of darts and arrows; and yet there wants not probability for the figure: because the hyperbole seems not to have been made for the sake of the description, but rather to have been produced from the occasion.[275]

The hyperbole of histories, then, is warranted, but for different reasons than that of poetry. To be blunt, what the disingenuous opponents who naively criticize the hyperbolic historian do not take into account is the fact that the author is, if the expression may be excused here, a man speaking to men, a transparently rhetorical author who must use rhetorical devices such as hyperbole to convey the severity or any other features of whatever is portrayed. That is, criticisms that demand genuinely transparent language from the author are suspect for they appear to assume falsely that there is another process by which meaning can emerge. Hyperbolic rhetoric in instances such as Herodotus' description of the valiant efforts of the Lacedaemonians is natural because the efforts of the author are already transparently rhetorical. It is the reader's task to assume that this is the case when he or she approaches the text and failure to do so will result in skewed criticism. To be fair, this is possible only if the writer is up to his task: "[T]he boldness of expression is not to be blamed if it be managed by the coolness and discretion which is necessary to a poet."[276] Foolish critics who assume a position of false objectivity where a necessity for interpretation is clearly indicated have only themselves to blame: "How easy 'tis to turn into ridicule the best descriptions, when once a man is in the humour of laughing, till he wheezes at his own dull jest!"[277] Thus, Dryden's continuing insistence on not focusing on minor poetic offences is actually warranted by a cautious approach to texts where the aim is to avoid grotesque misreadings. He assumes that the reader is always to some extent responsible for any interpretation of a given text.

Following decorum and the rules of artistry, however, can also be taken to excess in poetry and here Dryden's reasonableness begins to look like backpedaling. In the *Preface to*

[275] Ibid, 202.
[276] Ibid, 203.
[277] Ibid, 205.

All For Love, Dryden notes that he has followed modesty in his choice of expressions—even in the "satires" spouted by the quarreling Cleopatra and Octaviana—and he insists that keeping within the reasonable bounds of modesty is necessary. Again, the responsibility lies with the reader: "All beyond it is but nicety and affectation: they betray themselves who are too quick of apprehension in such cases and leave all reasonable men to imagine worse of them than of the poet."[278] This is a preemptive rebuke of Dryden's critics who, once again, would miss their mark should they too eagerly point to the inflammatory rhetoric in the play. To reinforce his argument, he illustrates his point with what he perceives to be the rigid ceremony of French theater and by appealing to national pride. Writers who follow decorum judiciously and exaggerate the modesty of characters on stage become the prophets of dullness. Although he did often praise French critics like Saint-Évremond, René Rapin and Boileau in particular, he thinks the peculiar features of English theater and especially its relative lack of decorum gave it a great advantage or "the genius which animates our stage."[279] French efforts were spent on ceremony and artificial formality that drained the stage of its power to please, resulting in the dullness Pope would later apotheosize: "As the civilest man in the company is commonly the dullest, so these authors, while they are afraid to make you laugh or cry, out of pure good manners make you sleep."[280] They produce sterile representations of life and in their efforts to please the critics such authors leave nothing for the critic to either praise or blame. Thus, too strict an adherence to the rules stunts even criticism. Would-be critics, "men of pleasant conversation (at least esteemed so), and endued with a trifling kind of fancy, perhaps helped out with some smattering of Latin,"[281] will in turn only expose their inaptitude and affectation when they judge poetry by applying the same rules to all poetry or assume that all poetry should please all men. They make

[278] Ibid, 223.
[279] Ibid, 224.
[280] Ibid.
[281] Ibid, 226. Rochester is here the specific target.

unreasonable demands on methodological grounds and make fools of themselves in the process. All this is well-known and repeated endlessly in Dryden scholarship, but what is perhaps less often noted is the transgressive role of the Longinian sublime in the ideal of reasonableness in Dryden's criticism. It is significant that Samuel Monk, for example, rather surprisingly dismisses the effect of the sublime on Dryden's criticism altogether.[282] In advocating the Longinian sublime in conjunction with the peculiar characteristics of the English stage, Dryden advocates a compromizing approach to the rules of poetry even at a time when he was enamored with neoclassicism. The tone of his criticism, however, betrays his own peculiar dogmatism.

The same reasonableness can be seen at work in Dryden's comments on translation. In his *Preface to Sylvae* (1685), he discusses the author's character from the perspective of the translator as a persona whose features have to be preserved in writing despite rules of decorum and form. Again, he judges excessive modesty a fault. He emphasizes the importance of conveying the character of the poet, "the maintaining the character of an author, which distinguishes him from all others, and makes him appear that individual poet whom you would interpret."[283] He describes the character of Lucretius as one of "magisterial authority" who, "though often in the wrong, yet seems to deal *bona fide* with his reader."[284] Lucretius reminds Dryden of Hobbes, with the exception that whereas Lucretius seems sincere and conveys his opinions to the reader accordingly, Hobbes "could not but be convinced, or at least doubt, of some eternal truths which he had opposed."[285] Earlier in his career Dryden was a great admirer of Hobbes. In older age his admiration appears to have

[282] Monk writes: "Of Longinus's effect upon Dryden's criticism in general we shall have nothing to say" (1960, 43). In a recent take on Monk's classic work, Karl Axelsson does draw attention to the fact that while "it is indeed true that criticism of intellectual literature occasionally enunciates trepidation for the excessive exercise of the imagination" it is also the case that "the distrust … concerns the exercise of undisciplined imagination, not the exercise of the imagination as such" and "that the disciplining ambition is not a technique with which to arraign and weaken the status of imagination" (2007, 217). However, Axelsson too neglects Dryden's criticism.
[283] Dryden 1962b, 21.
[284] Ibid, 25.
[285] Ibid.

waned somewhat, but he is nevertheless ready to spare him from yet another accusation of atheism. The strengths of Lucretius' character are twofold for Dryden. First, he is able to anticipate and forcefully rebut critical objections to his arguments. Secondly, the same forcefulness of his temper gives his rhetoric a loftiness that carries the argument even when there is but little substance with which to work. This is the domain of the poet for Dryden, where Lucretius' temper and skill shine through in his writing. In a much earlier work, the *Preface to Evening's Love* (1671), while defending himself against accusations of plagiarism, Dryden claimed that "in general, the employment of a poet is like that of a curious gunsmith or watchmaker: the iron or silver is not his own; but they are the least part of that which gives the value: the price lies wholly in the workmanship."[286] Plot and action, the substance of drama, are of secondary importance to the actual work of poetic composition.

In the *Preface to Sylvae*, while Dryden defends himself against accusations of obscenity in translating Lucretius' *Nature of Love*, he again transfers the responsibility for praise and blame elsewhere. He refuses to focus on his decision to translate controversial passages, but rather wishes to address the way he executed the translation. The subject is further aggravated by the delicate language Lucretius employs, but knowing he will evade the burden of rejoinder Dryden chooses to begin by stating that "I own it pleased me: and let my enemies make the worst they can of this confession."[287] The objection he foresees claims that the passage need not have been translated into such "luscious" English, an objection Dryden refuses to face head on and instead focuses on Lucretius himself:

> Instead of an answer, I would ask again of my supercilious adversaries whether I am not bound, when I translate an author to do him all the right I can, and to translate him to the best advantage. If, to mince his meaning, which I am satisfied was honest and instructive, I had either omitted some part of which he said, or taken from the strength of his expression, I certainly had wronged him; and that

[286] Dryden 1962a, 155.
[287] Dryden 1962b, 27.

> freeness of thought and words being thus cashiered in my hands, he had no longer been Lucretius.[288]

In a forceful Baconian declaration of the right to knowledge of the natural world Dryden states that "if nothing of this kind be to be read, physicians must not study nature, anatomies must not be seen."[289] That is, he equates discussing the subject matter with the right of natural philosophy to study nature, with the familiar exception that the role of poetry is also to please as well as instruct. In sum, says Dryden, "the intention qualifies the act"[290] and there is little room left for decorum. Lucretius, then, carries most of the blame as the original author, but in order to be true to his work Dryden feels he must insist on the importance of Lucretius' argument as well as his own duty as a translator to portray the author in his original form.

Dryden's calls for reasonableness remain more or less the same throughout his career, but his tone in admonishing the critics of his age does begin to approach invective quite early in the 1670s. His choice of words in his *Letter to Sir Charles Sedley* (1673) shows that he was ready to be openly hostile toward his critics who, among other things, accused him of being "an enemy of learning: without the foundation of which I am sure no man can pretend to be a poet."[291] He continues, repeating the word pretend in a more hostile tone: "As for the errors they pretend to find in me, I could easily show them that the greatest part of them are beauties."[292] However, he tells Sedley he will not grant a reply to his accusers, because he is sure of his own good sense, unwilling to justify their accusations with an answer and would rather be hated by his critics than stoop so low as to engage with unreasonable accusations which betray his attackers' ignorance. Dryden arrogantly places himself within the golden

[288] Ibid.
[289] Ibid.
[290] Ibid.
[291] Ibid, 187.
[292] Ibid, 188.

mean of reasonableness by excluding himself from unworthy company. However, shifting responsibility in this fashion was not always possible. Dryden was mocked for writing criticism of his own work and here blame could not be placed elsewhere. Driven into a corner, as may be expected, Dryden turned his inability to avoid responsibility into a critical trope. In the *Grounds of Criticism in Tragedy* (1679), he responds to Thomas Rymer's claims in the *Tragedies of the Last Age* (1678) as he once again debates the strict neoclassical rules of composition. The essay, prefixed to Dryden's Shakespeare adaptation *Troilus and Cressida*, was written at a time when Dryden's prose had recently acquired the forcefulness noted above and he was apparently feeling less and less obliged to indulge his critics, almost to the point of indifference. In the *Grounds of Criticism*, reasonableness acts as a uniting force between himself and his readers against the attacks of toothless critics. All reasonable men once again appear to agree on certain features of tragedy that push Dryden's argument forward. In the case of Rymer's neoclassical ideals, Dryden notes that a rigid adherence to the unities of drama would have to dismiss, for example, Shakespeare's history plays and therefore he chooses his own *Marriage à la Mode* (1673) as his example "as to avoid a satire upon others."[293] Given the prevalence of neoclassical modes of composition, he appears to think that he risks ridicule either on himself or the plays of others and therefore chooses to assume all the blame himself in a fairly theatrical manner. The threat of satire acts as a paralipsis which is immediately obvious to readers who are aware that Dryden, at least in his own mind, is much of the time arguing against mere "sucking critics, who would fain be nibbling ere their teeth are come."[294] Rymer was no doubt a serious and worthy critic in Dryden's opinion, but therefore also exceptional and worthy of a reply. The tone is unambiguously contemptuous, but other critics suffer a much worse fate in Dryden's hands. In a much later work, *Letter to the Right Honourable My Lord Radcliffe* (1693), Dryden's

[293] Dryden 1962a, 243.
[294] Ibid, 224.

bitterness had already grown to self-pity and his comment on Dutch philological critics of Ovid oozes with sarcasm: "I leave a farther satire on their wit, till I have a better opportunity to shew how much I love and honour them."[295] In the *Discourse Concerning Satire* the same year, on the other hand, he seems to have genuinely resigned himself to his fate and left his poetry, at least, "wholly ... to the critics: let them use it as they please."[296] Needless to say, the comment is hardly a reflection of Dryden's magnanimity.

The passive-aggressive hostility toward his critics is matched by Dryden's contempt for the public. In the preface to *An Evening's Love* (1671), Dryden, commending Jonson for his adherence to Horatian maxims in his comedies, places comedy below other sorts of dramatic writing because it "requires, on the writer's part, much of conversation with the vulgar: and much of ill nature in the observation of their follies."[297] He displays his reasonableness by qualifying his judgment with the recognition of comedy's popularity:

> But let all men please themselves according to their several tastes: that which is not pleasant to me may be to others who judge it better; and, to prevent an accusation from my enemies, I am sometimes ready to imagine that my disgust of low comedy proceeds not so much from my judgment as from my temper; which is the reason why I so seldom write it; and that when I succeed in it (I mean so far as to please the audience), yet I am nothing satisfied with what I have done; but am often vexed to hear the people laugh, and clap, as they perpetually do, where I intended 'em no jest; while they let pass better things without taking notice of them.[298]

In *Of Heroic Plays* (1672), Dryden extends the same courtesy to authors in a nonchalant gesture by conceding that "'tis free for every man to write, or not to write, in verse, as he judges it to be, or not to be, his talent; or as he imagines the audience will receive it."[299] Out of context, the concessions seem reasonable, but one must keep in mind Dryden's treatment

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[295] Dryden 1962b, 164.
[296] Ibid, 126.
[297] Dryden 1962a, 145.
[298] Ibid.
[299] Ibid, 157.

of the easily manipulated mobs in his plays. They are, simply put, a source of anarchy and debauchery. Maximillian Novak observes that comments like this are difficult for modern readers to stomach: "[Dryden] was eminently politically incorrect."[300] Dryden's contempt for low comedy and farces in the preface to *An Evening's Love* is genuine. The "better things" he wrote were in his opinion lost to an ignorant audience while the grotesqueries of farcical comedy with its "forced humours and unnatural events"[301] gained applause.

Excessive liveliness in comedy, according to him, produces "monstrous and chimerical"[302] entertainment:

> In short, there is the same difference betwixt farce and comedy as betwixt an empiric and a true physician: both of them may attain their ends; but what the one performs by hazard, the other does by skill. ... For to write unnatural things is the most probable way of pleasing them, who understand not nature.[303]

The medical analogy has deep roots, but it was current enough as the Great Plague had recently brought medical debates between empiricists and Galenists to the attention of learned readers. The action of the play takes place in 1665 and it features the much-maligned astrologers who had thrived on the fears of Londoners during the Plague. The debates would reemerge in the 1720s when an epidemic in Marseilles threatened England and renewed interest in the causes of the disease would provide Defoe with materials for *A Journal of the Plague Year*. Like a true physician who followed principles instead of mere empirical observations, Dryden was concerned with the principles that guide the art of poetry. That is, he did not view himself as a poet whose task it was merely to please audiences. Rather, he was concerned with the refinement of poetry for its own sake.

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[300] Novak 2004, 88.
[301] Dryden 1962a, 146.
[302] Ibid.
[303] Ibid.

In his examination of Jonson's wit Dryden addresses the matter in detail. While Jonson does not lack judgment as he is obviously able to mimic the folly of others, he lacks the Quintilian varieties of wit Dryden held in higher regard. Dryden includes reasonableness in his definition of wit as well. Wit, he says in the *Apology for Heroic Poetry*, is

> a propriety of thoughts and words; or, in other terms, thoughts and words elegantly adapted to the subject. If our critics will join issue on this definition, that we may *convenire in aliquo tertio*; if they will take it as a granted principle, 'twill be easy to put an end to this dispute. No man will disagree from another's judgment concerning the dignity of style in heroic poetry; but all reasonable men will conclude it necessary that sublime subjects ought to be adorned with the sublimest, and (consequently often) with the most figurative expressions.[304]

Jonson's empirical wit, a grotesque variety in Dryden's judgment, seemed to serve public opinion rather than poetry. Dryden's appraisal was muted, because "those who do more do but value themselves in their admiration of him."[305] Insincere critics flatter themselves when they flatter Jonson, something Dryden avoided on principle. When he discusses the subject of Jonson's wit in *Defence of the Epilogue* (1673), he concedes that his earlier criticism of Jonson was perhaps too harsh. Jonson, after all, was not a Shadwell:

> For Ben Jonson, the most judicious of poets, he always writ properly, and as the character required; and I will not contest farther with my friends who call that wit: it being very certain that even folly itself, well represented, is wit in a larger signification; and that there is fancy as well as judgment in it, though not so much or noble: because all poetry being imitation, that of folly is a lower exercise of fancy, though perhaps as difficult as the other, for 'tis a kind of looking downward in the poet, and representing that part of mankind which is below him.[306]

If Dryden seemed arrogant in declaring his preference for a higher kind of comedy that should be distinguished from farce, here he redeems Jonson by lifting him above the mob. Or

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[304] Dryden 1962a, 207.
[305] Ibid, 148.
[306] Ibid, 178. Cf. Paulson 2004, 44–8.

rather, he states that poets should assume a position above the rest of mankind, a position from which they are able to use their judgment to mimic the follies of the vulgar. Dryden's later position and argument thus exclude Jonson from his earlier critique and indeed grant him wit. Dryden's final position on Jonson is ambiguous, although it is clear enough that he thinks highly of him. But one should remember that not even Shakespeare escapes Dryden's critical judgment. In *The Grounds of Criticism in Tragedy* (1679), he writes of Caliban and stops short of accusing Shakespeare of merely pleasing the crowd by his strange creation.[307]

What Dryden thought of his age in general further illustrates his opinions of his critics and the public in particular, but here too it is difficult to find a coherent position. On the one hand, as he states in the *Defence of the Epilogue*, the age has seen noticeable improvements in the English language compared to that of Shakespeare, Fletcher and Jonson. On the other, he feels it is a skeptical age "where my least faults are severely censured; and ... I have no way left to extenuate my failings but my showing as great in those whom we admire: caedimus, inque vicem praebemus cura sagittis."[308] In the *Apology for Heroic Poetry* a few years later, he maintains his view that "we are fallen into an age of illiterate, censorious, and detracting people who, thus qualified, set up as critics."[309] The advancement of poetry is for Dryden a project that has taken great leaps from the previous age, but the advancements do not reflect society at large. The problem is related to what James Engell calls "the paradox of refinement,"[310] the apparent decadence and corruption that is born out of the refinement of the arts. If Dryden's criticism is read on the author's terms, it shows that the paradox is not a paradox as such. Rather, Dryden thinks the inclusion of unworthy participants in discussions

[307] Dryden comments on Shakespeare's Caliban: "He seems there to have created a person which was not in nature, a boldness which at first sight would appear intolerable; for he makes him a species of himself, begotten by an incubus on a witch; but this, as I have elsewhere proved, is not wholly beyond the bounds of credibility, at least the vulgar still believe it" (1962a, 252–3).
[308] Dryden 1962a, 173. The line is from Persius (Satire IV, l. 42): "We alternately strike, and expose our own legs to the arrows" (Watson's translation).
[309] Dryden 1962a, 196.
[310] Engell 1989, 44.

concerning the critical refinement of language has been a grave error. The public, in fact, spoil whatever gains have been made in the refinement of the English language by their unreasonable and unrefined judgment. The same applies to their preference for lower forms of wit. It is an unambiguously elitist position, but one with which Dryden would have certainly agreed. What Williams remarks while pointing out the Tory elitism of Oldham's "In Praise of Poetry" applies to this streak in Dryden's character: "[N]ot only should the authorship of poetry be confined to a natural elite, but it should also be addressed to an exclusively elite audience."[311] After all, the trend against which Dryden was writing was the inclusion of incompetent members of the public into the ranks of critics.

In later life, Dryden was candid about the corruption of his age. In a 1692 preface addressed to the Earl of Abingdon, Dryden, thanking the Earl for his commission, writes: "[H]ow I have acquitted myself of it must be left to the opinion of the world, in spite of any protestation which I can enter against the present age, as incompetent or corrupt judges. For my comfort, they are but Englishmen, and as such, if they think ill of me today, they are inconstant enough to think well of me tomorrow."[312] A year later in what Watson notes is very disingenuous praise of Sir Henry Sheers's Polybius, Dryden uses the occasion to speculate on the nature of this fickle mob mentality. He admires Polybius for revealing the hollowness of talk of the supernatural in histories and focusing instead on natural causes:

> [H]e professes an immortal enmity to those tricks and jugglings which the common people believe as real miracles, because they are ignorant of the causes which produced them. But he had made a diligent search into them, and found out that they proceeded either from the fond credulity of the people, or were imposed on them by the craft of those whose interest it was that they should be believed.[313]

[311] Williams 2005, 29.
[312] Dryden 1962b, 63.
[313] Ibid, 67.

Dryden finds Polybius making a distinction between histories that cater to the ignorant and true histories, the former being not unlike clumsy tragedies that resort to a *dei ex machina* to resolve plotlines. Citing Casaubon, Dryden completes the image by noting that lazy historians who do this find willing participants in an ignorant audience:

> 'Tis a common frenzy of the ignorant multitude, says Casaubon, to be always engaging Heaven on their side: and indeed it is a successful stratagem of any general to gain authority among his soldiers, if he can persuade them that he is the man by Fate appointed for such or such an action, though most impracticable. ... Light historians, and such as are superstitious in their natures, by the artifice of feigned miracles, captivate the gross understandings of their readers, and please their fancies by relations of things which are rather wonderful than true.[314]

History, like satire, was for Dryden entangled with moral philosophy and his point in praising Polybius is entirely moral. In the *Life of Plutarch* (1683), Dryden took human nature to be "the same in all ages, agitated by the same passions, and moved to action by the same interests"[315] and history "only the precepts of moral philosophy reduced to examples."[316] Knowing the past, he writes in phrases that sound very Lucretian, "informs the understanding by the memory" and "helps us to judge of what will happen, by shewing us the like revolutions of former times."[317] The public who want to know only the supernatural and false causes of history and are catered to by willing peddlers of supernatural fictions will live in a hermetic world that allows for no real progress or genuine understanding. Propriety, it seems, informs the understanding in fiction, but as in poetry the historian's claims to truth must resist merely pleasing the audience.[318]

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[314] Ibid, 68.
[315] Ibid, 4.
[316] Ibid, 8.
[317] Ibid, 4.
[318] See the preface to *Albion and Albanus* (1685): "Human impossibilities are to be received as they are in faith; because, where gods are introduced, a supreme power is to be understood, and second causes are out of doors. Yet propriety is to be observed even here" (1962b, 35).

Dryden's hostility aside, even Zwicker recognizes Dryden's point in his more recent discussion of Dryden's biographical writing. Instead of a master of the rhetorical masquerade of politics and power, Zwicker now sees in the Dryden of the late 1680s and 1690s a writer who has matured into a historian who is able to distance himself from his writing and let his characters emerge fully formed. Zwicker terms this quality of Dryden's character his "critical intelligence,"[319] "skeptical temperament"[320] or "objectivity"[321] that enables him to inhabit the thoughts of others. The flattering conclusion of Zwicker's essay praises Dryden in terms that make it seem as if Dryden's practice of negative capability made him navigate effortlessly between his subject and his constant self-creation:

> [T]he otherness of other and the otherness of the self were not different creations for Dryden; they were aspects of the same kind of artistic objectivity, the same imaginative capacity. We may find it more attractive, more diffident, to make of the ancients figures for admiration and understanding, but Dryden knew that it was also necessary to make of himself such a figure, and in his practice as biographer he moved between these projects. It may feel counter-intuitive to think of them as the same, but as an artist Dryden knew that they were but aspects of the same kind of understanding.[322]

Zwicker's characterization of Dryden's later work reads like a rewriting of Dr Johnson's description of Dryden's otherness and sameness. That is, in Dryden one can read his constant self-creation and the appraisal of the objects of his criticism composed in a way that actively eradicates a privileged critical position. Those who claimed to transcend the need for what might seem like a synthetic process of self-creation he accused of feigning, hypocrisy or incompetence.

As Dryden became disenchanted with the prospects of refining the English language after the Revolution, little optimism for further progress remained. The more striking ambiguities

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[319] Zwicker 2008a, 111.
[320] Ibid, 115.
[321] Ibid, 123.
[322] Ibid, 124.

that emerge from his later criticism are borne out of his willingness to stand as an example of his own art and praxis as a critic. In some sense, the transparency in which he dressed the King became his own in that he was ready to create a portrait of himself in writing as a fallible man, poet and critic. His bitterness, in turn, becomes all the more dramatic when one sees in his literary persona a lifetime of work now threatened by an unreasonable audience who fail to accommodate his human frailties. His admissions of fallibility turn into accusations of inconsistency as easily as they turn into empty panegyrics, but Dryden's manner of emptying his prose of posturing, very often by striking a transparent pose, has to be taken into account when one tries to characterize the man and his work. Dryden's bitterness made him isolate himself and his learned peers, ancient and contemporary, from the shallow critics and audiences of his time. Public opinion was indeed merging with that of the learned critics and Dryden found this disconcerting. But in a late preface addressed to Lord Radcliffe (1693), he nevertheless reiterates his earliest definition of critics as "defenders and commentators"[323] of the poets and includes in the role of the critic the task of redeeming their works "from malicious interpretations."[324] The critics of his age unfortunately provided an unworthy audience with a ready supply of malicious interpretations and did so either to praise themselves or to tear down others in order to usurp the stage. Their motives, Dryden seems to say, were not to be found in their words, which merely disguised their intentions as the words of agitators fan the flames of mob mentality.

In a letter to John Dennis (1694), Dryden finally revealed what he thought was the measure of his own morals. The explanation took the form of a refusal to explain his religion and his politics:

[323] Dryden 1962b, 157.
[324] Ibid.

> For my principles of religion, I will not justify them to you. I know yours are far different. For the same reason, I will say nothing of my principles of state. I believe you in yours follow the dictates of your reason, as I in mine do those of my conscience. If I thought myself in an error, I would retract it; I am sure that I suffer from them; and Milton makes even the Devil say that no creature is in love with pain. For my morals, betwixt man and man, I am not to be my own judge. I appeal to the world if I have ever deceived or defrauded any man. And for my private conversation, they who see me every day can be the best witnesses whether or not it be blameless and inoffensive.[325]

In the end, Dryden relinquishes the power to judge his own conduct to others. If there is a rhetorical function behind his words, it is, as always, to make an example of himself. Dennis had neither asked for these justifications nor challenged Dryden in any way in his letters. Dryden had been attacked anonymously often enough and the most recent attacks on him merited no actual defense, but he restates, yet again, that the dismissal of critics who did not know him was enough of a countermeasure.[326]

Dr Johnson, although generally sympathetic toward Dryden's criticism, was unnerved by Dryden's self-criticism.[327] Later critics from the eighteenth-century to the 1960s—Scott, Saintsbury and the oddly reserved Watson—commend Dryden on his treatment of past poets, but rebuke him for his opinions of his contemporaries. More recent critics such as Hume and Engell, says Gelber, "ignore Dryden's practical criticism all but completely and define his greatness in terms of some limited aspects of his general theory: his eclecticism, his sense of history, the tone and quality of his general theory."[328] Dryden's reputation has been rehabilitated in modern criticism, but ambiguities remain. Engell's remark that whenever one reads eighteenth-century criticism one reads Dryden as well is perhaps true in a broad sense, but his view that in Dryden's criticism one also reads an ambiguous approach to the question of refinement and decadence is more problematic. In such claims one must take into account

[325] Ibid, 179.
[326] Winn notes that Dryden's admission of suffering for his religion was probably a response to a recent printed accusation by a Thomas Rogers, but by now the dismissive gesture had become a staple in Dryden's rhetoric. Cf. Winn 1987, 474.
[327] Gelber 1999, 251.
[328] Ibid, 252.

Dryden's insistence on the exceptional treatment of the poet. Dryden was aware that the English language had flourished in his time and that much of it was due to the freedom Englishmen had come to enjoy, but there is little recognition in Dryden's work of the role of the public in its refinement. If anything, for Dryden the age was plagued with wanton libel committed by the common rabble who set themselves up as critics with little learning or refinement of manners. He thought so as a court wit, as a professional author and as the wise (if cranky) old man of letters he finally became.

3.3 A Discourse Concerning Satire

This, then, was the context of Dryden's *A Discourse Concerning Satire*. Dryden was already famous for his satirical poetry and of course one should not underestimate his influence as a poet. Commenting on *Mac Flecknoe* and *Absalom and Achitophel*, Weinbrot summarizes the importance of Dryden's verse for subsequent satires: "Dryden could give satire shape, variety, and appealing public urgency for private concerns. ... In Dryden's hands, satire is purged of some of its energetic vulgarity—as evident in peer as in plebeian—and acquires good manners that can easily be rejected when 'please' fails."[329] With the *Discourse*, Dryden wanted to create critical guidelines for satire worthy of his legacy in verse. In doing so, he redefined English satire once again. There were extant albeit fragmented discussions on satire that Dryden could draw from in English scholarship. The continental tradition was much

[329] Weinbrot 1988, 1. Weinbrot suggests that Dryden's brand of verse satire is the starting point of a tempered satirical genre that begins with Dryden, is analyzed and codified by Dryden, and which ends with Pope. A "dissociation of satiric sensibility" seems to occur and "later formal verse satire tends to become either excessively Horatian or excessively Juvenalian" (189). The genre appears to swallow itself and the shift, suggested only as a hypothesis by Weinbrot, seems plausible due to the inherently transgressive nature of satire. As for Varronian or Menippean satire, Weinbrot notes in his later work that it is rather the influence of Casaubon and Dacier on Dryden that merits attention, not Varro himself. Weinbrot writes: "The (almost) prime mover Casaubon influenced Dacier, who influenced Dryden. All or part of this trinity begat most other then-contemporary discussion on presumed Menippean satire's presumed classical canon" (2005, 40).

more advanced. Casaubon had lived for a period in Jonson's London and his *De satyrica graecorum et romanorum satira* was known to scholars. André Dacier's short essay on satire attached to his edition of Horace (1681–1689) had already enjoyed success in England for some time when Dryden wrote the *Discourse*. There was also a robust tradition of satire in English literature and drama. However, Dryden rejected much of this in the *Discourse* in favor of a new conception of satire of his own making.

Dryden's personal views naturally colored his approach to the Roman satirists and his analysis of Horace as a court poet would have probably been less severe had he not been dismissed from the court himself—in the *Preface to Sylvae* Dryden does indeed prefer Horace for entertainment whereas the angry Juvenal takes over this role in the *Discourse*. Dryden gives the Stoic Persius precedence over Juvenal and Horace in that "he is everywhere the same."[330] The credit he gives to Persius' learning echoes, however faintly, Casaubon's preference. The argument is refined by that of Barten Holyday who, as a good critic but an inept poet, showed Dryden that "in Persius the difficulty is to find a meaning, in Juvenal to choose a meaning."[331] Political morals are given significant weight in Dryden's choices—had his retirement been comfortable, he might have lifted Persius above the other two. However, preferences of this kind are less important than the rules by which satirists should wield their weapon. In the *Discourse*, these are the amalgam of both modern and ancient learning, some continental scholarship and Dryden's own schooling, all adapted to the needs of early modern England. What the English needed, Dryden seemed to indicate by his choices, was satire critical of the status quo and not the innocent fun of Horatian verse.

The fact that Dryden manufactures a new tradition of satire can be inferred from his treatment of the scholarship of Casaubon and Dacier. Casaubon's view of Varronian satire in particular included centrally the notion that it was tempered with philology and moral

[330] Weinbrot 1988, 123.
[331] Dryden 1962b, 139.

philosophy, making it, in some sense, a provisionally critical genre or criticism equipped with some poetic license. Menippus left but fragments and Varro's satires, also fragmented, are often described as very peculiar. They remained largely unread during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Casaubon calls Varro's satires almost "monstrous"[332] in their mixing of Greek and Latin and various kinds of verse. Casaubon's theory of satire rests on the premise that Greek satyr plays and Roman satire were two fundamentally different genres and that both had a separate origin in their respective cultures despite the clear connection between the Greek Menippus and the Roman Varro.[333] Dryden criticizes Casaubon's theory on the whole, but a more telling neglect of Casaubon's scholarship can be seen in Dryden's adoption of Dacier's opinion on the earliest Roman satirists. Dacier misreads Casaubon as claiming that Ennian and later Lucilian satires were significantly different in form. The error was passed on by Dryden who rather surprisingly followed Dacier's criticism of Casaubon despite the fact that the latter is quite clear on this point.[334] Dacier takes Casaubon to say that there were major differences between the two early satirists in form and subject matter and sees in this approach a methodological discrepancy that sabotages Casaubon's criticism:

> Simply put, if the satires of Lucilius are different from those of Ennius because the former added much to the work of the latter, as Casaubon claimed, it follows that those of Horace and those of Lucilius will also be completely different. For Horace added no less to the satires of Lucilius than Lucilius added to those of Ennius and Pacuvius.[335]

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[332] Casaubon 1605/1973, 258.

[333] Helmut Castrop comments on this discrepancy: "Since Varro aligned himself unambiguously with a Greek predecessor and adopted the term *menippea* from antiquity, Casaubon realized he had to deem the link negligible if he was to abide by his general theory concerning the history of the genre" (1983, 50). [Da sich Varro mit der von ihm selbst eingeführten und in der Antike belegten Bezeichnung menippea eindeutig an einen griechischen Vorläufer anschloss, sah sich Casaubonus durch seine Grundthese gezwungen, diesen Zusammenhang als geringfügig und gattungsgeschichtlich nichtig hinzustellen.]

[334] A comparison between Lucilian fragments and Ennius shows, says Casaubon, that both used mixed meters. He claims that the main difference between the first and second Roman satirists was *not* generic. The difference was rather in their subject matter and the manner in which they treated it. Both treat moral subjects and teach morals, but Lucilius chooses to feature real people, some of them powerful members of the Republic, and he is much more savage in his reproofs of the vicious in the manner of Old Comedy. Ennius is more gentle and general. Cf. Casaubon 1605/1973, 273–4; Dryden 1974, 556–7, n 44:28.

[335] Dacier 1735, xi. [En un mot, si les Satires de Lucilius font différentes de celles d'Ennius, parce que le premier a beaucoup ajouté au travail de l'autre, comme Casaubon l'a prétendu, il s'ensuivra de là que celles

Dacier is concerned about historical continuity and how Horace relates to the progress of the genre as a whole. Dryden renders Dacier's critique of Casaubon (and many other remarks) in English almost word for word:

> Dacier justly taxes Casaubon for saying that the satires of Lucilius were wholly different *in specie* from those of Ennius and Pacuvius. ... Here 'tis manifest that Diomedes makes a specifical distinction betwixt them the satires of Ennius and those of Lucilius. But this, as we say in English, is only a distinction without a difference; for the reason of it is ridiculous, and absolutely false. This was that which cozened honest Casaubon who, relying on Diomedes, had not sufficiently examined the origin and nature of those two satires; which were entirely the same both in the matter and form.[336]

Casaubon speaks of the lack of difference "in genere carminis,"[337] Dryden's term *species* echoes Dacier's "espèce."[338] Why Dryden paid more attention to Dacier's critique of Casaubon's argument than Casaubon's original is a matter for speculation. The puzzling oversight adds weight to Weinbrot's view that critical work on the genre was inconsistent at best—current scholarship, in fact, supports Casaubon instead of Dacier.[339] Dryden looks to classical sources, Horace and Quintilian, and argues that in their comments they "could mean no more than that Lucilius writ better than Ennius and Pacuvius; and on the same account we prefer Horace to Lucilius."[340] In other words, personal preferences explain, at least for Dryden, the purported differences between the satirists as well as the perceived mistakes by such esteemed philologists as Casaubon.

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d'Horace & celles de Lucilius seront aussi entièrement différentes; puis qu'Horace n'a pas moins enchéri sur les Satires de Lucilius, que celui-ci avoit enchéri sur celles d'Ennius & de Pacuve.]

[336] Dryden 1962b, 112.

[337] Casaubon 1605/1973, 273.

[338] Dacier 1735, xii.

[339] In the differences between Ennius and Lucilius one can see, according to C. A. Van Rooy's standard account of the differences between the early Roman satirists, "the strong convictions and aggressive personality" of the latter compared to the former (1965, 52–3).

[340] Dryden 1962b, 111–2.

These may be minor matters, but they demonstrate a willful neglect of scholarship. Dryden's careless undoing of Casaubon's work is unsettling. True, Dacier's short essay was much more manageable for the busy translator and man of letters, but it seems clear Dryden had an intimate knowledge of Casaubon's study as well.[341] Casaubon's great project was to separate the genres of Greek satyr plays and Roman satire. Dryden, in turn, ties the two together in an arbitrary way to recreate a uniform tradition for the Greeks and Romans. Considering Casaubon's overall argument and the fact that *De satyrica graecorum poesi et romanorum satira* is divided into two books to emphasize the division between the two genres, that Dryden himself quotes Casaubon's etymological distinctions and that Casaubon's critique of those who confound the distinctions was far from polite, it is very strange indeed to read Dryden's critical remarks in a work that claims to follow Casaubon's study. Dryden seems to have done what he did simply to clear the ground for a theory of his own. A brief digression to Engell's insight into the thought of the age might be useful here to contextualize Dryden's odd criticism of Casaubon. Once again, disenchantment is the issue at the heart of the matter.

Engell writes: "In the 1700s the success of 'mythological works' with a serious tone nearly vanishes. ... Only the mock-heroic and satiric inversion ... support the machinery of supernatural beings."[342] Engell refers to the satires of Swift and Pope and notes the uneasiness of the age with the use of Christian myth and its simultaneous rejection of pagan deities. They signify, rather dramatically, "the end of an epoch."[343] Dryden voices these concerns in his discussion of epic poetry and Milton's "heavenly machines"[344] in the *Discourse*. He puts the matter simply: "Christianity is not capable of those embellishments

[341] Casaubon's more concise *Prolegomena to the Satires of Persius* (1605) was available to readers of Persius, but as a defense of Persius' obscurity and his satires as "not a type of popular poem ... but a type which is erudite" (Medine 1976, 297) they do not touch upon the differences between Ennius and Lucilius, enlightening as they are.
[342] Engell 1989, 81–2.
[343] Ibid, 82.
[344] Dryden 1962b, 84.

which are afforded in the belief of those ancient heathens."[345] The machinery of Christianity, he says following Boileau, is too feeble to support heroic poetry compared to the "ridiculous fables"[346] of Greco-Roman culture. The digression continues to outline Dryden's abandoned plan for a Christian epic, an uneasy confession that Milton had in fact achieved what Dryden had dreamed of doing. Literary critics tend to agree, sometimes grudgingly, that "the appearance of *Paradise Lost* was a cataclysm in the history of modern epic."[347] It enabled satire to take its place in a new hierarchy of literary genres. The hierarchies of poetry were overturned by Milton's triumph and this is no doubt why Dryden felt the need to look back to antiquity and reconnect satire with its ancient Greek origins in a new theory. It is telling that Dryden discusses satire together with epic poetry as a way of reaching back to the ancients. The possibility to imitate them in earnest through epic verse was lost, but the ironic distance satire provided promised one way of finding something of that dignity in refined satire.

After stating that he must not insist on his theory and only suggest it as a possibility, Dryden nominates the playwright Livius Andronicus as the author who brought satirical Greek Old Comedy to the Romans. In tracing his history he again draws selectively from Casaubon. The demands of a more refined audience required a new form which Andronicus created by adding "many beauties to the first rude and barbarous Roman satire."[348] Roman entertainment before this Greek influence Dryden deems farces. Thus, in order to amend Casaubon's theory Dryden proposes that while the Greek *satyrica* and Roman *satira* were indeed born on separate occasions, what became known as Roman satire was itself a mixture of genres, a continuation of Andronicus' (sadly lost) plays or Greek Old Comedy transplanted onto the early Roman stage.[349] Satire, then, was born from the stage according to

[345] Ibid, 85.
[346] Ibid, 86–7.
[347] Rosen and Santesso 2008, 15. Cf. Bogel 2001, 18–9.
[348] Dryden 1962b, 143.
[349] Ibid, 109–110. Cf. Casaubon 1605/1973, 236.

Dryden and in this at least he contradicts Dacier. Thus, Dryden extends the tradition of satire from Livius Andronicus to the Lord Chamberlain to whom the *Discourse* is dedicated. Once again, his view is problematic, but there is a reason for elevating Andronicus as the chosen model of satire. What Dryden does, perhaps taking his cue from Casaubon once again, is to combine the mimetic and narrative features of ancient poetic practice in order to install a character of dramatic poetry, the Author, at the center of the genre.[350] His conjecture can be read as an attempt to cement the notion of the kind of character-based satire familiar to Englishmen at least from the time of the Marprelate Controversy and embed it into a historical narrative that gives it a classical original in Andronicus. Thereby he creates of satire a mixture of narrative poetry and the action of drama—a mixed form according to the classical division of mimetic poetry—and also relates the art form to the English satirical tradition even as he eliminates nearly all traces of it to create a fresh start.

The formal definition of satire Dryden borrows from Heinsius:

> Satire is a kind of poetry, without a series of action, invented for the purging of our minds; in which human vices, ignorance, and errors, and all things besides, which are produced from them in every man, are severely reprehended; partly dramatically, partly simply, and sometimes in both kinds of speaking; but for the most part figuratively, and occultly; consisting in a low familiar way, chiefly in a sharp and pungent manner of speech; but partly, also, in a facetious and civil way of jesting; by which either hatred, or laughter, or indignation, is moved.[351]

What purports to be a definition quickly turns into a critique as Dryden criticizes and ultimately rejects Heinsius. He calls the definition "obscure and perplexed,"[352] not really a definition at all but a description of Horatian satirical practice that excludes Juvenal and Persius. Parts of the definition apply to satire in general, but these features are far too general to be useful. The lack of action, for example, simply excludes plays from the genre. Satire

[350] Cf. Casaubon 1605/1973, 102.
[351] Dryden 1962b, 143.
[352] Ibid.

does purge the passions, but the definition begins to fall apart when it tries to delineate more specific features. The "low familiar way" of speech does not apply to the wisdom of Persius or the stark sublimity of Juvenal. And if Horace lacked sophistication, Dryden asks, why should other satirists be so constrained? Dryden thinks Heinsius's definition is too rigid, not only because it is too narrow but because definitions in general fail to capture the ways in which satire adjusts itself to the needs of its age: "The majestic way of Persius and Juvenal was new when they began it, but 'tis old to us; and what poems have not with time, received an alteration in their fashion?"[353] Donne is Dryden's example here and Dryden states that "he followed Horace so very close that of necessity he must fall with him."[354] The origins of satire can be explained, however provisionally, but it is in the nature of the genre to be malleable to its historical circumstances. This important formal feature of satire, the adaptability of the genre which scholars of the satires of Dryden's age so eagerly note, was a central feature of late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century satire from its founding document.

Dryden does provide some rules to limit the destruction caused by lampoons. The code of conduct he assigns to these is quite simple:

> There are only two reasons for which we may be permitted to write lampoons; and I will not promise that they can always justify us. The first is revenge, when we have been affronted in the same nature, or have been any ways notoriously abused and can make our selves no other reparation. ... [T]he second reason, which may justify a poet, when he writes against a particular person; and that is, when he is become a public nuisance. ... The first reason was only an excuse for revenge; but this second is absolutely of a poet's office to perform.[355]

As is to be expected, Dryden admonishes the toothless lampooners who lack the wit to either instruct or entertain. Women in particular, says Dryden, are often the unjust targets of such foolish authors; one assumes that Juvenal's satire against women is redeemed by the satirist's

[353] Ibid, 144.
[354] Ibid.
[355] Dryden 1962b, 125–7.

mastery of his art. Inappropriate choices of topic and dull rhetoric are thus excluded from proper lampoons as well, whereas true satire simply does not seem to exist in England.

Dryden's theory about Livius Andronicus has not been widely adopted. However, it is probably safe to assume that Dryden did not intend it as more than a theoretical possibility and that the character-based satire he suggested through the example of Livius voiced an ideal approach to the art form. He sees no lineage of satire in England—Boileau and the Earl of Dorset qualify as satirists, and as the *Discourse* is dedicated to the latter his status is questionable to say the least—and it is no small wonder considering that for English audiences "all things are wit which are abusive." Donne and Rochester merit a nod. Marvell and Oldham were perhaps on his mind but left unmentioned. Only Butler's *Hudibras* warrants Dryden's praise. In effect, Dryden assumes he is writing satire criticism *ex novo*. As Gelber puts it:

> One of the pleasures of the *Discourse* is to find Dryden, as he examines the history of satire, taking his own good advice. He provides us with both general counsel and with an example of how to proceed. As a literary critic, he is only too willing to dismiss the judgments of the scholars. The case they mount for this or that satirist is compromised by partisanship and hence is of not much use. And after a brief struggle with their special pleading, he finds it easier and more productive to waive them aside and to proceed on his own.[356]

Dryden's suspicion of dogmatic criticism is voiced explicitly in his rebuke of those who stolidly prefer one of the Roman satirists over another, how critics tend to "fall in love with their own labours, to that degree of blind fondness, that at length they defend and exalt their Author, not so much for his sake as for their own."[357] This is a reiteration of Dryden's familiar attitude toward his fellow critics, but this time he goes as far as drawing a parallel between the criticism of his age and something like the spectacle of the Roman games. One

[356] Gelber 1999, 205.
[357] Dryden 1962b, 116.

might think of a Bakhtinian carnival or a caricature of a Habermasian liberation of the public sphere as an analogue to Dryden's critical circus, but the criticism is more severe. It paints learned debate as a mock-battle where the teams on each side are assigned colors that the critics must then defend, whatever the cost.

This is perhaps the final contradiction which Dryden, who thought he was writing his final critical work in the *Discourse*, wanted to leave for posterity. The rhetorical debate over poetry and morals, refined, decadent and oddly synthetic, can easily descend into a hollow and foolish enterprise where truth matters very little. But Dryden is not one to cry over the lack of transparency in such posturing, an impossible and outdated ideal of the Elizabethan Puritans. The possibility of empty debate did not mean that proper conduct and good form could not create something beneficial for the whole nation. In the end, it is praxis that matters. Dryden, who had served many masters during his long career, knew this better than most—Dorset, for example, was valuable to him as a patron, but he was also a Whig whose politics were radically different from Dryden's. What Dryden brings to all these claims in his later criticism is a detached critical perspective, something very different from Puritan claims of genuine moral transparency. It is an embedded figurality or politeness that requires interpretation from the reader at the outset. Or, if you will, he sees critical speculation as valid an approach as rigorous philology. In this, at least, he was remarkably consistent. Levine notes of Dryden's first great critical work: "[E]verything in the *Essay* is qualified."[358] The *Discourse*, in turn, contains a variety of qualifiers that show that while Dryden is dictating rules to his countrymen he is simultaneously exploring the topic and searching for answers.

It could be argued that what Dryden teaches future critics, that of satire as well as a myriad of other topics, is the art of withholding assent. That is, the reserved moderation he applied to

[358] Levine 1999a, 46.

his own critical praxis and demanded of others. The critic and the satirist remain if not above then outside mere public entertainment. They do not dictate morals, but skillfully dissect vices with rhetorical gestures that will remain for most merely sleights of hand. Dryden's California editors restate this in loftier tones: "Dryden believed a successful writer of satire must be a man of virtue, intelligence, and candor, that is, of generosity."[359] They continue:

> In Dryden's opinion, moreover, the successful satirist is a public figure, either praised and rewarded by the political standard-bearers of his society (Maecenas, Dorset, Louis XIV) or neglected by them to society's discredit. What the satirist says is relevant to his society, and his fate (whether or not there is enough money to bury him in state) is an implicit judgment of that society.[360]

The satirist in this description is a measure of society's worthiness and its moral gauge. When one understands this, it is clear to see why the satirist must be a morally worthy person whose passions will not seduce him or her into writing mere lampoons that will only lead to further corruption. The point of satires is to criticize vice, not to add to it. Commendable as this ideal image of satirists is, their rewards, Dryden implies, are not personal but for the benefit of society. Dryden's view also makes apparent the reasons behind the impossibility of defining the art in a way that is not intimately tied to the historical moment the satirist inhabits. This ties a satirist to the great pageant of royal and political power. Above all satirists must be examples of their moral art, as Dryden tried to be, and follow their conscience, which Dryden (to his detriment) certainly did. If one concedes Winn's evaluation of Dryden's character as wholly satirical, the self-analysis in which Dryden was engaged in his criticism is also demanded of the reader. It is a truism that great literature tells readers more about themselves than about the age in which it was written, but in Dryden's case the conclusion is unavoidable. One does not do this because one compares his age to one's own and so learns

[359] Dryden 1974, 525.
[360] Ibid, 526.

something about the past in relation to the present, but because one is forced to examine the way one reads Dryden in the very act of interpretation. On the other hand, when one reads Dryden's *Discourse* and the notes of those who speak of "Dryden's tradition," one cannot but help feel Dryden was in some sense painting a self-portrait of sorts, of the critic who never ceases to make demands on the reader and highlight the reader's own choices. To be fair, Livius Andronicus is only a token author in the work and it is Dryden himself who steals the spotlight. The historical argument he presents is too flawed to be taken seriously and while the flaws may or may not be deliberate, its call to create a new tradition of English satire is quite clear. This, finally, is why Dryden's character was satirical, because as much as satire criticizes the age in which it was written, in the end it must shine a light on the reader. Dryden's work as a whole insists on it and as he forces the reader to search for and choose an interpretation, more is revealed of the reader than the author. One does not discover this by pointing to a specific text or a single argument from his critical oeuvre, of course, but one can only get a grasp of Dryden's shifting character through his writing when one lets him slip through one's fingers over and over again.

4. Daniel Defoe as the Transgressive Satirist

Dryden's influence is diffuse and remarkable, but his critical prose naturally reflected broader developments in contemporary philosophy and literature. In a remarkably concise summary of what happened to allegorical and related satirical modes of representation between the Renaissance and the eighteenth century, David Rosen and Aaron Santesso argue that a series of events from the death of Elizabeth to the eighteenth century "shaped a new society no longer able (or willing) to conceive of itself in allegorical terms."[361] Whether the matter is one of ability or willingness is an interesting question, but certainly allegorical modes of understanding the world became problematized as new political, social and philosophical developments gave birth to the Enlightenment. As a corollary to this might be added Engell's observations on the disappearance of mythological works whose remnants satire tried to preserve. It was indeed an end of an epoch, as Engell notes, and one might argue that the loss of earnest mythological allegory finally realized the hollow core of Cartesian doubt and secured its place at the center of modern thought.[362] The disappearance of allegory proper, delayed only by the last gasps of the failing art form that can be seen in satirists' mockery, resulted in a new focus on the subject before the advent of Romanticism. Writers turned to a new kind of myth drawn from lived experience, infusing it with an aura of wonder derived from within the subject. Engell's views anticipate the birth of the Romantic subject, but its

[361] Rosen and Santesso 2008, 16.
[362] Engell 1989, 82. Cf. section 3.3. above. This has been seen as a source of horror by some. Graham Harman, for example, examines "a Lovecraftian reading of phenomenology" (2008, 336) in an article on Husserl and Lovecraft's horror stories and so cultivates radical readings of a perverse phenomenology. These are related to the loss of referentiality in allegory where the loss of a transcendental referent leads to fears of grotesque extrapolations that need not pay mind to the world as such but can run wild as creatures endowed with a byzantine ontology alien to our own.

appearance was still in the future when Defoe made his mark on English literature. According to Rosen and Santesso, two options remained for those at least willing to experiment with the now unsettled allegorical forms of expression. First, they could continue writing allegories without what Rosen and Santesso term the "transcendental verifier"[363] which acts as the touchstone for correct interpretation and as the absolute reference point of allegorical rhetoric, something that glues *res* to *verba*. The result was a "hollowed-out form of allegory" that had the appearance of the allegorical mechanism without the proper referentiality that is required for, say, its didactic function.[364] The second option that actually tried to escape nostalgic expression was of course satire. Following Angus Fletcher's work on allegory, Rosen and Santesso see satire "not so much a successor genre as a perverse extension"[365] of allegory in a literary environment that disallows allegory proper. Considering Dryden's example, directing "allegory against allegory, irony against irony"[366] seems quite natural and should perhaps even be expected from any writer who spends time writing allegorical prose or poetry. Formulations of this kind can famously be seen, for example, in Pope's *Dunciad* and Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* and many other works which at times seem to escape into the realm of abstraction and detach themselves from referential allegory to produce something akin to Dryden's free exploration of truth and argument in art. That is, allegory that has been released from the onus of referentiality, bootstrapping the genre into a quasi-autonomous form that is able to transgress into the realm of the grotesque or attempts to raise itself toward sublime playfulness.

After Milton, interpretation as a quest to obtain truth from texts begins to look desperate as interpretation is separated from transcendent truth. After Dryden, any parody or satire that

[363] Rosen and Santesso 2008, 16.
[364] Ibid. Rosen and Santesso also point out that Dryden's allegorical poems, *Absalom and Achitophel* in particular, acquire the character of period pieces in this context.
[365] Rosen and Santesso 2008, 17.
[366] Fletcher 1964, 151.

involves allegorical interpretation can be expected to show signs of Dryden's post-Miltonic yearning for revelation. In Defoe's case, however, it is difficult to imagine a motive based on a detachment from the world behind his deflationary satires. This might be the case for Swift who, according to Rosen and Santesso, "had no faith in coherence."[367] Satire as exploded allegory was for Swift and Pope a transgression of the borders of reference and form, but in Defoe's case one can also see an effort to contain the author's role in allegorical expression. This becomes apparent in his later work in particular. Commenting on Defoe's *Due Preparations for the Plague*, a companion to the *Journal of the Plague Year*, John Richetti writes of "the gap between the material world Defoe loved to render and the realm of spiritual longing that he tried to present as more important but wound up undermining to some extent."[368] This spiritual longing suggests that if truth as a solid epistemological foundation for argument was no more, it still existed as memory and faith for him. Faith also enabled him to act as a satirist in charge of London's epistemological hygiene in his plague writings. The tensions created by the gap Richetti mentions may also be seen as a manifestation of the fact that parody as a reflection of the futile quest for truth in interpretation need not be a negation of the possibility of truth. It can be an act of preservation or an image of something lost amidst all the critical noise Defoe knew all too well. Rather than an extension of the allegorical mode of expression that launches itself into artistic autonomy, Defoe seems to have turned inward, embedding satire as allegory inside existing narratives. He is, after all, famous for publishing fictions as true stories. In this section, I want to examine how Defoe was able to navigate through these questions in his early poetry and how his approach evolved in later life, especially in the *Journal of the Plague Year* whose subject matter gave him the opportunity to explore the grotesque in its various forms. The *Journal*, more than any other work, also gave him the chance to explore

[367] Rosen and Santesso 2008, 18.
[368] Richetti 2005, 308.

what actually constituted a proper representation of experience for his contemporaries. This Defoe recreated in writing he crafted so carefully that critics still occasionally debate the merits of the tale in terms of its veracity.

4.1 Allegory and Defoe's Satire

Defoe's education was very different from Dryden's, although like Dryden he did have an impressive teacher. Charles Morton's curriculum was aimed at Dissenting families and focused on English instead of the classical languages. Novak notes that "Defoe's belief in the progress of invention, which so startlingly contrasted with the pessimism of his contemporaries Swift and Pope, may have been instilled by Morton"[369] Morton also appears to have had an effect on Defoe's politics.[370] Practical knowledge of the language was deemed a much more suitable aim for his students. For some time Defoe seemed destined for the ministry, but the career never materialized and instead he became the businessman and amateur writer we know him as today. Like Dryden, Defoe is a curious character of literary history, because not much of his life is known apart from what remains in his own writing. Neither was very fond of the clergy and as Dryden's work sometimes falls under royal propaganda, so does Defoe's; Defoe's relationship with William may have not been personal, but his work for Robert Harley no doubt falls into this category. His writing is also very often about himself, the controversies he was entangled in and, like Dryden, he often lamented the ways in which his good name had been violated. As with Jonson and Nashe, Defoe's resistance to prevailing modes of literature is still appealing to modern readers. Richetti

[369] Novak 2001, 48.
[370] Cf. Novak 2001, 113, 171.

observes that since most of the political turmoil of early eighteenth-century Britain no longer stirs the passions of readers, "Defoe's poetry retains its interest for its tireless self-expressiveness and moral self-promotion and self-justification."[371] These, he says, are "partly of biographical relevance but also of key importance for the history of authorship (or literary identity and celebrity) in the early eighteenth century."[372] Defoe himself writes in the preface to a collection of his works: "Of all the Writers of this Age, I have, I am satisfied, the most Industriously avoided writing with want of temper, and I appeal to what is now Publish'd, whether there is not rather a Spirit of Healing than of Sedition runs through the whole Collection, one misunderstood Article excepted,"[373] the misunderstood article being *The Shortest Way With the Dissenters*. One need only glance at Defoe's career to realize the claim is of course completely false.

The Shortest Way With the Dissenters was published in December 1702 and it made Defoe a wanted man. For better or worse, it was the definite turning point of his career. It was intended as a parody of High Church polemics that amplified their rhetoric, that of Henry Sacheverell in particular, and to argue that, as Novak puts it, "the High Church has abandoned the very charity which is the essence of the Christian way of life."[374] Defoe's intention was to parody the flammable rhetoric of these conservative clerical antagonists and so reveal the untenable extremism of the High Church officials. Accusations of hypocrisy against the Church were to be expected from a fervent Williamite after the Whig revolution, but Defoe pushed the issue too far. William had died three months before the publication of *The Shortest Way* and the politics of the time were changing even before his death. According to Novak, "an ironic hoax like *The Shortest Way* may have missed its audience by

[371] Richetti, 2005, 65.
[372] Ibid.
[373] Ibid, 20.
[374] Novak 2001, 174.

a year."[375] The accusations against the pamphlet stated, among other things, that his use of a fictitious speaker spread harmful arguments and that it was impossible to sort out the author's sincere views from his irony. Defoe no doubt took a calculated risk in his provocative ventriloquism and when it failed, government agents who read the pamphlet as a seditious tract ordered Defoe's arrest. Defoe went into hiding and while in hiding penned a pathetic apology, "A Brief Explanation of a Late Pamphlet, entituled The Shortest Way With the Dissenters" (1703). This did not work, his printer was arrested, and a copy of the pamphlet was ordered to be burned by the common hangman. Advertisements in the *London Gazette* offered a fifty pound reward for information leading to Defoe's arrest. The government's enforcer in the case was Daniel "Dismal" Finch, Earl of Nottingham, a High Tory. Defoe wrote to him in January, pleading to be spared from banishment, but nothing worked. The embittered author was finally turned in by an informer in May of 1703. After interrogations over several days, Defoe refused to name any accomplices and was sent to Newgate Prison. He was released on a bail of 1,500 pounds in early June, convicted a month later for seditious libel and sentenced with unusual severity to stand in the pillory three times (at Cornhill near the Royal Exchange on July 29th, at Cheapside on the 30th and at Fleet Street by Temple Bar on the 31st). He was to pay a fine of 135 pounds and to be incarcerated again in Newgate until he could "find good sureties to be of good behaviour for the space of seven years from thence next ensuing And that he do not depart from thence and ... be of good behaviour with regard to our Lady the present Queen and her populace."[376] Defoe saw satire as an instrument of reform and distinguished it from libel, so the sentence must have seemed unjust.[377] However, he ignored the seven year ban of improper conduct and continued writing.

[375] Novak 1966, 406.
[376] Richetti 2005, 23.
[377] Cf. Novak 2001, 130.

The sentence made Defoe a public figure and he would refer to it constantly throughout his long career. First explicitly as a sign to the readers marking the author's identity and later, as in the *An Essay on the History and Reality of Apparitions* (1727) where Defoe repeats the story of his time in hiding from the authorities, the references are almost habitual. The harsh punishment was probably administered so that Defoe would reveal his accomplices. Instead, Defoe executed a brilliant pre-emptive strike and wrote *A Hymn to the Pillory* (1703). In a defiant gesture, Defoe lists people who should be in the pillory instead of him in the poem, and so dramatizes himself as a martyr of conscience. The poem was peddled in the streets adjacent to the pillory alongside the original pamphlet and recited by ballad-singers to the crowds. In a very unlikely turn of events, the crowds did not pelt him with rocks, rotten eggs and vegetables, but with flowers. Or so the story goes. Tory pamphleteers claimed the Whigs had hired a mob to protect Defoe. In any case, this temporary reversal of fortunes was a remarkable feat as "no man in England but Defoe ever stood in the pillory and later rose to eminence among his fellow men."[378] People understandably tended to disappear from the public eye after the humiliation of the pillory, but Defoe managed to retain some semblance of dignity. The unlikely triumph signals the beginning of his career as a writer, but *The Shortest Way* would always remain a stain on Defoe's character. And it did cost him dearly. He went bankrupt and had to spend a number of months in Newgate. The effect of the pamphlet on Defoe's career is interesting for a number of reasons, but especially because the character presented in it was one-dimensional and only a crude sketch when one compares him to, say, Swift's well-meaning monster in *A Modest Proposal*. Pope, says Novak, would still depict Defoe in the pillory after twenty-five years and, in what is a clear understatement, that "Defoe helped to contribute to this image in some ways."[379] In the *Hymn to the Pillory* he mocks the government's punishment of those who engage in what Novak calls "creative

[378] Richetti 2005, 25. The quote is J. R. Moore's.
[379] Novak 2001, 191.

criticism"[380] merely by assuming the voice of the satirist whose strength has overpowered those who have been reduced to using brute force against him. In other words, he absorbs the blame entirely by speaking as the satirist and the honest critic of the injustices perpetrated against him. This challenged the mob to read his pamphlet, the poem and Defoe's predicament in a way that eventually won them over. It was another conscious risk, but this time it worked. As Novak puts it, "Defoe transformed himself into an icon: the author as transgressor who, through that transgression, would be better equipped to hold up a mirror to society and reveal its sins."[381] Not only did he win over the crowd, he won a powerful patron and protector in Harley.

Richetti observes that in his early poems "Defoe turns over and over again to his favourite subject—himself."[382] After *The Shortest Way* controversy and defending himself against his enemies in print, Defoe's obsession with himself should not be too surprising. The story of *The Shortest Way* is well-known and needs little explanation. Another early poem that tends to receive less critical attention, *The Dyet of Poland* (1705), shows clearly how Defoe used his new public persona for humor, satire and criticism. The poem about Polish affairs obviously reflected those of the English parliament. The intended audience of the poem were witty, urbane Londoners, and although Defoe had had his troubles with the authorities just a year or two earlier, his bold satire was no doubt directed by his reliance on their wit. Novak writes of the poem: "In some sense, this is the beginning of a bantering relationship between Defoe and his audience—a relationship that involved an expectation that though a work was unsigned, Defoe's hand would still be recognized."[383] Defoe also took great care in crafting the satire and had high hopes for it. Whatever Defoe's faults, he had learned from the pillory that the most important skill of any rhetorician is his ability to gauge an audience and he drew

[380] Ibid.
[381] Ibid, 201.
[382] Richetti 2005, 69.
[383] Novak 2003, 263.

on his already significant experience as a public author to maximize the impact of the poem. As a result, the amplification he uses in the preface and the poem itself is strong enough to help him avoid accusations of the kind he was subjected to in the controversy of *The Shortest Way*. One may compare it to Samuel Garth's *The Dispensary* where the author reasonably argues:

> If the *Satyr* may appear directed at any particular Person, 'tis as such only as are presum'd to be engaged in Dishonourable Confederacies for mean and mercenary Ends, against the Dignity of their own Profession. But if there be no such, then these Characters are but imaginary, and by consequence ought to give no Body Offence.[384]

Garth puckishly apologizes for any offense given to those who do not deserve it and directs the satire against those who do. In *The Dyet of Poland* Defoe amplifies this defense by insisting he does not intend to refer to any actual persons at all. The negation is humorous in its transparent falsity, although not everyone appreciated the joke. The apology would have not shielded Defoe from accusations of libel or a Tory counter-attack, but Harley's protection and perhaps the fact that the poem was not as successful as Defoe had hoped meant Defoe, presumably still under the restrictions of his previous sentence, was left unscathed.

The poem itself is not very clever, but the preface and its manipulation of the name of the author are amusing. The author, called Anglipoloski of Lithuania by Defoe, adopts a disguise not unlike Nashe's authors. Defoe, writing in the pompous garb of the victimized author, negates his identity in a way that leaves no question about the identity of the actual author. The poem also shows, among other things, that the problem of allegorical interpretation was ripe for satire. In the poem, Defoe taunts the reader with a series of thinly veiled allusions posing as an author who denies being Daniel Defoe and denies the poem has anything to do with satire—despite the fact that the title page features the word "Satyr" in large capital

[384] Garth 1703, unpaginated.

letters. The allusions in the poem itself draw attention to the transparent allegory and as such mock the critical reader who wants to fix meaning to the text through interpretation. In fact, calling the device allegory is perhaps an exaggeration as the poem has little art to it and contemporary readers would have been able to connect the references with even less effort. Indeed, one can call the crude device a mere string of analogies that are easily filled in by the reader. The analogies that hold together the allegory, such as it is, diminish its figurality compared to an allegory composed as an extended metaphor. That is, if one thinks of allegory in terms of formal and referential properties, Defoe's is fully referential and in some sense deliberately empties itself of figurality. The negation of referentiality, which Defoe stresses to absurd lengths in the preface, fixes the fact in the reader's mind that the allegory should be read as fully referential. Allegory as form is thus emptied of its need for interpretation, its figurative nature. Once again, the effect is achieved through amplification, a conscious saturation of referentiality that dispenses with the reader's need for active interpretation.

Defoe is able to assign a reading to the allegory by creating a fictional author whose negations can be read as a transparent ironic device. This Defoe had no doubt learned from earlier satirists who regularly used transparent disguises. Anglipoloski warns critics and readers against misreading his poem, about Polish affairs in appearance only, by stating explicitly that any resemblance between the text and actual persons is either accidental or the result of overinterpretation. This is of course a bluff on Defoe's part for as he denies any allegorical interpretation, he in fact suggests the text be read in allegorical fashion. If there ever were any doubts in the reader's mind that parallels to contemporary England should and must be drawn in the process of interpreting the poem, the preface would surely silence them. If there was any doubt about the identity of the actual author of the poem, the fact that Anglipoloski says he will remain indifferent if people point to "the famous name of Daniel

Defoe"[385] and accuse him of authorship dissolves the mystery. In his preface to the poem, Defoe, tongue firmly in cheek, says he is glad to be out of the reach of Polish authorities, but that he, as the author, cannot avoid interpretations that generalize the faults of the Polish diet into those of any other nation. Styling himself a heroic author, he says he is determined to publish nonetheless, believing it to be one of the perils any author must face. "Censures" and "innuendo-men," he says, are forever searching for oblique meaning in texts, even when they are to be read innocently and not as satires. He plays with the sensibilities of his audience by denying the satirical nature of the poem and in so doing makes a mockery of the interpretation of satire itself. Readings which generalize or allegorize satirical texts are thus beautifully ridiculed in the very genre that specifically demands a certain kind of allegorical interpretation.

On the surface, Defoe says he wants to be understood "as he speaks, not as every prejudiced man may imagine he meant." Nevertheless, he provides a key to the poem as he denies an allegorical reading. The device of the thinly veiled reference also points to the conventions of Renaissance theater. Much like Jonson in his preface to *Volpone*, the author demands proof for any accusations. The comparison is informative. In his defense of the author in *Volpone*, Jonson, emboldened by the success of the play, anticipates a common objection to the effect that in praising the poet's duties he is merely citing ancient ideals and contemporary scribblers retain but the name of poet, not their earlier refinement or good judgment. He concedes that unfortunately this applies to a great many of his peers, but adds a qualifier to strengthen his argument. Jonson excludes himself from the company of immoral hack writers and challenges anyone claiming the opposite to prove their point and to demonstrate "what nation, society or general order of state, I have provoked? What public

[385] Defoe 1705. The brief preface is unpaginated and hence I will leave out page numbers from the citations.

person?"[386] Of his works, he says: "[L]ook into them, what broad reproofs have I used? where have I been particular? where personal? except to a mimic, cheater, bawd, or buffoon, creatures, for their insolencies, worthy to be taxed?"[387] Defoe, referring to himself in the third person, parodies the conventional defense and makes it into an ironic denial of responsibility: "If 'tis alleged that there is too great an affinity in the Story, he answers: if that be true, he is sorry for it; but at the same time he hopes not, and the matter of fact ought to be proved, before he stands censured for calumny." Of course, there is little need for such proof as it is of little use to prove that which is obvious. Rather, this is a call to draw the parallels and make them explicit. After a brief lament on the misguided impulse of contemporary readers to interpret descriptions of specific places as more general representations of various others, Defoe hastily moves to dislodge the burden of proof he has placed on his readers. He addresses the callous reader "that can swear to a man's meaning, and knows his inside without the help of his outside" and states that because his intention was not to libel, the libelous qualities of the poem, if found, must have been placed there by the reader: "In the writing 'tis a poem you, in the reading turn it into libel, and you merit the punishment for the metamorphosis." Like Jonson, he reprimands the overzealous constructionist, but unlike in Jonson's defense this is presented in a satirical voice, in character, and in a transparent Nashean disguise.

Some did, rather foolishly, criticize Defoe's poem. Perhaps the boldest of these critiques is *The Dyet of Poland Reconsider'd Paragraph by Paragraph* (1705), probably written by William Pittis, a Tory pamphleteer. Pittis had written a similar paragraph-by-paragraph refutation of Defoe's *True-Born Englishman* and had already written a critique of *The Dyet of Poland* in the fifth edition of the *Whipping Post*. The short-lived journal mimicked Defoe's *Review* by establishing a fictional court of law for contemporary writers and periodicals.

[386] Jonson 1870, 334.
[387] Ibid.

Defoe was a multiple offender and was brought before the court for the *Dyet* as well. As the author is being led away, a gentleman of the court stops him and demands an explanation "in relation to the sense of some expressions contain'd in the aforementioned poem."[388] The exchange that follows unfolds like Jonson's defense. The author says that "what he had done was by a poetical authority, that men of his profession were invested with a license for so doing, and that Virgil and the rest of the ancients abounded with examples to that purpose."[389] In short, the author defends himself by citing precedent in the laudable poets of antiquity. The reply states that "there was a mighty distinction as well between their characters, as the economy they liv'd under."[390] Further, the religion of the heathen writers supposed that men could be deified into gods and "apt to suppose they continued the substance and shapes they wore upon Earth."[391] The rebuttal echoes Dryden's problematic attitude toward the mechanisms of the incompatible cosmologies of the ancients and moderns and shows the restriction on mythological allegories in action. In any case, a Jonsonian rebuttal, an appeal to show where he has offended his accusers, would in this case be of little use in its original form as a defense.

In *The Dyet of Poland Reconsider'd*, the author simply fills in the references Defoe provides and names names in doing so. The author uses the conventional dashes to shield the identities from ignorant readers, but these only underline the absurdity of the exercise and are in fact completely redundant. He names Defoe, the relevant politicians, royals, countries and places, historical events, texts and other sources of the satire's material. He criticizes the inconsistency and internal logic of the verse, its invective, factual errors, its "sham-moderation"[392] and of course Defoe's arrogance and lack of learning. Martin Marprelate

[388] Cf. Pittis 1705b, 18.
[389] Ibid.
[390] Ibid.
[391] Ibid.
[392] Pittis 1705a, 57.

would have been ecstatic to debate such an opponent since, among his many faults, the author seems to be oblivious to the uses of paralipsis in satire. When Defoe refers to one of his targets as someone "below lampoon," he asks: "[I]f he is below lampoon, why does the poet take such pains to expose him?"[393] He seems equally oblivious to Defoe's chosen rhetorical strategy: "Prethee Daniel leave off this way of writing, or you'll bring in satire so often, that your writings will be a satire upon yourself at last."[394] The *Whipping Post* reports in its July 24 edition that the author of *The Dyet of Poland Reconsider'd* found himself in trouble soon after publication, and Pittis himself faced the pillory a year later.[395] One could argue that connecting the dots of the allegory and criticizing Defoe's satire indeed amounts to satire, precisely because of the allegorical transparency of the original. As a defense mechanism against critics, then, Defoe's trap is ingenious. The facts of the case are not all that clear, but if he designed his poem to produce this effect and so contributed to Pittis's fall from grace by provoking him to present a gullible counter-argument against *The Dyet of Poland*, Defoe's rhetorical skills were even greater than he has been given credit for. The balancing act that was required to escape accusations of libel in *The Dyet of Poland* was impressive, but to place blame on his critics fresh out of the pillory by springing an elaborate rhetorical trap of this sort was a satirical masterpiece.

If, as Defoe (or Anglipoloski) speculates, all his metaphors can be exploded and then reconstructed to suggest a certain allegorical interpretation, any such interpretation must be an arbitrary attack and thus not the true interpretation of the text. In other words, the issue mocked in the poem is not actual proof of an allegorical design behind the surface of the text as in Jonson's defense, but the immorality of the reader who misconstrues meaning. Defoe takes advantage of relativized interpretation and simultaneously undermines any

[393] Ibid, 52.
[394] Ibid, 58.
[395] Cf. Newton 1935, 175.

controversial interpretation by mocking the clever critic or reader who might take offence at the transparent but negated allegory. Proof of an allegorical design may be found (in fact, proof *will* be found if one only reads the poem), but the blame is now more exclusively on the reader who has little choice in the matter and thus anyone who makes an effort to map out the obvious connections of the transparent allegory can be said to engage in some form of libel. The risk was of course that in order to ensnare one fool in his trap Defoe had to rely on the collective good will of his readers and their correct interpretation of the transparent interpretative device. Naturally, Defoe's trap could not have been set for a Renaissance audience and it could only function as it did at the turn of the eighteenth century. In contrast to Nashe, in Defoe's preface one can observe a fully developed satirical character that is founded on an understanding between the author and his audience much like the one that enabled the success of *A Hymn to the Pillory*.

Defoe's rhetorical trickery seems to support the notion that a fundamental change in the uses of allegory occurred in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. This view is reinforced when one compares Defoe to some of his Renaissance predecessors. Defoe's use of transparent allegory in *The Dyet of Poland* produces not only a hollowed-out allegorical poem. Its blatantly obvious references are no doubt a mischievous nod to the old conventions of the genre. It is from the start an intentional saturation of reference in an allegorical genre whose use had become unwarranted. Its ironic counterpart was tolerated nonetheless and in Defoe's hands the use of the device seems tame compared to, say, Swift or even Dryden himself. However, one also has to bear in mind that Defoe had already suffered a punishment for a similar text and such antics, one assumes, were to be expected of him. As he got older, he continued writing satire and expanding his powers of amplification. At times, he ventured into the grotesque and took advantage of the changes in the philosophy of the age in a very different way from Dryden. The best example of this can be found in his plague writing, an

already grotesque genre whose horrific descriptions of disease and death often overshadow more subtle expressions of distress. Defoe's target in the *Journal* was the epistemology of empirical philosophy. He would pit two approaches, traditional medicine and the new empiricists, against each other. The work popularized some of the most important learned debates of the age and provides some insight into Defoe's mind. It can also teach modern readers something about the minds of Defoe's audience.

4.2 A Journal of the Plague Year

There is a dark air of mockery present in the *Journal* in the form of a chaotic, senseless and meaningless world. When one begins tracing the sources of Defoe's bleak humor, one finds that much of it stems from his reaction to the changing nature of science and medicine in the eighteenth century. Defoe's writings on the Great Plague of London were composed during a time when natural philosophy was rapidly transforming English society. The period between the plague of 1665 and Defoe's plague writing in the 1720s saw the first great leaps in science, but Defoe's work emerges during a transitional phase, at a time when old doctrines were beginning to show signs of fatigue and attitudes toward empirical medicine still retained some of their past skepticism. Martin Jay notes that "[i]n fields such as medicine, the effects of non-dogmatic flexibility and a willingness to experiment, so long associated with quackery, began to produce salutary benefits by the 1750s."[396] Although empiricist approaches were gaining ground and building doctrine in opposition to traditional humoral medicine, traces of an epistemological confusion remain in Defoe's account of the Plague.

[396] Jay 2004, 44.

Defoe, "a master of the ineffable and, for all his realism, of the sublime,"[397] raises this confusion to terrifying heights in the *Journal*. Defoe was of course much older and by now an old hand in all forms of controversial literature. Some of his own experiences with the disease no doubt appear in the story, although to what extent this is the case is still an open question. Some of his more abstract concerns, however, can be seen quite clearly in the famous hallucinatory episode on which I will focus here and which I shall read as emblematic of the broader project of the *Journal*. Defoe's chosen persona, this time a quasi-fictitious character, requires some unpacking, but examining him in detail reveals a great deal about how the author's function was seen from Defoe's Whiggish perspective. The *Journal* was offered to the public as a true story, as was often the case with Defoe's novels. However, the *Journal*'s biography is exceptional in the care Defoe took to construct an accurate representation of an authentic subjective experience. His aim was to fool the masses, not single readers like Pittis. Defoe went to great lengths to convince his audience and despite the fact that criticism has found him out, the novel is useful in examining what made readers assume his story was truly the experience of a single Londoner living during the time of the Great Plague. Perhaps the strangest aspect of the work is that even though it is fiction, many still think of it as the best and most accurate description of the Great Plague ever written.

In 1720, news of an outbreak of the plague in Marseilles reached England. The threat of the plague was always present to some degree and the fears of Defoe's contemporaries were justified by a string of previous epidemics. Keith Thomas points out that "[i]n the hundred and fifty years before the great visitation of 1665 there were only a dozen years when London was free from plague."[398] Five major outbreaks had occurred in the hundred or so years leading to the Great Plague: in 1563, 1593, 1603, 1625 and 1636. Each major epidemic gained the epithet *Great* and their death toll ranged from about 10,000 to over 68,000 in

[397] Novak 2001, 605.
[398] Thomas 1973, 8.

1665.[399] London escaped further major plagues, but it was not until the Hong Kong epidemic of 1894 that the *Yersinia pestis* bacterium was finally discovered. Until then the causes of the plague remained a mystery and the source of much speculation among medical professionals and laymen alike.[400] Always a prolific writer, Defoe reacted to the threat of a new epidemic by publishing two books on the subject in 1722: *Due Preparations for the Plague* and *A Journal of the Plague Year*. The former is a suggested plan of action for future epidemics which incorporates a number of dramatized case studies, while the latter focuses on the single case of a London saddler Defoe calls H.F., a protagonist probably modeled after Defoe's uncle Henry Foe. The *Journal* is presented as a narrative based on his diary, but it is ambiguous in terms of genre. Past commentators have been of the opinion that "there is not a single essential statement in the *Journal* not based on historic fact" and that "[e]ven the stories ascribed to Defoe's invention have their origins in real contemporaneous events."[401] Today, it is generally recognized that the work should be read as historical fiction. Labeling the work fiction, however, does not rob the *Journal* of its factual basis. It tells the modern reader that if one is to look for specific facts concerning the Plague, the *Journal* is not an entirely reliable source. The *Journal* presents H.F. as the model skeptic who maintains a cool head by mocking the ignorant who hasten their demise by needlessly and harmfully agitating their minds during the epidemic. It is informed mockery that teaches readers about a particular type of skepticism whose principles were derived from contemporary medical writing. As London descends into chaos, Defoe's alter ego is the sarcastic rock on which the reader can lean.

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[399] Moote and Moote 2004, 10. The actual figures for the 1665 epidemic are difficult to verify. Moote and Moote say that "the official tallying at the end of 1665 had counted 97,306 burials for the year, of which 68,596 were listed as plague. The actual toll from all causes was at least 110,000. Thousands of unidentified bodies lay in plague pits, and hundreds more were buried without official records, among them religious dissenters" (259).
[400] For a brief description of the events leading to the discovery of *Y. Pestis*, see Moote and Moote 2004, 270–284.
[401] Nicholson 1919, 3.

The oppressive and claustrophobic atmosphere of the infected city, so vividly recreated by Camus much later, is relentlessly bleak and nowhere does one find the light touches of everyday life found in, say, Pepys's diary. Whatever humor can be derived from it is not purgative or cathartic in nature but rather functions as a didactic device. Defoe's mockery of empiricists and quacks was in some ways a public service, a satiric cold shower for the overheated imaginations of his fellow Londoners whose mental distress facilitated contagion, according to the best medical advice of the time. His strategy of equivocation has proven very successful over the years. In terms of plague writing in general, Defoe's lively treatment of the facts is not exceptional. Certain stock characters, anecdotes, expressions and arguments are repeated and recycled in much of plague writing and these are quite often traceable to certain literary sources. Ernest B. Gilman argues that "[d]escriptions of epidemics and even 'firsthand' accounts may be indebted more directly to stories of the same kind than to immediate (and unmediated) experience."[402] This is certainly true of Defoe's story, because although he must have had some first hand knowledge of the disease he was only five years old at the time of the Great Plague. Whatever generic difficulties remain, Defoe nevertheless conducted extensive research to create a very convincing appearance of a factual narrative. That is, even though the story is now read as transparently fictitious, it nevertheless commands a certain degree of respect as a true story about the Plague. For some reason Defoe aligned himself with traditional medicine and hence against the supposed epistemological oddities of empiricists. It is difficult to determine whether Defoe's choice to follow the humorists was made on principle or merely the accidental influence of the specific medical treatises included in his research. However, it can be shown that a critical approach to empirical medicine was inherent in the rhetoric of old and recently republished plague tracts Defoe must have used as his sources.

[402] Gilman 2009, 38.

Andrew Wear claims that "medical writers, although they recognized and helped to spread abroad the fear and horror that the public had of plague, at the same time offered hope to the same public that plague could be cured and provided them with advice."[403] This, according to Wear, was a means of preserving social order and also part of a humanitarian effort, a reassuring sign that there was hope of a cure. Defoe's books were at least to some extent written with the aim of tempering the imaginations of the citizens of London in order to counter the detrimental effect that fear, according to contemporary physicians, had on the spread of the epidemic. His own approach to specific causes and treatments in the *Journal* is inconsistent, partly due to the fact that creating a historically accurate narrative would have required presenting redundant medical advice and this, in turn, would have interfered with the civic aims of the book. One of these apparent inconsistencies for the modern reader is his reliance on detailed empirical observations while he simultaneously recommends traditional humoral treatments, at times even against the advice of physicians who practiced humoral medicine.[404]

Defoe was among those who resisted the idea that the Plague was directly caused by divine forces. He was in agreement with physicians who thought that while the disease was indeed an act of God, the plague was also a natural phenomenon. Defoe called it "a distemper eminently armed from Heaven."[405] The characteristically Protestant rejection of supernatural explanations was a growing emphasis in medical writing from 1665 onwards, establishing the border between religion and medicine, but approaches to the interposition of natural philosophy between the divine will and nature varied.[406] The explicit target of Defoe's

[403] Wear 2000, 276.
[404] This perhaps tells more of the rise of Robert Boyle and the more empirically-minded virtuosi of the Royal Society during the period between the Plague and the publication of the *Journal* than Defoe's lack of medical insight, but critics do generally point out that Defoe was out of his depth. A favorite point of argument is his use of the term "phlegmatic hypochondriac" (1972, 19) which was a sure sign of Defoe's ignorance for his many opponents, including Swift and Pope.
[405] Defoe 1972, 36.
[406] Cf. Wear 2000, 291–2.

criticism was the vulgar manner in which those who claimed to be in possession of truths that straddled heaven and earth constructed their experience into grotesque knowledge. The satirical rhetoric he employed in this task, in turn, is clearly indebted to the ways in which traditional medicine criticized the avant-garde epistemology of empiricists. It is fair to say that Defoe's opportunistic but civic-minded books present a layman's reaction to the tensions between new empiricist medicine and traditional Galenic or humoral doctrines which escalated during the plague year. The College of Physicians had always looked down on the empirical approaches of their colleagues, but during the Plague the hierarchies between licensed medical practitioners and quacks became blurred as all seemed equally helpless to prevent or treat the spreading disease.[407] During and shortly after the Plague, debates between the two very different approaches to medicine came to a head in a pamphlet war. The Marseilles plague made their arguments, theories and disagreements topical again and publishers were quick to notice this. For example, Nathaniel Hodges's *Loimologia* (1665), one of Defoe's main sources, was published in English translation in 1720 with a new essay on disease prevention by John Quincy. The empiricist side included George Thomson, a skilful polemicist who gained fame early in his career with his bold experiments and notoriety after the Plague by publishing a detailed anatomical study of a plague victim. These pamphlets and treatises provided Defoe with the ammunition for his attacks on quacks and conmen who sought to profit from the fear caused by the epidemic.

Eminent plague doctors such as Hodges and Richard Mead agree that fear and panic reduce the body's capacity to resist disease and warn against spreading fear among the populace. Arguing against unnecessary quarantines in his 1720 treatise, Mead says: "If *Fear*, *Despair*, and all *Dejection of Spirits* dispose the Body to receive *Contagion*, and give it a

[407] Moote and Moote note that "[l]icensed practitioners connected to the three professional organizations numbered around 250, all of them men; an additional 250 persons, including 60 women, may have offered similar therapies without a license" (2004, 100). Cf. Thomas 1973, 11–17.

great Power, where it is received, as all Physicians agree they do, I don't see how a Disease can be more enforced, than by such a Treatment."[408] Defoe followed the advice of the medical men and took it as his task to show the horrors of enforced quarantines or "the shutting up of houses" in the *Journal*. He also illustrates the collective madness engendered in the public by fear. In the *Loimologia*, Hodges writes: "[S]ome pretend to be so sharp-sighted, as to discern Clouds in the Atmosphere big with Pestilential Poysons, and other such Conceits of a distempered Imagination, that are chiefly the Products of Fear, which construes every Thing for the worst."[409] In effect, what the physicians and Defoe suggest is a healthy, and health-inducing, skepticism against those who sought to gain from the fears of their fellow citizens and so place them in danger. The overheated imagination that can strike a person dead with the very thought of contagion is a common figure in plague writing and examples of such cases are mentioned by Defoe as well, but Defoe's most striking illustration in the *Journal* takes the form of a description of a mass hallucination.

Defoe tells of a general air of melancholy in the city that was made worse by "Astrological Conjurations, Dreams, and old Wives Tales"[410] which catered to the fear of the coming disaster. Rather disingenuously, Defoe remarks that people seemed addicted to them, "from what Principle I cannot imagine."[411] As he must have been aware, he was playing to similar fears in his books. While Defoe was more open to the possibility of apparitions than most and discussed the subject extensively elsewhere, ghosts and angels carrying the plague were to him signs of madness rather than transcendent knowledge. As literary devices, however, such supernatural excesses were in the eighteenth century seen as an acceptable way of creating what Jack Lynch calls "the fear requisite to a sublime psychology."[412] In Defoe's story,

[408] Mead 1720, 34.
[409] Hodges 1720, 35.
[410] Defoe 1972, 21.
[411] Ibid.
[412] Lynch 2003, 39.

imaginations are primed for speculation by comets before the Plague strikes. Of the two comets, the second of which appeared before the Great Fire, the protagonist says that he was, like most, prone to believe that they were indeed signs of future calamities, but his skepticism protected him against joining the ranks of the superstitious. He reports that he was willing to consider them signs, but also recognized his own alarming willingness to conform to the apocalyptic enthusiasm of those who reasoned from them that all hope was lost. When he cannot see an actual object in the sky, he refuses to take part in the delusional description of what he suspects is a nonentity or enter into debate about the meaning of the sign:

> One time before the Plague was begun, (otherwise than as I have said in St. *Giles's*,) I think it was in *March*, seeing a Crowd of People in the Street, I join'd with them to satisfy my Curiosity, and found them all staring up into the Air, to see what a Woman told them appeared plain to her, which was an Angel cloth'd in white, with a fiery Sword in his Hand, waving it, or brandishing it over his Head. She described every Part of the Figure to the Life; shew'd them the Motion, and the Form; and the poor People came into it so eagerly, and with so much Readiness: YES, *I see it plainly*, says one. *There's the Sword as plain as can be*. Another saw the Angel. One saw his very Face, and cry'd out, What a glorious Creature he was! One saw one thing, and one another. I look'd as earnestly as the rest, but, perhaps, not with so much Willingness to be impos'd upon; and I said indeed, that *I could see nothing*, but a white Cloud, bright on one Side, by the shining of the Sun upon the other Part. The Woman endeavour'd to shew it me, but could not make me confess, that I saw it, which, indeed, if I had, I must have lied: But the woman turning upon me, look'd in my Face, and fancied I laugh'd; in which her Imagination deceiv'd her too; for I really did not laugh, but was very seriously reflecting how the poor People were terrify'd, by the Force of their own Imagination. However, she turned from me, call'd me prophane Fellow, and a Scoffer; told me, that it was a time of God's Anger, and dreadful Judgments were approaching; and that Despisers, such as I, should *wander and perish*.[413]

The way Defoe describes the hallucinations suffered by the frightened Londoners makes it clear that these ghosts and angels are not the protective votive figures of normal plague imagery, but malicious unnatural forces that harass and terrorize their gullible victims.[414] The

[413] Defoe 1972, 23.

[414] Images of the plague have been traditionally read as attempts to understand and control one's fate against the threat of the plague. See, for example, Marshall 1994, 485–532. See also Barker 2004, 659–689. Gilman views the difference between Italian and English traditions in imagery as an iconoclastic break in the conceptualization

ghosts and signs of the *Journal* are linguistic creations crafted either by fraudulent astrologers and the like or by people terrorized by their own imaginations. The supernatural angel comes into being through the combined impressions of the crowd, each describing a different part or aspect, and the finished image is born through a process where each individual impression circuitously validates another. In other words, it is reasoned into existence through a kind of perverse inductive method which is taken to absurd lengths until it seems as if the figure is fashioned into existence from mere words. The scene and the appalled reaction of the protagonist thus criticize the epistemological madness and mob mentality through which such images are allowed to manifest. The protagonist is an outsider who forces the public to examine itself through the eyes of the only sane man in the crowd.

There are several elements in the scene that warrant further study. Two of these, the role of the sublime and the ability to summon images in the mind which Defoe might have borrowed from a number of sources, including the Cambridge Platonists, are discussed below. The third which should be noted here is the influence of Defoe's reading in medical writing concerning the plague. The avenging angel brandishing a sword is of course a biblical image, perhaps even banal in this context, and it also appears both in sermons and the much maligned astrological almanacs of the time. With regard to the comet mentioned in the episode, Defoe had the advantage of being able to refer to Quincy's *Of the Different Causes of Pestilential Diseases* attached to the *Loimologia* which mentions Newton, who "taught Men to think justly, and talk intelligibly about the Motions and Influences of those remote Bodies upon our *Atmosphere*."[415] In this respect, Defoe's protagonist is clearly more modern than his attackers. The episode is also a comment on Hodges's concerns over conjurers "who frighten the credulous Populace with the Apprehensions of an approaching Plague, by idle

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of the nature of the disease: "Scripture [in England], rather than any intervening pictorial tradition, offers the proof text for an understanding of plague history, and scripture teaches that God uses the plague as a means of inscribing his judgment on the sinful" (2009, 73).

[415] Hodges 1720, 233.

and groundless Reports and Predictions."[416] Hodges's argument is of course concerned with medicine and motivated by fears that such predictions and false omens will exacerbate the epidemic. In lieu of medical advice, Defoe paints a satirical picture that shows what happens when such advice is not heeded and imaginations are allowed to run wild.

Quincy's preface to the *Loimologia* warns that Hodges is rather old-fashioned in his style and approach. In his addendum, Quincy himself shows an analytic approach to earlier plague writing which he divides into two categories: "Such as ascribe [causes] to the immediate Wrath of Heaven, and account them as Punishments inflicted by the immediate Exertion of a Supernatural Power; and such as assign for their Origin some natural Cause."[417] The doctors mentioned above are all more or less in the latter category as they all say, with qualifications against atheism, that in order to discover a cure one will have to focus on secondary causes without assuming an immediate or direct divine cause. In fact, Quincy believes it unworthy of God to exert His will directly on His creation. Rather, he says, theories of the first kind were born either out of ignorance or "out of an affected Devotion."[418] Self-styled prophets who claimed God enacted vengeance directly "thought it their Interest to come into this Opinion, and pretend to do greater Cures by certain religious Performances, and their Intercessions with Heaven."[419] Hodges himself says that those who frighten the populace with imaginary threats should be deemed "as a kind of Traitors."[420] Defoe's illustration ironically reverses Hodges's advice and makes the protagonist the heretical accidental iconoclast. He extends accusations of panic-inducing rhetoric to doomsayers of all persuasions who gather people around them "in a kind of horror."[421] The form of the disturbing inductive method presented by Defoe can also be traced to Galenist arguments

[416] Ibid, 206.
[417] Ibid, 232.
[418] Ibid, 233.
[419] Ibid.
[420] Ibid, 206.
[421] Defoe 1972, 25.

against empirical medicine, but as these arguments were part of a larger debate, it is informative to examine them in the light of the kinds of arguments they were intended to counter. This brief digression will also shed more light on how Defoe approached experience as a concept in fabricating the story of H.F.

George Thomson was a chemical physician who followed the empiricist teachings of the Flemish chemist and physician Jan Baptist van Helmont. Thomson had a gift for polemical writing and used it to attack the Galenists who, by virtue of their position, were able to resist empirical advances in medical science. His pamphlet *Galeno-Pale* attacks their humoral doctrines by claiming that the Galenists' advocacy of a redundant body of ancient knowledge is absurd and harmful to their patients. He defends the principles of the chemical physicians and attacks "Pseudochymists"[422] and "Galeno-Chymists,"[423] Galenists who pretend to practice the art of the chemical physician with Galenic principles and whom Thomson calls "as monstrous and Anomalous as a Centaure or Syren."[424] He is especially against Galenist purgatives and bleeding. These methods, he says, are based on too rigid a reliance on principles and superstitions which do not take into account the needs of the individual patient. A cure suitable for one may have adverse effects on another or even cost him his life: "'Tis a sad thing to behold a young man in the flower of his years ... to be thus *Methodized* into his Grave, by them that pretend to be such grave learned Doctors."[425] Thomson operates on his chosen target by dissociating the false and ludicrous Galenic method from more useful methods and principles:

> [W]e may justly censure this *Galenical* Method, as the word *Methodus* signifies, according to another interpretation, *Fictio*, or *Ludificatio*; a meer *Imposture* or *Cheat*. Had not a man better either to trust to *God* and *Nature*, or, if he can be

[422] Thomson 1665a, 107.
[423] Ibid, 19.
[424] Ibid.
[425] Ibid, 94.

> procured, make use of some *honest, plain* Physician, who without any deceit or pompous Preludium, shall fall to his work of curing you.[426]

The vanity of Galenic physicians is for Thomson a sign of their false learning and incompetence. In fact, Thomson argues, much of their learning is empty rhetoric and as it is not based on concrete experience or medical field-work it is pseudolearning that arranges knowledge gleaned from experience in a way that undermines itself. He is also very defensive of his preferred discipline, once again stating that combining it with the epistemology of humorist medicine only produces yet more grotesque knowledge.

Thomson continues his rhetorical attack in another pamphlet with what Gilman rightly calls a "Spenserian extravagance"[427] by making the metaphor of the Galenist corrupt body of knowledge even more explicit. He claims to have "ripped up, and sufficiently anatomized, *usque ad Sceleton*, (so far as a short Treatise would permit) the huge deformed bulk of the monstrous, mutilated Galenical body."[428] He continues by saying it was "high time for such an unweildly, lazie, cumbersome, good-for-little, voracious, *animal Sarcophagum*, *Cruorem consumere natum*, a devourer of more then *Bel* and the *Dragon*, having surfeited himself with bloud and humours, should now expire and breathe out his last, and become food for the birds of darkness."[429] His own plain-speaking approach to medicine he calls, in yet another tract, "*Practical*, no idle *Dogmatical Fancy* of a *Non Ens*" and says he has "here laid open what I visibly and experimentally have found to be true, what I have handled with these hands, and seen with these eyes."[430] In short, Thomson's medical iconoclasm is a powerful attack against the corrupt body of knowledge on which Galenist medicine relies and his fearsome skeptical rhetoric hits at the very heart of received doctrine.

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[426] Ibid.
[427] Gilman 2009, 118.
[428] Thomson 1665b, 12.
[429] Ibid. Quoted in Gilman 2009, 118.
[430] Thomson 1666, ("The Epistle Dedicatory," unpaginated).

The Galenist response argued that it was actually the empiricists' approach that was irresponsible and produced grotesque knowledge by relying too much on experience without any principles to guide it. In his *Vindiciae Medicinae et Medicorum*, Hodges attacks the "Emperick" he defines as a person who "*without consideration of any rational Method undertakes to cure Diseases*."[431] The lack of a method or sound principles is, according to Hodges, a considerable risk because without a proper method of organizing knowledge gathered from experience, there is no way of addressing medical problems in an ordered, rational fashion. Indeed, argues Hodges, an empiricist of this sort proceeds blindly from case to case and cannot therefore fix on a principled approach in his practice. Although both Hodges and Thomson base their arguments on experience, according to Hodges experience alone does not authorize a given response to a medical problem nor does it qualify a physician to act as a medical professional. Instead, he says, "[t]*rue experience is constituted of Reason and Sense*."[432] True experience, dissociated from raw experience, leads to theorems which in turn lead to "*Universal conceptions*"[433] which in turn verify experience and contribute to a coherent body of knowledge instead of an unwieldy collection of facts. If these maxims of medicine are not allowed to guide experience, it leads to "*Molas*-like, *unshapen*, and *monstrous Births*,"[434] or unorganized knowledge that puts patients at risk. Furthermore, Hodges argues, any reformation of medicine that relies on this grotesque knowledge and rejects the principles of established Galenic medicine can only be a "pretended *Reformation in Physick*."[435] That is, he thinks the empiricists' calls for reform are unfounded as they are not principled, or do not arise from the approved methods of licensed

[431] Hodges 1665, 3.
[432] Ibid, 4.
[433] Ibid.
[434] Ibid, 5.
[435] Ibid, 6.

practitioners. The broad epistemological claim also delivers a covert accusation of political radicalism.[436]

Hodges is of the opinion that all such "*monstrous Births* should immediately be *destroyed*."[437] A harmonious doctrine cannot, for him, be assembled without guiding rational principles and hence the end result must be grotesque by its very design, or "*monstrous products* of the *Brain.*"[438] If this were allowed, the empiricists could form absurd cause and effect pairings or treat the smallest afflictions as major diseases. In fact, their doctrine would not be any better than the fanciful notions that guide the star gazers who predict misfortunes from the positions of heavenly bodies or, indeed, Defoe's enthusiasts who create angels of death from clouds and air. In contrast, Hodges speaks of love as the guiding force in the education of physicians: "I may well assert, that it is no more a *principle* of *bodies Natural* then *Politick*, especially in the affairs of *Medicine*, by which means the great business of *Consultation* is regularly *carried on*, distinct *abilities* concurring to overcome the strange *intricacies* of *complicated Diseases*."[439] In his defense he patiently stitches back together the body of Galenic doctrine so rudely ripped apart by the likes of Thomson: "This *Love* is the *bond* knitting the whole associated body together by its *gentle ligaments* in due *symmetry*."[440] In the final pages of the *Vindiciae*, Hodges refers to Thomson's accusation of methodizing patients into their graves and tries to rise above the vitriolic rhetoric of the pamphlet wars. Galenic methods, Hodges says in an exasperated tone, were not devilish plots to doom mankind. Had there been truth in the empiricists' accusations and had people been willing to believe their "aenigmatical hypotheses,"[441] Galenist medicine would have long since disappeared. Criticism, says Hodges, only makes the established doctrines stronger. The love

[436] Cf. Ormsby-Lennon 1978, 397.
[437] Hodges 1665, 27.
[438] Ibid.
[439] Ibid, 90–1.
[440] Ibid, 91.
[441] Ibid, 173.

he speaks of is of the Platonic kind that keeps bodies of knowledge together and enables them to be known in the first place. There is, then, something fundamentally indecent in empirical forms of knowledge according to Hodges, an epistemological anarchy Defoe must have also seen in the quacks he attacked. The skeptical author of the *Journal* who is to be emulated to shield oneself from the plague is a veritable saint in comparison.

4.3 Grotesque Knowledge and the Sublime

In light of Thomson's colorful spleen and Hodges's impassioned defense of doctrine, it should not be too difficult to see how Defoe might have been drawn to the controversy. Hodges's characterization of the wild inductive methods of the empiricists should also be recognizable as similar to the method by which Defoe's crowd constructs its shared hallucination. The principled approach, secure in its skepticism in the exceedingly strange environment, is represented by the protagonist's pious refusal to apprehend the image, whereas the inductive method is equated with the crowd's claim to transcendental knowledge of the angel. Naturally, the leap from sensory to transcendent knowledge creates a humorous contradiction since there would be no need for argument if the angel was directly observable to everyone and a single heretic would have little power to influence the observation. The protagonist's subjective experience is shielded by simple skepticism, but perhaps a more accurate model for the diseased minds he confronts can be found in the observations of Ralph Cudworth, the Cambridge Platonist. In his posthumous *Treatise Concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality* (1731) which argues for an innatist epistemology, Cudworth responds to the skepticism of Sextus Empiricus and outlines modes of knowing that involve the presence of various kinds of ideas, or "phantasms." He states that most of the time these do not appear

as actual sensations, as when one compounds ideas into an image of "a golden mountain, a centaur, a chimera."[442] Self-awareness creates the proper distance and ensures that the mind "cannot look upon them as sensations, or things really existing without itself."[443] This is part of the normal functioning of a healthy mind. However, when a disease of the body or the mind takes over the faculties, "those phantoms which do not arise from the motion of the nerves, being most prevalent and predominant, even when they are awake, may become sensations and appearances of things as really existing without the soul."[444] In such cases, "men may confidently believe they hear, see, and feel those things that are not, and be imposed upon in all their senses."[445] This can be caused by disease, but, following the humoral theory, also by an excess of passion. Diseased minds, unstable as they are, are also susceptible to manipulation. This is a scenario Swift found worthy of satire as well, but Defoe abided by the cautionary tales in a far more earnest manner than Swift. Unlike Swift who would simply mock the foibles of enthusiasts, Defoe was on a mission to temper the minds of Londoners.

The naïveté with which Defoe's protagonist challenges the observations of the crowd, however, raises an obvious question. How is he able to resist the image and the crowd's madness? How can he be so sure of his own observations and yet deny the same validity of the experiences of others? The question is also important for Defoe's project as a whole. Richetti, for example, calls the *Journal* "nothing less than [Defoe's] most daring piece of writing" due to its "aggressively empirical claims" and encyclopedic detail of the historical moment of the Plague.[446] By now it should be clear that Defoe took his method of creating the appearance of a factual narrative in the *Journal* even further than usual and the factual

[442] Cudworth 1996, 69.
[443] Ibid.
[444] Ibid, 70.
[445] Ibid. Cf. Noggle 2001, 65–7.
[446] Richetti 2005, 310.

façade is crucial to the story. Even if one is aware that the facts are the product of research, fiction instead of true personal experiences, the question is not an idle one. That is, it still demands explanation despite the fact that the author and his experiences are clearly fictitious. It is perhaps best approached from the perspective of the Longinian sublime and the inherent dangers of the anarchic freedom poetic language entails. The practical problem with descriptions of angels as well as the plague as an ontologically ambiguous contagious substance is that their incorporeality makes them unrepresentable in material terms. "But how," to quote Dryden, "are poetical fictions, how are hippocentaurs and chimeras, or how are angels and immaterial substances to be imagined?"[447] The problem requires setting limits to hyperbolic language and regulating the reception of hyperbolic rhetoric, a task fit for a critic. Dryden finds in the Longinian sublime an explanation for the power poetry has over the imagination. Language creates images "by a kind of enthusiasm, or extraordinary emotion of the soul,"[448] and may so create an illusion of perception. The practical problem of composing descriptions of non-existent objects Dryden solves following the Horatian line of argument which states that descriptions of non-existent objects refer to previous knowledge:

> For immaterial substances, we are authorized by Scripture in their description: and herein the text accommodates itself to vulgar apprehensions, in giving angels the likeness of beautiful young men. Thus, after the pagan divinity, has Homer drawn his gods with human faces: and thus we have notions of things above us, by describing them like other beings more within our knowledge.[449]

The danger of the poetic alliance between common knowledge and supernatural beings, as Defoe's illustration implies, is the vulgar reification and projection of these images onto natural phenomena. In other words, common sense and sublime language, when yoked together, create monsters and delusions, not angels. By Defoe's time, the dynamic between

[447] Dryden 1962b, 204.
[448] Ibid, 203.
[449] Ibid, 204.

sublime knowledge and a skepticism that guards the boundary between supersensory and material knowledge was an established topos in poetry and criticism. In fact, Noggle argues that the foundational epistemological gesture of the Restoration mentioned above in relation to Dryden centrally involves "[e]nforcing limits on reason by referring to realms of experience above or beyond it."[450] This leads one to the conclusion that the skepticism of Defoe's protagonist is, in some sense, intended to enhance the realism of the story. Lacking in propriety, the vulgar crowd and their inflamed imaginations cannot act wisely in creating an angel in the sky with transgressive hyperbolic discourse. The epistemological gesture, which Defoe uses as a rhetorical device, has the protagonist insisting on the unattainability of immediate knowledge of the divine in order to validate his own position. The implicit argument is that imaginary knowledge of primary causes was only experienced in the delusions of the mad; by asserting the finiteness of his own realm of experience the protagonist is able to stand firmly on his skeptical ground and deny the validity of the crowd's experience. Defoe emphasizes not the sense impressions as such, but the method by which the angel is reasoned into being by those who are in no way equipped for such heroic feats of language.

Noggle focuses on Tory satirists and Pope in particular, but he also identifies as their target the Whig perspective, of which Defoe is a part, which "finds that our felt or intuited failures to grasp a sublime truth beyond the probable order themselves sublimely affirm that order."[451] Read like this, the protagonist's professed failure to gain transcendent knowledge is thus the very thing that enables his view of the primacy of his own experience and hence the primacy of the secondary causes of the plague as manifestations of the divine will. Defoe's

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[450] Noggle 2001, 41. Commenting on Dryden's *The State of Innocence* (1677), Noggle writes: "Representing immaterial substance for Dryden is at once the height of poetic endeavor and hopelessly alien to common sense, never entirely safe" (61). Dryden, whose poetry had a great influence on Defoe, acknowledges a countering force to such excesses in a caricature of an antisublime critic who anticipates the satires of Swift and Pope and maintains that hyperbolic poetic language can never escape the sphere of materiality or common sense.
[451] Noggle 2001, 26.

political attachments and their relation to his motives are well-known and a generally Whiggish call for moderation is certainly present in the *Journal*, even when Defoe rails rather immoderately against the fantastic imaginations and grotesque reasoning of the panic-stricken public. The calm rational approach of the protagonist is at times almost ludicrous amidst the horrors of the epidemic. One need only bring to mind his solid determination to remain in the city when the plague first arrives. Moreover, moderate skepticism as a defense against disease, the text suggests, works very well for the protagonist who is able to explore the city and yet escape the plague unharmed.

The grotesque elements that reinforce the message of the story demand a more detailed and rigorous approach. Many techniques of the grotesque identified by Wolfgang Kayser are clearly discernible in Defoe's hallucinatory scene: (1) the fusion of separate realms of experience, (2) the loss of identity, (3) the distortion of natural phenomena, (4) the suspension of the category of objects, and (5) the fragmentation of the historical order.[452] Kayser's work seems like a suitable point of departure for an analysis of Defoe's abstract depictions of grotesque experiences as his definition of the grotesque as a vision of an alienated and estranged world rests in part on his reliance on the motif of a city in turmoil and the subsequent disintegration of social order.[453] This is indeed precisely what often happens in plague narratives although few show the disintegration taking place as vividly as Defoe. Furthermore, as James Luther Adams and Wilson Yates note, Kayser's argument shows that "as cleavages develop in society, grotesque distortions appear as the harbingers of cultural renewal."[454] Defoe's historical position at the threshold of the age of empirical science lends

[452] Kayser 1981, 185.
[453] Ibid, 67. Noël Carroll has criticized Kayser for attempting to discover a singular metaphysical aim and function for the grotesque. Carroll's own analysis sketches a structural account of the grotesque and rather argues for a pluralistic conception of its function. Even if one concedes this point, Kayser's analysis can be useful as one perspective to the many possible functions of the grotesque and hence its application to the present case is, I think, justified. Cf. Carroll 2003, 295.
[454] Adams and Yates 1997, xiii.

itself to this interpretation and the harbinger in question, an apt trope in this case, is the very manifestation of the grotesque form of knowledge he criticizes.

The first of these techniques can be seen in the direct intrusion of the imaginary angel into the realm of everyday experience. While the Protestant refusal of supernatural causes in favor of natural causes is certainly a part of Defoe's scene, the two realms were also separated in medical writing on the basis of the harmfulness of fear to public health. In short, privileging secondary causes was vital in the practical business of fighting the plague. The established separation of the two realms thus enables and motivates Defoe's illustration of the grotesque transgression committed by the crowd. The angel breaks through an impermeable border as one of those "abysmal forces" which break up the harmony of the established order of the world and "shatter[s] its coherence."[455] Kayser also notes that a "frequent insistence on a lack of meaning provides a solid basis" for the abysmal world to emerge and so recognizes skepticism as a force that enables the grotesque to come into being.[456] Lack of meaning in Defoe's case stems from the denial of sublime transcendence in the description of otherworldly creatures who only emerge out of their world through the inductive formation of grotesque knowledge.

The second, loss of identity, can be seen in the act of the linguistic creation of the angel from what to the individual observer appears as a simple cloud. The strong-willed skeptic who trusts his own senses more than the reports of others is labeled an unbeliever by an unruly mob acting as one. The threat of violence contributes to the ominous tone of the episode—insofar as this is possible in a scene that features the arrival of an angel carrying pestilence. It also adds an element of humor and bathos to the scene when the skeptic is forced to flee the enthusiasts who threaten him. We read the tokens of a disease whose cure remains hidden on bodies, the otherworldly through the distempered imagination of the mob

[455] Kayser 1981, 37.
[456] Ibid, 62.

and see the established epistemological order only when it negates the existence of transcendent realms of experience. We also see the hallucination negatively as a symptom of hyperbolic rhetoric that produces an excess of assent in the members of the crowd by providing a radical new order as an answer to the mystery of the plague. The grotesque, following Kayser, reveals itself to the reader in a disorienting and absurd spectacle where the delusional crowd assimilates the willing participants into the mass of the mob.

The third and fourth techniques, distortions of natural phenomena and the suspension of the category of objects are inherent in the hallucination itself which is by definition ontologically ambiguous. The city is filled with poisonous miasmas, everyday objects and even the air are all possible sources of contagion and its causes are thus potentially everywhere. The mystery of the plague leads even Hodges to state in the *Loimologia* that sometimes a "very subtile *Aura* may be so mixed or loaded with gross and sulphureous Particles, as to be perceptible to the Senses."[457] Why he says this and on what basis is not clear, but from his claim one could argue that a hallucination is ontologically flexible enough to usurp the blank category reserved for the unknown causes of the plague. The perverse description of the phenomenon by those who experience it, Defoe suggests, points to a linguistic form. Yet another linguistic symptom is identified by Hodges who balks at the ridiculousness of emblems and amulets purported to have healing or protective powers. He asks: "[W]hat medicinal Virtue can there be in a Figure?"[458] His insightful explanation reveals the reason for their use: "It seems to me that because the *Sacred Mysteries* of our *Art* were anciently described by *Hieroglyphicks*, the Populace, who were ignorant of their Significations, mistook them for Charms against a *Plague*, and other grievous Diseases, and they propagated their Delusion down to Posterity."[459] While the angel is of a different nature,

[457] Hodges 1720, 35.
[458] Ibid, 220.
[459] Ibid.

menacing rather than apotropaic, both can be read as signs that gain autonomy through a Hermetic incantation.[460] The inductive spell the crowd casts on itself supposedly reveals knowledge of the source of the epidemic, but it is clearly delusional to the outside observer. Kayser, who claims that the grotesque reveals its true depth only when it is paired with its sublime opposite, argues that the agent whose presence creates the estranged world of the grotesque must remain unknown: "If we were able to name these powers and relate them to the cosmic order, the grotesque would lose its essential quality."[461] The skepticism of Defoe's protagonist, his blunt negation of sublime transcendence accessed through magic words, keeps the powers behind whatever the crowd sees in darkness.

Finally, the fragmentation of the historical order in the *Journal* is seen in its linear chronology and the meticulousness with which the protagonist keeps the reader informed of the accumulating numbers of plague victims. It is as if the author, confronted by the full horror of the epidemic, reverts to a kind of morbid bookkeeping exercise in order to at least keep himself informed by recording his experience, leaving the reader alone to consume the brute facts of the story. He does not make explicit demands on the reader. He merely stops narrating the story. The protagonist of course survives, which affirms his faith and enables him to tell his story, but the barrage of information leaves the reader with the uneasy feeling that the city is in perfect condition except for the estrangement caused by the plague. This leads to the final irony of the *Journal*, which can be found in its form and generic ambiguity. Richetti writes:

> *A Journal of the Plague Year* is, of course, a collection of factual particulars, and one of its weaknesses is just that journal-like quality of accumulation of experiences organized by the calendar, chronologically and more or less day by day. Undeniably, the book is repetitive and at times rambling as well as digressive. Sympathetic readers, to be sure, have seen these qualities as designed

[460] Cf. Hobbes: "[A] sign is not a sign to him that giveth it, but to him to whom it is made" (1996, 239).
[461] Kayser 1981, 185.

> to produce a realistic effect, ... But those particulars manifestly cohere for the readers as the evocation of that larger communal entity, the city of London ... as a living whole, a kind of indestructible organism.[462]

In Defoe's "protogothic city,"[463] as Jayne Elizabeth Lewis calls it, nothing is hidden and yet access to the fundamental nature of what disrupts its life, the disaster of the Plague, is denied and hidden behind a veil of facticity. The obvious tension often found in the criticism of Defoe's monstrous creation has as its central mystery the discrepancy between the hidden divine origin of the Plague and the material reality of the city. The discrepancy is perhaps, as Lewis notes, "a sign of the historical mutation of one interpretative (or representational) paradigm into its successor,"[464] but it is also a sign in the technical sense of pointing to a contemporary medical debate, as interpreted by Defoe, and signifies that the imaginations of Londoners should be tempered with satire. Lewis also remarks that "the immunity problem," the reason why Defoe's protagonist never gets sick, is a question that has "mystified centuries of readers."[465] The protagonist's tempering skepticism is one answer to the secret of his immunity. Denying the existence of the hallucination, the protagonist's insistent subjectivism shields his imagination from infection and this denial, in turn, makes him less fearful and less susceptible to the plague. Defoe's equivocation or compromise between primary and secondary causes is thus directly linked to the settled opinion of the physicians and the skepticism they advocated. It also has obvious links to the rhetorical mode of description employed by Dryden, but overall Defoe, too, presents the world held together with Platonic love, which prompts the reader to look for unity in the story. When the assumption is overturned by the ever-fragmenting factuality of the city, the promised unity is left unfulfilled

[462] Richetti 2005, 316.
[463] Lewis 2004, 83.
[464] Ibid, 84.
[465] Ibid, 94.

if not shattered and only the impulse to find one remains. In this manufactured sense, then, the story fails.

What seems to be the lesson of Defoe's grotesque knowledge is the one conveyed by the Galenists. In his careful approach Defoe heeds the advice of Hodges, who declares that "[m]ay Posterity ... be warned, and not, like Empyricks, apply a Remedy where they are ignorant of the Cause."[466] Idealized raw experience, that is, is merely the raw stuff of life that in no way validates itself or is able to distinguish causes from effects. Richetti's criticism of Defoe's method of organizing the data of the *Journal* reveals that if one reads the work as a sign of a postulated imaginary London that emerges as a single entity from the accumulated facts of experience, the form of Defoe's story must reflect the epistemological conundrum. The London that has been thus created spans the years between 1665 and the early 1720s, takes into account a mass of lives and texts all meshed into one, and represents the city as an indestructible creature whose core is as impenetrable as the mystery of the Plague was for Defoe. If one applies to it the love Hodges argues holds together any coherent body of knowledge and reads it as an emblem today, it remains a powerful reminder of the chaotic space between madness and reason where the grotesque and indeed satire seem very much at home. If the skepticism of the work as a whole can be summarized, it seems to take the form of an uncertainty or ambiguity that (instead of More's ideal and actual) creates a dialogue between parts and wholes. It generates doubt in the power of allegorical and emblematic expression to capture or represent the world in symbols. But far from smashing the world of representations into a chaos in which some might read Nashe's purported joy in anarchy, Defoe's authorship appears to simply demand an awareness of the possibility that signs will eventually fail if one demands too much of them. Love, by extension, is no guarantee of social or epistemological cohesion either.

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[466] Hodges 1720, 20.

It is tempting to read the adventures of H.F. among the London crowds as an image of Defoe, the transgressive satirist, in action. Defoe certainly knew better than most what it meant to be at the mercy of crowds who were not ready or willing to hear the moral reproof satirists trade in and although he would have seen the mob as a force for political change, he also knew its capacity for excessive violence. Novak comments: "The mob was, for Defoe, an aspect of the political sublime—powerful without limit and frightening in its terrible energy, instanced in the tearing apart of the De Witt brothers in Holland in 1672."[467] The fear of being torn apart like the hapless brothers, the mobs he faced on Harley's assignments and in the pillory must have made them seem like a force of nature. A Whiggish resignation to their power is thus understandable at least in Defoe's case. However, he was able to use his experiences with mobs and persecution to create a stunning portrait of the unreasonableness of unruly crowds. He did fool his readers for some time and the nature of the text's facticity is still problematic. Rather than read Defoe's ploy to convince his readers of the veracity of his story as cynical manipulation, it is perhaps better to grant him a sympathetic reading. After all, even today when his story is deemed transparently false his work is read as a more or less true report that has been clothed in fiction. If one reads him with sympathy, satire for Defoe seems like a defiant transgression into the realm of the beast where the satirist himself risks infection, injury or even death, but nevertheless reemerges to tell his tale. He is one of the pure who can return back to the land of the pure, however tarnished by his travels. The reader travels with him into the pit, but is also fortunate enough to return with him unscathed. There is a sense of self-righteousness in Defoe's stance which is comforting even if the reader does not agree with him and in this he fits the description of a utopian satirist whose moral standards are made perfectly clear in his satire. It was his failure to read the audience of *The Shortest Way* that defined him in his lifetime, but here too there is little sense of

[467] Novak 2001, 265.

danger for the reader and the author's agency remains uncompromised even when it is denied. There is perhaps some danger in the fear and grotesque knowledge of the *Journal*, but due to the work's grave subject matter any form of mockery simply seems instructive. If one wants to read a satirist who creates an unequivocal sense of danger, one must turn to Jonathan Swift.

5. Jonathan Swift and Hermeneutic Despair

Swift's *A Tale of a Tub* is an inexhaustible source of debate as it touches upon so many of the major scholarly, religious and philosophical controversies of eighteenth-century satire and critical thought. It provides insight into the Quarrel of the Ancients and Moderns, a satirical description of the Dissenters at the turn of the century, and parodies of the new corpuscular philosophies. One could also argue that it is inexhaustible by design as it utilizes two rhetorical devices which guarantee that a final resolution of the text's meaning will remain beyond a definitive interpretation. The first of these is akin to More's ambiguity and Montaigne's Pyrrhonistic thought experiment mentioned earlier. The second is based on Dryden's overt doubleness which allowed Swift to build his characters as permanently ambiguous creatures who are able to use and distribute devices of the first type. Unlike most earlier accusations of the reader's culpability in the interpretation of texts, Swift's charge is built into the structure of the work. Though left unstated in its most abstract form, it is much more forceful than accusations of culpability that simply tell readers they reveal their guilt if they find the work offensive. In this section, I want to explore Swift's method of convincing the reader to follow him into the rhetorical and interpretative dead ends of the *Tale*. I also want to touch upon the ways it amplifies the cynical criticism the work was designed to convey to his contemporaries and, indeed, to those who read him today.

5.1 Reading Swift's Satire

In his analysis of Swift's *The Examiner* and *Drapier's Letters*, Ehrenpreis notes that Swift's figurative ironies tend to dazzle readers so that they have no eyes for Swift's subtler ways of manipulating the reader. Inverting the conventions of panegyric and its sublime figures, "Swift takes figures associated with elevation and inverts them. He employs ironical metaphors, similes, personifications, synecdoches, and allegories which implicitly degrade their subjects."[468] The cumulative effect of his damning figurality contributes to the humor of his satire and gives him a way of amplifying his arguments as he wishes. In this way he was able to bring down the targets of his mock-panegyrics, many of whom were enamored by the new philosophies of an age which promised to deliver methods that would finally resolve, among other things, the mysteries behind the effectiveness of such figures. As one of Swift's less often discussed techniques Ehrenpreis mentions his farfetched or metaleptic conceits. In his attack against the Whigs, Swift was fond of painting the Whigs in an unfavorable light through synecdoche where parts representing wholes are carefully chosen to represent the worst of the targeted group. The group as a whole is then associated with an unflattering member of the group, its features amplified and as it is lauded it is condemned. Or, more specifically, "after establishing that the dissenting sects are among the constituent bodies of the Whig party, Swift ... treats them as equivalent to the party as a whole."[469] Swift thus gives himself the opportunity to wind up the absurdity of the mock-panegyric to sublime heights and the prefigured absurdity unravels quite naturally. Swift's opinion of authorship was nowhere near as natural. His success appears to have rested on his ability to simultaneously claim and deny the authorship of the *Tale*. Swift seemed reluctant to confess authorship explicitly, proud as he was of the work, but his authorship was common knowledge and

[468] Ehrenpreis 1981, 60.
[469] Ibid.

perhaps naming himself in the Apology attached to the 1710 edition or in later editions would have been unnecessary or excessive. The role of the purported authors of the *Tale* who narrate the stories and present its theories, however, is fairly straightforward: they write panegyrics and speculative philosophies riddled with irony and deliver them as nearly mad buffoons. This was of course what Swift did best. Ehrenpreis notes that "[n]ot only does Swift make believe he is someone else; he also attributes to that person a character which he really detests: Swift hates astrologers; yet Bickerstaff is one."[470] The device is of course not a Swiftian innovation, but the lengths to which he takes it is what makes his satire extraordinary. His ironies permeate his rhetoric and they are of course carefully aligned to provide either the promise of or opportunity for satirical amplification. The impression one gets from Swift's set-up includes the presence of a menacing satirical power that is released only with regard to certain cases he wants to highlight. His latent anger tells of a more fundamental unease with the world at large. This has often been noted by critics who quite readily assume that Swift's final madness was the result of his overflowing spleen. His inverted view of the corruption of his age also tells of a possible idealism lurking at the back of his mind. As should be clear from the preceding discussion, assuming that the satirist paints his ironies against a standard that reflects an ideal world is risky, but one must nevertheless ask what it would mean to resolve questions surrounding Swift's scornful rhetoric. What would a resolution of the Swiftian world look like? This is a question that needs to be asked to begin a reading of Swift and in trying to find an answer one must be prepared to fail.

Swift's work is famous for the rhetorical aporias that are revealed when he does decide to amplify one of his ironies. In them, arguments grind to a halt and viewpoints within the narratives all become equally absurd. The best example of Swift's use of rhetorical impasses

[470] Ibid, 209.

of this sort is no doubt *A Tale of a Tub* and interpretations of the work by critics attest to the fact. The work is unfortunately impossible to summarize in full. Fortunately, in the case of the *Tale* summaries are frankly unnecessary. It is described by Frank Boyle as a kind of "Derridean parody"[471] where the inverted opposites finally turn into the essence of the thing parodied. That is, the corrupted remnant of whatever the target of Swift's satire wants to deny is brought to the fore and made into a symbol that stands in for the target. The final result brings together the worst qualities of the target of satire which then usurp the role of whatever Swift wants to satirize. Frustrating the reader's position to achieve this effect is central to *A Tale of a Tub*, as Boyle argues:

> Unlike *A Modest Proposal*, where a reader may quickly run out of textual refuges and so be forced into an examination of individual correspondences with the text, *A Tale* is a universe in which a reader may choose never to stop seeking new satiric frontiers. But, all seeking in *A Tale* leads to intellectual precipices. The experience of making almost any positivist argument in reading *A Tale* leads a reader to a place like that of a cartoon character who is running for a time on air before consciousness of the absurdity of the position sends him hurtling into the abyss.[472]

The intimate relationship the author has with the reader only pushes the confusion further. The two modes of satire that can be distinguished in Swift, exemplified by *A Modest Proposal* and the *Tale*, are both terrifying as they seduce readers to craft their own doom in the act of interpretation. In *A Modest Proposal* the reader is led to a horrifying conclusion via a rational argument that sounds quite reasonable were it not for the gruesome final solution to the Irish problem. The *Tale* is different in that there is no clear overall resolution to be found and when the reader is urged to tie the loose ends of the narratives he or she quickly discovers that this is impossible. Perhaps the most remarkable feature of the *Tale* is that despite all the frustration and venom Swift pours over his targets and the reader, one cannot

[471] Boyle 2011, 205.
[472] Ibid.

but be seduced by the prose, forget the argument of the text and be lulled into the world of the mad critic.

The *Tale* is quite often described as a brilliant but infuriating text, as if its refusal to resolve the tensions it creates requires some degree of masochism from the reader if he or she is to enjoy the experience. The futility of deciphering the *Tale* is not lost on anyone who reads it and most critics who do so find pleasure in it despite Swift's unrestrained hostility. Rawson, echoing the consensus among most modern readers of Swift, describes this effect as a kind of enjoyable pessimism that arises from a resolve or even contentment in the text's failure to generate a resolution:

> Readers are caught up in an unresolved contradiction, projecting an either-way-you-lose atmosphere which is part of what is nowadays, in Swift studies, called "entrapment." Modern is old and new at the same time, in a way that defies conventional expectations of orderly discourse, leaving no sense of a defining proposition to resist, let alone assent to, only an awareness of aggression diffusely and comprehensively targeted.[473]

Perhaps what one reads in Swift's satire is the unresolved nature of the modern subject, the never-ending monologue that has to go on unresolved and whose closure would mean self-destruction. This would mean reading the work as both a projection as well as a mockery of the problem of modernity, the denial of meaning being the comfort of the reader and ultimate goal of the author. As Frederik N. Smith has argued, Swift's authors seem to qualify as precursors of the narrators of Beckett's novel trilogy where the emptiness of the subject is negated by the subject's inability either come to terms with his or her existence or erase the problem of subjectivity. The connection is fairly abstract, but as Smith puts it, Beckett's "narrators are plagued by the literary voices they, and Beckett, hear in their heads."[474] Swift, of course, is one of the loudest of these voices. Swift criticism has shown that the

[473] Rawson 1994, 34–5.
[474] Smith 2002, 158. Similarities between Swift and Beckett have been discussed at least since Fletcher 1962. For a more recent comparison between Swift and Beckett, see Perloff 2008.

interpretative impasses in the *Tale* raise a number of persistent questions, as one would expect. For example, to what extent were Swift's enjoyable traps intended to mock the negative capability embodied by literary personae such as Dryden's? If Swift really intended to lead his readers to the frustrating inconclusive interpretations his readers report, to what extent can Swift's satire be considered a failure? Why does one take pleasure in reading Swift if one only finds in him meaning that is suspended, irrational or even abusive? That critics disagree about these matters should be no surprise, but how severe are the disagreements in the case of *A Tale of a Tub*? Three specific problems should be noted here. The first two may serve as an introduction to the third question which pertains to the rhetorical design of the *Tale*.

First, one must dispense with the standard account of the satirist's aims and intentions. In the case of *A Modest Proposal* one may read satire as a protest against social and political injustice, but the *Tale* is not as easy to decipher, if it can be deciphered at all. In a robust formulation of this and related problems, Griffin asks:

> Is satire in fact based on shared cultural values? Does it work by confirming contemporary moral standards? If so, we would have to concede that most of the great satires have failed. *Gulliver's Travels* and *A Tale of a Tub* aroused sharply opposed reactions among Swift's contemporaries, who couldn't agree about his moral underpinnings. Modern critics have been no more able to arrive at consensus interpretation. We still notoriously disagree about Swift's targets and his attitudes, and we are beginning to be less sure about the apparent straightforwardness of the satire in Dryden and Pope.[475]

Swift's satires in particular undermine the notion that satire is simply a generic vehicle for moral maxims. As Griffin astutely observes, the moral lessons in satire should be seen as starting points for the art rather than the moral of the story. It is highly improbable that readers of Swiftian satires or any learned satire for that matter need to be told that greed is

[475] Griffin 1994, 38.

bad, that helping others is rewarding, that naïve enthusiasm may lead to absurdity, that to err is human, to forgive divine, that moral behavior is preferable to acting immorally, that virtue is preferable to vice. Expositions that conclude by noting these truisms as the satirist's simple message are probably as true as they are trivial and dull. It is perhaps better to assume that the ironies of satire are supposed to arouse opposing interpretations and in Swift's case the failure to generate a consensus is particularly pronounced as he tends to evoke visceral reactions with his grotesque imagery. Ehrenpreis thinks that under all the difficulties Swift experienced in his personal life "lay a kind of admirable naïveté" which told him that "failure was the best sign of good intentions."[476] It is unwise to psychoanalyze the dead, but finding in Swift a conflicted but ultimately selfless personality that will not be satisfied with a resolution of the controversial issues he cares most about would explain something about his personal motives. Thus Swiftian rhetoric could be read as a form of noble self-sabotage. Needless to say, this explanation raises more questions than it answers and, furthermore, makes issues pertaining to the uses of moral rhetoric those of the author's psychology. There is no doubt that Swift's mental makeup was complex and conflicted, but in that case one would have to enquire into the reasons why Swift chose to express himself in the manner he did and not in some other way.

The second question pertains to the *Tale* as a text that can be read not as a task for interpretation but rather as a platform for moral speculation. Backing away from positive

[476] Ehrenpreis 1983, 211. Ehrenpreis goes as far as to create psychoanalytical portraits of the satirist and the reader. He argues that it is possible to "interpret the act of reading the essay [*An Argument against Abolishing Christianity*] as a contemplation of the author safely chastising persons other than ourselves. It is true that outside the literary frame we may be identical with those persons. Imaginatively, nevertheless, we may yet be distinct. Such an explanation can be valid only if we agree that each reader has an ambiguous attitude toward moral convention. The upper self respects conventions; the under self loathes them. Freudians make such a division between the ego and the id. If we admit the distinction, it will follow that the more the upper self dominates, the more the under self has to fume, and the strain between them will in most people impose a more or less painful burden upon their moral character, a burden that naturally wants to be eased" (ibid, 295). According to Ehrenpreis, Swift's literary ambitions and "low opinion of himself" (ibid, 331) meant his psychological makeup was made for satire. The psychological symmetry between the readers' psychology and satire would thus explain the need for and indeed the pleasure or release derived from satire, but on the other hand it perhaps tells more about the human impulse to find symmetry in reasoning than the structure of the mind, as Norrman 1998 argues.

statements concerning Swift's satire and drawing on Griffin's argument noted above, Bogel claims that when readers discover they are supposed to feel uneasy and expected to engage with rhetoric that poses irreconcilable questions designed to provoke any reader into chasing their own tail, so to speak, they discover "that reading satire is not so much about finding a position we can plug ourselves into as about exploring the complexity of a particular moral position."[477] Bogel also implies that the discovery produces some measure of relief as the text denies its own resolution—perhaps this is also the reason for Boyle's use of spatial metaphors to illustrate the humorous situation readers find themselves in when repeated acts of interpretation lead to failure. The readers' failures to interpret the text reveal that the *Tale* is riddled with rhetorical devices designed to mislead them and so deny a clear resolution:

> As a result, readers are also engaged in exploring the question of what it means to take a position at all. Swift's satires, for example, as Everett Zimmermann has written, "demand of us the difficult process of searching for an authoritative perspective rather than just assuming Swift's perspective." ... The satirist is thus a figure about whom readers properly feel a certain tentativeness, ambiguity, doubleness. At times, this doubleness is overtly thematized within a text, not just taken to be a mode of possible relation between text and reader.[478]

To paraphrase Dryden, the problem might be Juvenalian in that one has to choose or decide on a meaning instead of finding it in the author's perspective—Dryden's presence is also felt in the overt doubleness Bogel mentions. The difference in Swift's case, of course, is that as the reader is encouraged to find meaning in the text it simultaneously refuses to provide that meaning. Bogel emphasizes the character of the satirist at this juncture and rightly so. The satirist emerges in the *Tale* as a figure who plays with the restless ambiguity of a mind trying to fix on an argument or an overall position with the full knowledge that the task of finding monosemic meaning is impossible. Furthermore, this ambiguity that produces and suspends

[477] Bogel 2001, 62.
[478] Ibid, 62–3.

interpretation does also produce pleasure despite the futility of the undertaking—this is evident from theories of satire and poetry in general which never fail to cite pleasure as well as instruction as the aims of satire.[479] The ratio may be different among poets, Juvenal may bring more pleasure than Horace, and one might engage in comparisons that explain the matter, but Swift includes arguments of this kind in the work as well to confuse his readers even further. The pleasures of decoding the text's meaning will continue only as far as the reader's patience will stretch. One finds in the *Tale* a confrontational version of More's or Montaigne's ambiguity which is spelled out by Swift as if to challenge readers into exhausting themselves. As enjoyable as moral speculation is, this does not explain why one takes pleasure in the act of futile interpretation. The doubleness of the abusive satirist who is the source of the reader's troubles is hardly sympathetic either.

The third and perhaps most alarming problem that should be noted is that Swift's satire is in some ways designed to be unreadable by scholars and that setting off into a scholarly discussion concerning the text veers into absurdities because of the way it was composed. The work referred to as *A Tale of a Tub* is actually three texts published as one volume: *A Tale of a Tub*, *The Battle of the Books* and *The Mechanical Operation of the Spirit*. Weinbrot remarks in his excellent summary of the works that whereas eighteenth-century readers would have read them in succession as Swift intended, modern readers are often stuck with excerpts. Scholarly readers, on the other hand, have to read annotated versions that pose an entirely different kind of problem. Commenting on the Guthkelch and Nichol Smith edition of the *Tale*, Weinbrot writes: "It is designed for the scholar looking for historical context, ancillary sources, annotation, and relevant information that amusingly brings us closer to Bentleyan anatomizing than to Swiftian universalizing."[480] Swift's totalizing satirical

[479] For a discussion on the pleasures of satire, see Griffin 1994, 161–184. For a discussion on the discrepancies between the maxim and actual practice, see Hume 1973.
[480] Weinbrot 2005, 119.

gestures are usually seen as a rift in scholarly debate in the English Quarrel of the Ancients and Moderns, and thinking about them in context before delving into the issues should help the reader to approach the work with cautious skepticism. Swift's contribution is important in many ways: it has been studied vigorously by scholars for over three centuries and the footnotes have accumulated accordingly. This is precisely the problem that overwhelms scholarly readers of the *Tale*.

The events leading to the publication of the *Tale* are well-known and repeated to the reader by Swift himself. What began as Perrault's tribute to his king enraptured English readers who were introduced to the issues by debates between Temple, Wotton and Richard Bentley which Swift popularized through satire in the *Tale*. The role of scholarship and especially philology seem to be the key to discovering what the controversy was really about—the break between the brute facts of contemporary politics and the classical ideal had consequences beyond scholarly niceties. Charles Boyle's edition of the *Epistles of Phalaris* was an important point of departure for the debate, but its true importance lies in the fact that it stood as an example of the kind of scholarship the Ancients favored. It dispensed with comments, notes and scholarly apparatuses, judging them mere pedantry. The crucial question formulated by Levine concerns the role of scholarship in broader terms:

> Was critical judgment to be left to those like Temple, who wanted to employ the arts and literature directly in their lives through the imitation of classical models? Or was it to be turned over to those who did not need it and therefore could hardly be expected to appreciate it, to scholars like Bentley, whose style and manners were rude and unpolished and who were as willing to struggle over a trifle by Manilius as over the epics of Homer?"[481]

[481] Levine 1999b, 77.

Elsewhere, Levine notes that for the Christ Church wits who fought against Bentley the authenticity of the Phalaris epistles was actually of little importance.[482] What they did value was the polish and politeness that could be gleaned from ancient texts, whatever scholars thought of them. As one watches the episode unfold in the history books, one has the impression that the Quarrel evinced the reevaluation of the Renaissance scholarship of the likes of Scaliger, Lipsius and Casaubon. Moderns were looking back to their work and finding that the scholars appeared to know more about the ancients than the ancients themselves. A new generation of scholarly readers pounced on their old materials in a way that did not please those who looked to the ancients for practical advice. Wotton, a prodigy, is a prime example of precisely such a man. In his view, those who discerned the thoughts of the ancients must have minds surpassing those that produced the original texts.[483] Swift notes something similar in saying that those who write keys and commentaries of others' work should exceed the object of their criticism in learning, but he was nevertheless very much on the side of the Ancients. The great works of the classical age spoke directly to the Ancients without the aid of scholars. The Moderns, in turn, remained in the Renaissance tradition of a Valla or an Erasmus whose critical approach refused to simply romanticize the ancients and rather evaluated their merits and even criticized them. In sum, the issue was one of contemporary authority, that of men of taste versus men of learning. For Swift, Modern studies were mere pedantry or "*Systems* and *Abstracts*"[484] with little intrinsic value, superfluous glosses of ancient works that were already perfect. When one reads the *Tale* one quickly discovers that Swift has indeed laid a trap for his readers and particularly for those who want to decipher the text using a scholarly approach.

[482] Levine 1991b, 106–9.
[483] Ibid, 42.
[484] Swift 2010, 96.

Since Weinbrot's recent remarks on the *Tale*, the new Cambridge edition has been published and in it one finds that Marcus Walsh's scholarly apparatus exceeds Swift's text in length. The introduction, endnotes, appendices and other explanations are brilliant and necessary for modern readers, but they do force readers to put themselves in a position that reminds one of a caricature of Bentley with all his scholarly vices amplified and, as it is rare to find readers to match his scholarly merits, the reading is designed to engage the modern reader as well in the kind of abuse of learning Swift intended to ridicule. This means that readers have to be willing to subject themselves to ridicule by the text they want to interpret in the very act of interpretation. There is simply no way around this—Swift's famous formulation of satire as the mirror that shames everyone but the one who gazes into it is no consolation. James Phiddian argues that the chaotic form of the *Tale* was also inspired by Dryden's translation of Virgil whose dedications, illustrations, life of Virgil, postscript and other "Modern typographical excess and idiosyncrasy"[485] were exacerbated by the fact that editions of the work were sold unbound. As the publication date of Dryden's translation and the composition of the *Tale* coincide it is reasonable to assume that Swift's excessive fragmentation of the *Tale* is at least in part a comment on what must be counted as one of Dryden's major literary achievements, the English *Aeneid*. However, as fascinating a comparison between the *Tale* and Dryden's *Aeneid* might be, Swiftian satire falls unequivocally on the reader. As the excesses of scholarship are an essential component of the entire work, one cannot simply dismiss them as being of mere scholarly interest. That is, Swift's apparatuses are not paratexts or compartmentalized parodies of paratexts but they should be considered as part of the satire and of the main body of the work. When they play the dual role of paratext and parody, they threaten to become unreadable as either.

[485] Phiddian 1995, 128.

This, finally, is what Swift does best in the *Tale*. He creates an impossible situation for his reader where all the options to interpret the text are exhausted beforehand. To drive the point home, the bloated scholarly apparatus of modern editions mocks the reader next to Wotton's comments which Swift famously assimilated into the satire. Moreover, the real work of the scholar, commentaries and notation, is perhaps even more clearly the target of the *Tale*'s savage critique today since the modern reader has to rely on scholarship to even begin to read the text. Reading the *Tale* through the soiled glass of Swift's mockery of the very aides that help one read gives the distinct impression that Swift, the satirist and author, is not on the reader's side. Yet one cannot but admire his foresight in producing a work that cannot be read without bowing down to Goddess Criticism who will only gain strength as time goes by. If one reads in Swift's *Tale* an adaptation of More's ambiguity engine or Montaigne's demonstration of Pyrrhonism, one finds that Swift has fashioned them into an ingenious textual thumbscrew whose grip will tighten the more the reader tries to study the text.

5.2 The Mad Critic

But read one must and Weinbrot, for one, wants to read Swift as his original audience did in 1704 before the 1710 Apology skewed the original work. What greeted the reader in 1704 on the first page of the *Tale* was a list of treatises purportedly written by the same author whose names mock abuses in learning and religion. Weinbrot remarks: "We are not seriously threatened by a list we do not take seriously."[486] As with Martinist lists of fictional works, they can be recognized as a humorous device with which the pompous author tries to show

[486] Weinbrot 2005, 121.

that he "controls his text, his victims, and his readers."[487] The audience, in turn, can thus laugh at the pretensions of the learned from a secure position as soon as the *Tale* begins. In contrast, "[t]he 1710 Apology warns, threatens ... Defensive Swift clearly distinguished between the threatened real author and the triumphant Tale's author. One is consciously responsible and the other is unconsciously responsible for writing satire about abuses in religion and learning."[488] Swift presents himself as the Juvenalian hero who stands alone against the multitude who refuse to be reformed by his satire. When one sees the moral content of the satire not as a noble message used to nourish those hungry for reform but as an excuse to revel in the complexities of moral philosophy, Swift's earnest sincerity seems either threatening or absurd. The text, in effect, has no solid moral basis on which readers can rest their judgment. Phiddian, relying on Zwicker's politicized reading of Dryden's character, reads this mock-sincerity as yet another parody, that of Dryden's candid confessions of his own frailties and troubles.[489] The specific motivation behind Swift's parody again relates to Dryden's Virgil and the fact that Dryden, despite all his complaints of scholarly troubles, raided previous translations to complete his work, especially the contemporary work of Lauderdale. In Swift's eyes, to be blunt, Dryden was a hypocrite and a plagiarist whose translation, though admirable, was tarnished by the immorality of its author who, to be fair, had in the past been forced to defend himself against similar accusations. Read in the wider context of the trope of the author, however, it is clear that the Apology significantly changes the tone of the entire work.

The sincere but impotent Swiftian author of the Apology whose intentions have been misinterpreted by ignorant readers bewails his fate and casts a shadow over the rest of the book. Weinbrot comments:

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[487] Ibid.
[488] Ibid.
[489] Phiddian 1995, 130–132.

> The Apology darkens our perceptions and expectations of satiric success almost as soon as we start to read. The immediately contiguous parts of the work try to return us to a world of norms, of 1704 and earlier, but henceforth everything that we read is shaped by the Apology's rage at failure.[490]

This inevitably leads the reader to two conclusions that will guide his or her reading. First, that the book he or she is about to read is part of a bigger project that has failed due to the book's inefficacy. Secondly, it is implied that the reader is part of a society that has refused moral improvement in the past and therefore drifted even further away from the ideal moral clarity the author wished to create. In short, it informs the reader that he or she is reading a failed work of critical literature in a society that has sunk even further into the corruption and sinfulness the original tried to correct. Swift also confesses that he is as powerless to assign the effect his text will have on the public at large as any single reader in his impotent and futile anger. This is reinforced by the Bookseller's message to the reader that informs him or her that the book is incomplete and printed without the author's permission. In contrast to these qualifiers, the author's dedication to Prince Posterity presents a cheerful author who praises his age and names a number of worthies, Dryden and Bentley included, who inspired him to undertake the project. Amidst these distancing tactics one is nevertheless able to keep the satirist's vision in mind and follow the Swiftian argument as it progresses as the interplay between the bitterness of the Apology and the naïveté of the narrator. The metaleptic "comic process of displacement,"[491] is easy enough to follow and essential to the book's humor as Swift's voice is masked clearly enough to decry the corruptions of his age. In the *Tale* itself, Weinbrot is certain that "[r]eaders are aware of Swift's voice behind the narrator's voice. He is angry and punitive, defensive and troubled, rather than amused and superior, as we too

[490] Weinbrot 2005, 123.
[491] Ibid, 125.

once were."[492] The hostility that permeates the *Tale* is not for Weinbrot mere anger on Swift's part: "We ... commonly overlook the *Tale*'s profound sadness."[493] The story is, after all, about the immanent collapse of social and moral structures that were now so rotten they simply could not be maintained. Swift's is not a lighthearted Horatian satire but, despite the obvious humor and even silly jokes, the laughter it provokes is tinged with a melancholy whose effect goes beyond a moral rebuke. It becomes distressing when Swift takes on critical reading and involves the reader in the process of interpreting the text in ways not all readers will find comfortable at all. Especially scholarly readers, as noted above, will find the way in which the structurally integral criticism of methodic interpretation mocks the reader distressing.

In the Apology, the angry Swift is defensive and dismissive of his critics who have misread his intentions:

> Had the Author's Intentions met with a more candid Interpretation from some whom out of Respect he forbears to name, he might have been encouraged to an examination of Books written by some of those Authors above-described, whose Errors, Ignorance, Dullness and Villany, he thinks he could have detected and exposed in such a Manner, that the Persons who are most conceived to be infected by them, would soon lay them aside and be ashamed.[494]

Swift, sounding like a caricature of Dryden, says he could have repudiated the claims of his critics, but abstained from doing so. The Apology, he informs his readers, is not for those who have attacked him, but for future readers of the book he says is "calculated to live at least as long as our Language."[495] The fate of treatises such as the keys published to undo Swift's satire or indeed the likes of *The Dyet of Poland Reconsider'd Paragraph by Paragraph* moves Swift to uncharacteristically delicate prose: "They are indeed like Annuals

[492] Ibid, 134.
[493] Ibid, 146.
[494] Swift 2010, 6.
[495] Ibid, 5.

that grow about a young Tree, and seem to vye with it for a Summer, but fall and die with the Leaves in Autumn, and are never heard of any more."[496] Artistry aside, the dismissals are forceful and full of scorn, but Swift does point to a number of passages to clarify his text where "prejudiced or ignorant Readers have drawn by great Force to hint at ill Meanings."[497] He refers especially to passages which have been falsely interpreted as satire of religion. As Ehrenpreis puts it, Swift "declares that the religious allegory only exposes the follies of Dissenting fanatics or of superstitious Papists."[498] Swift is thus, as Dryden was, putting himself in the crossfire of fanatics from both sides and complains that "passages written in irony or parody have been considered as simple discourse; that innocent passages have been wrenched into profane meanings."[499] In this, he echoes Dryden's problems as a humorist: ironies are missed and unintended passages undeserving of a strong reaction from the audience are highlighted by incompetent readers. But more than that, he thus evokes the traditional trope of the victimized and misunderstood author. The text's true meaning, however, should be obvious to most readers according to Swift. "Men of Tast" will also observe an irony "through the Thread of the whole Book" which, when it is revealed through correct interpretation, will defuse many of the criticisms hurled at the text.[500] The real tragedy behind Swift's counter-attack against his critics brings to the fore the fact that the misreadings of scripture, personified by the brothers of the *Tale*, and the rigid methods of the new philosophy have been established or even institutionalized. The simple and clear truths of ethical conduct that grew convoluted and corrupted after the Renaissance have no chance of survival when critics are encouraged to propagate an infinity of overarticulated and grotesque misreadings. This is a project the reader of the *Tale* must take part in and which

[496] Ibid, 8.
[497] Ibid, 7.
[498] Ehrenpreis 1983, 334.
[499] Ibid.
[500] Swift 2010, 8.

makes the text in some sense unreadable—one has to take part in its corruption and that of society to read it. The Apology makes sure it is too late to undo whatever damage is revealed to the reader. The reader is thus forced to share Swift's pain and made automatically guilty of participating in the destruction of the very thing for whose survival Swift claims to fight. As a final insult, Swift of course reserves the right to misread and misappropriate Wotton's comments in a profoundly deceptive albeit transparently false manner.

The way the reader is forced into becoming an accomplice to Swift's project can also be seen in the way Swift assimilates Dryden's critical persona into the work. Dryden is indeed named explicitly as an object of parody. In fact, as Ian Higgins argues, the *Tale* is in obvious satirical dialogue with Dryden's *Discourse*. The tone of Dryden's critical show of force appears "pathologically confessional and digressive"[501] in Swift's parody. The origins of the *Tale*'s dedications, prefaces, introductions and apparatus Higgins sees as originating from Dryden's style in general, its affectations and self-serving negotiations between author, reader and patron. Swift scorns Dryden's prefatorial writing and the Cambridge edition does list more references to the *Discourse* than any individual work by Dryden. By satirizing Dryden, Swift tried to reanimate Dryden's well-rehearsed public persona in caricature. Higgins summarizes his findings:

> There is in both works an appeal to posterity, authorial disavowal of satire, complaint about prefaces and digressions in the midst of a digression, and complaints about the multitude of scribblers who pester the world. In short, the *Tale* displays Swift's unfriendly reading of one of Dryden's major critical texts.[502]

Swift's bitterness is obvious. As always, there is interplay between crude humor and sophisticated rhetorical schemes. The narrator of the *Tale* is not, as he states plainly, a satirist.

[501] Higgins 2004, 218.
[502] Ibid, 220.

Swift is, and his denial of the satirical character of his author-figure is of course at the root of the satirical force of the textual play that carries the narrative. In the preface to the *Tale,* he denounces all satirical intentions on his own part and reverses the prefatory convention that laments the fact that audiences are in the habit of constructing particular interpretations of general satires: "'Tis but a *Ball* bandied to and fro."[503] In another reversal, he defines the "true critic" as "a discoverer and collector of writers' faults,"[504] a simple inversion of the conventional notion of the critic's duties voiced by Dryden. Acting as the ludicrous Modern scribbler, he concludes that the ancients, "highly sensible of their many imperfections, must needs have endeavored, from some passages in their works, to obviate, soften, or divert the censorious reader, by satire or panegyric upon the true critics, in imitation of their masters, the moderns."[505] The inversions are crude, but funny nonetheless and, as critics seldom fail to report, much of the pleasure of reading Swift comes from a mixture of sophisticated irony and crass humor. It is often hard to tell whether the waters in Swift's well are shallow or deep (to use one of his own metaphors), but the above cases do not inspire a reading that would warrant the kind of praise often bestowed on Swift's rhetorical skills.

It is in the combined complaints about scholarly apparatuses and appeals to posterity where one finds Swift at his most sophisticated. In his Lucianic rage against the vain learning of his age, Swift manages to propel his satire to new heights in the negative gestures that try to destroy his own argument by mockery and by insults against critical readers. These may be counted among the "self-immolating,"[506] "self-lacerating"[507] gestures and the work's attempted "self-annihilation"[508] that tell of Swift's anger. In part, the effect is achieved by the simple device of the caricature of the Modern who narrates the story. The narrator himself is

[503] Swift 2010, 32.
[504] Ibid, 62.
[505] Ibid, 63.
[506] Phiddian 1995, 112.
[507] Ibid, 113.
[508] Ibid.

enthusiastic and innocent, even cartoonish in his indestructibility. Swift was aware that if his text was to stand the test of time, it would require notation and explanation—one is here reminded of his remarks on *The Dunciad* and its need for scholarly notation. As with Pope's *Dunciad*, Swift was consciously writing "a ridiculous version of the republic of letters"[509] in a work he knew would require exactly the kind of pedantic scholarship it parodied and need it even more so in the future. If, then, one does read the satire's parody of criticism and scholarship in terms of self-annihilation, the self-annihilation of the text is also the device that sustains and nourishes the text.[510] The only thing in question in the execution of Swift's infuriatingly brilliant device is Swift's own modesty. Writing as he was as an ambitious young man with something to prove, he was quite pleased with the fame and admiration the work brought him.

The topic of a kind of self-annihilation is taken up by the narrator at the end of the actual *Tale*. Weinbrot notes of the narrator: "The Conclusion to his *Tale* has little to do with the tale as tale. It concerns only the author, who has become the subject of his own writing. He moves from a version of history to a version of the self, which really is a version of nothing."[511] The nothingness the critic aspires to is a candid moment in the *Tale*, as he is in fact simply spinning in place while writing about his vacuous topic. Whether one reads this disappearing act as that of a Horatian poet-critic, a double man like Dryden, or a self-promoting controversialist like Defoe, he evokes disgust above all. The candid yet veiled monologue during which the reader finds the narrator a vain and rather annoying creature ends with a request directed at the reader:

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[509] Griffin 2010, 155.
[510] This is what I take to distinguish satirical texts from the self-consuming artifacts of Stanley Fish's study by the same name. Fish writes of two kinds of literary presentation. One that "builds its readers confidence by building an argument they can follow" and one that "by calling into question the sufficiency of its own procedures, calls into question the sufficiency of the minds it unsettles" (1972, 378). If anything, the satires discussed here use the kinds of unsettling texts Fish discusses as a template to entertain and instruct. That is, hope of deciphering them is lost at the outset when the presence of the generic traits of satire are made known to the reader.
[511] Weinbrot 2005, 160.

> I have one concluding Favour, to request of my Reader; that he will not expect to be equally diverted and informed by every Line, or every Page of this Discourse; but give some Allowance to the Author's Spleen, and short Fits or Intervals of Dullness, as well as his own; And lay it seriously to his Conscience, whether, if he were walking the Streets, in dirty Weather, or a rainy Day; he would allow it fair Dealing in Folks at their Ease from a Window, to Critick his Gate, and ridicule his Dress at such a Juncture.[512]

The message is identical to Dryden's pleas for fairness, but the tone is clearly Swiftian. He stands Dryden on his head first by providing an inverted definition of the critic's duties and then begs critics not to criticize him even when he clearly deserves it. Dryden was more honest than his caricature at least in that he realized he had to relinquish the ultimate power of judgment of his character to others. However, the fact that he did so less than gracefully obviously did not escape Swift's attention. Furthermore, the sublime poet elevated by Dryden into a man of largesse who does not waste time with minor faults displays an arrogance that comes to light under Swift's examination. Dryden's reticence and sublimity, viewed as critical positions detached from his person, are amplified by Swift into a full-blown contradiction: the critic's duty is to point out faults except where the author does not wish them to be pointed out.

Critics continue to be disparaged as the *Tale* turns into the *Battle*. In the *Battle of the Books*, Swift opens the story with a familiar device. He states in the preface that the names he names should be read only as the names of books, and the story is thus shielded by an allegory of sorts, but one so thin that it needs no interpretation—the instructions are of course completely redundant and this redundancy, this familiar thinness of allegory, sets up the allegorical satire in the usual manner. Familiarity with the device might bring some relief to the reader in terms of the problem of interpretation, but this is provided through violence and the continuing glorified futility of the *Tale* that has to be experienced nonetheless. Weinbrot

[512] Swift 2010, 136.

emphasizes the connections between the *Tale* and the *Battle* by noting that both include "a multivoiced introduction, marginal explanatory notes, and strategically placed hiatuses joined to Latin glosses and asterisks."[513] The text is fragmented and torn, Homer has been dethroned and unworthy critics have challenged social cohesion to the extent that a battle between learned arguments seems inevitable. The *Phalaris* controversy was the immediate motivating force behind the text, but the *Battle* involves levelers across the board who threaten the world of learning, religion and politics. When Homer falls, kings are not far behind. The insolent "Bentley-spider" demands the "Temple-bee" remember his place in the grand scheme of things. There is a "general sense of the imposition of the moment upon the centuries" where "[d]iscontinuity and temporality rule."[514] To the doubt and chaos initiated by the *Tale* Swift brings as a climactic device the personification of criticism in the form of the goddess to whom Momus brings word of the Battle of the Books:

> She dwelt on the Top of a snowy Mountain in Nova Zembla; there Momus found her extended in her Den, upon the Spoils of numberless Volumes half devoured. At her right Hand sat Ignorance, her Father and Husband, blind with Age; at her left, Pride her Mother, dressing her up in the Scraps of Paper herself had torn.[515]

Her companions include Opinion, Noise, Impudence, Dullness, Vanity, Positiveness, Pedantry and Ill-Manners. The goddess is a sight to behold:

> The Goddess herself had Claws like a Cat: Her Head, and Ears, and Voice, resembled those of an Ass; Her Spleen was so large, as to stand prominent like a Dug of the first Rate, nor wanted Excrescencies in form of Teats, at which a Crew of ugly Monsters were greedily sucking; and, what is wonderful to conceive, the bulk of Spleen encreased faster than the Sucking could diminish it.[516]

[513] Weinbrot 2005, 184–5.
[514] Ibid, 187.
[515] Swift 2010, 154.
[516] Ibid.

The goddess intervenes, throws one of the sucking monsters into Wotton's mouth and so propels him into a frenzy. The grotesque images the reader meets mesh into scenes where Aristotle retaliates against Bacon, Descartes is hit with an arrow and finally Homer rides into glorious battle. Swift amplifies the absurdity of scholarly debate to such an extent that it ultimately seems a ridiculous exercise in epic pointlessness. The allegory implies a debate of pedantic schoolmasters who use texts, ancient and modern, as weapons against each other in controversies that are as futile and frustrating as the "chasms" of the Battle which punctuate the scene to create a broken and incomplete report of the Battle itself. One may read in it Dryden's circus of critics who fling books and points of debate at each other in an effort to promote their vain causes. Combined with Swift's method of leading the reader into argumentative impasses, the text is once again infuriating, but the pointlessness of interpreting the allegory, the futile pursuit of whatever one is supposed to gain from scholarly debate, seems to be the main point of the episode. Only when one emerges for breath from the story and sees the obvious joke played on the reader does one find some relief from the manic confusion. Readers are expected to interpret the text as an allegory and to follow the embedded scholarly apparatus, not to mention the much more impressive and necessary modern apparatus, and find them ridiculous and absurd. At the same time, one has to acknowledge that without them there would be no text to interpret.

In the end, there is very little left of what Fletcher calls "the purity of allegorical intention"[517] as the battle draws to a close. Fletcher, like most critical readers of Swift, is of course aware of Swift's method of writing "satire within satire,"[518] of how Swift, exaggerating Dryden's shifting opinions, redefines his intentions with the same conviction every time he states them. The perverse folding over of the satiric form is disorienting as the initial scheme becomes convoluted to the extent that readers find themselves lost in a work

[517] Fletcher 1964, 316.
[518] Ibid, 309.

that forbids the kind of careful reading necessary to decipher its meaning. However, even if Swift's parody of satire itself is deemed a traditional self-reflexive formal device at least as old as *Don Quixote*, one has to ask what it is that Swift is parodying in the obsessive convolutions of the *Tale* and the *Battle*. There is of course a broader concern behind Swift's work. Weinbrot identifies this by reminding the reader that "[l]evelers of Parnassus will seek to level episcopacy and monarchy."[519] He continues by saying that the *Battle* "is rooted in the harsh religious and political turmoil of the later Restoration period" and that it "also connects itself to the *Tale* and its context the better to reinforce reasons for the violence."[520] The violence involved in the manipulation of form, its breaks and fragmentation, also tell of something more immediate than the manipulation of the conventions of genre or its reflections of historical events, violent as they may have been in the memory of those who still felt the repercussions of the Civil War and the social revolution of the Restoration. The Quarrel in the rhetorical culture of post-Restoration England would have seen the analogy between the King and Homer as well, but this does not yet explain the linking of scholarly and political controversies into a scene of an absurd battle. Weinbrot hints at a reason behind the spectacle by noting that the naïve narrator "tries to bring others into his corrupt and corrupting world" and make them "an active convert to that world."[521] That is, Swift tries to infect his readers with the rhetoric he criticizes and even though this is done to point out its nefarious influence, the reader will feel violated by the exercise. Of Swift's convoluted form, Fletcher writes:

> This self-criticism of satire is its own strongest weapon, since in this way it is protected from the charge of excessive bitterness and strictness—one does not trust a man whose irony systematically negates all that is happening in the real

[519] Weinbrot 2005, 180.
[520] Ibid.
[521] Ibid, 190.

> world, but one will take a good deal from a man who makes sport of his own methods.[522]

Perhaps this is so, and something like it worked for Dryden's portrayal of the King, but one has to wonder to what extent the evaluation applies to Swift. He cannot be accused of strictness by any stretch of the imagination and he wore his bitterness on his sleeve. A more important issue than to what extent Swift has the right to the reader's confidence is to what extent his reader can withstand his convoluted invective. As a satirist, the abuse of the trust of his readers is part of his artistry. As his satires within satires continue to accumulate readers find themselves at a loss as to what his position actually is. The bottom of his argument, if he actually has one, falls out and he spins gracefully out of control into madness much like Defoe's ridiculed empirics who lack guidelines that are grounded on solid principles. If one reads his satire as a kind of metaleptic device on the level of form or a farfetched device that gradually forces the reader to lose sight of his argument, the possibility of interpretation becomes increasingly difficult and eventually futile. Again, this appears to be his intention: to frustrate readers not in order to test their patience but to obliterate it. All this is directed at the critical reader whose interpretation is expected and whose interpretation is expected to fail in this fashion. That is, the reader is forced to assume the responsibility for his or her own humiliation. The fact that most readers of Swift do this willingly and appear to take pleasure in it is a testament to Swift's art.

Exhausting the reader's patience also features in *A Tale of a Tub*. Jonathan Lamb analyzes the end the of first part of Swift's work and points out that "[t]he allegory of the *Tale* runs out of steam when finally there is no text left worth interpreting and no authority left to dispute."[523] Everything, he says, becomes literalized and no tension remains between the text and its interpretation: "Each attempt to invest a symbol or figure with significance descends

[522] Fletcher 1964, 316.
[523] Lamb 2008, 32.

first into literalism or tautology, and at last into nonsense."[524] Swift's treatment of Homer in the *Tale*, yet another case of simple mockery, illustrates a cruder use of literalization. After accusing Homer for failing to provide a complete account of all knowledge, he falls into absurdity by accusing Homer specifically of not having read the latest works on natural philosophy and of not having written a complete account of the spleen. In the mad critic's reading of Homer, one must first spot the marginal note that refers to a hyperbolic statement made by Xenophon that praises Homer as a universal genius, a common truism one might render as "everything is in Homer," and then realize the author's eagerness to criticize Homer for not providing his readers with a complete body of absolutely all knowledge. The critic wields the qualifier *all* to create categorical statements in what becomes a metaphysical argument. The argument reflects Swift's concern that the thought of his age wants to flatten all contingencies under the rule of method. *All* as a qualifier begets necessity and necessity, in turn, begets universals and absolutes. Swift parodies the liberal use of these statements in his satire and because the absolute *all* leads to statements of a universal nature, he is also mocking a pattern of leveling argumentation he sees as objectionable. Method, after all, may become simply a systematic way of being foolish if one follows the wrong one. The tension thus created in *A Tale of a Tub* explodes into an actual battle of the books. In the final part, *The Mechanical Operation of the Spirit*, Swift turns to more specific philosophical targets even as the reading experience grows more convoluted. In it, he finally tries to break through into the reader's ideas of what it is to be a reading subject in the first place.

[524] Ibid.

5.3 Arguments for a Mechanical Mind

The Mechanical Operation of the Spirit, which humorously tries to get rid of anything resembling allegorical interpretation, begins in much the same way as the preceding works, but here the author is unknown and Swift gives the impression that the work is a reproduction of a found text. The author is unknown, the text is censored by the bookseller and the rest is given over to the judgment of the "Learned Reader."[525] In other words, the bookseller expects the reader to be of a scholarly nature and the author, based on his reference to the Royal Society, is a learned author as well. He dwells on the figure of the ass and its rider, priming readers to expect yet more satire, but he is also apparently "resolved, by all means, to avoid giving Offence to any Party Whatever."[526] Instead of the popular epistolary form he deems unsuitable for the body of the text, he proposes to proceed using an allegory. Not only that, he pulls apart and explicates the elements of the allegory he will employ "that the judicious Reader, may without much straining, make his Applications as often as he shall think fit."[527] It is immediately clear that one is once again in the presence of a different kind of satirical author:

> Therefore, if you please from hence forward, instead of the Term, *Ass*, we shall make use of *Gifted*, or *enlightened Teacher*; And the Word *Rider*, we will exchange for that of *Fanatick Auditory*, or any other Denomination of the like Import. Having settled this weighty Point; the great Subject of Enquiry before us, is to examine, by what Methods this *Teacher* arrives at his *Gifts* or *Spirit*, or *Light*; and by what Intercourse between him and his Assembly, it is cultivated and supported.[528]

This the author does, or claims to do, in order to ease interpretation, but the connecting of the terms is clearly an affront to the reader whose interpretation is not required to decode the

[525] Swift 2010, 167.
[526] Ibid, 172.
[527] Ibid.
[528] Ibid.

satire as the author has spelled it out explicitly. The author comments on a number of impossible projects such as the squaring of the circle and the utopian commonwealth, to which the new Cambridge edition adds the comment that as Swift was an admirer of More, "*Utopia* is hardly likely to be an object of his satire."[529] Aligning these projects makes sense once one remembers that Hobbes apparently went to his grave thinking he had resolved both problems. More might not be the target, but the alchemical and utopian goals are not so much targets of Swift's satire as the very engines of the enthusiasm Swift mocks. That is, utopian goals toward which unreasonable men rush in their idealistic intellectual pursuits or the things that spur them on even when their more cynical critics deem them impossible at the outset.[530] Far from being terrorized by their own imaginations, except perhaps on occasion as in the case of Martin Scriblerus's rust-loving father,[531] they seem to take great pride in their delusions and threaten to infect others with their pernicious enthusiasm.

The text then proceeds to outline a mechanism for inducing religious ecstasy by aligning the methodological madness of mathematicians, philosophers and scientists with religious enthusiasm in a confused flurry of argumentation that refers to Aristotelian notions of mind and nature, Meric Casaubon's anatomy of enthusiasm, drug-induced trances and eastern meditation techniques. The author sifts through the ways in which enthusiasm may be generated, makes a distinction between an innate aptitude for enthusiasm, an artificially generated one and one that has grown natural through exposure to artificial forms. The mechanism which he describes requires that the senses be overwhelmed or otherwise "justle[d] ... out of their Stations"[532] in order to produce the desired effect. Once this synthetic ecstasy is achieved "it manifestly appears that the Reasoning Faculties are all suspended and

[529] Ibid, 512, n 8.
[530] Many of Swift's readers would have also been aware of the Hobbes–Wallis controversy which began with the squaring of the circle, but naturally spilled over to fundamental questions of epistemology. For discussion see Jesseph 1999.
[531] Cf. Pope and Arbuthnot 2002, 16–19. Cf. Levine 1991a, 238–252.
[532] Swift 2010, 174.

superseded, that Imagination hath usurped the Seat, scattering a thousand Deliriums over the Brain" and the Spirit appears in the form of hallucinatory light.[533] To this intoxication the Dissenting preacher applies his art, which is the subject of the second part of the text. Swift ruthlessly mocks the Quakers and other Dissenters whose preaching and religion in general he disparagingly associates with trade. The protest ties their religious convictions with the artificial nature of the corrupt ecstasy of their flock and dissociates the exercise from genuine religious life. The mere proposition that a synthetic variant of the process is available is made to look absurd and those who argue for such techniques ridiculous proponents of a synthetic sublime. This and forms of disingenuous piety in general are aligned with budding Enlightenment philosophy:

> Who, that sees a little paultry Mortal, droning and dreaming, and drivelling to a Multitude, can think it agreeable to common good Sense, that either Heaven or Hell should be put to the Trouble of Influence or Inspection upon what he is about? Therefore, I am resolved immediately, to weed this Error out of Mankind, by making it clear, that this Mystery, of venting spiritual Gifts is nothing but a *Trade*, acquired by as much Instruction, and mastered by equal Practice and Application as others are.[534]

In short, the author does his best to lead readers to accept that they are living in an age of perfected sinfulness. Of course, the argument is far from convincing and the body of the author's instructions is omitted as "neither safe nor Convenient to Print."[535] Swift's satire here turns to abstraction as the passages that were promised to the reader disappear into one of the many chasms of the text. Where one would hope to find an argument that would lure the reader into thinking dangerously one finds only empty signs that stand in for deleted language that should do so. The omissions appear to underline the absurdity of actually reaching a state where true experience of the sublime coincides with authentic enlightenment.

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[533] Ibid, 176.
[534] Ibid, 178.
[535] Ibid, 179.

It appears to play with the same idea as Rochester's *Satyr Against Reason and Mankind* which in Noggle's analysis manifests the ability of the known material universe to exhaust the senses while simultaneously denying any kind of transcendence. But Rochester's Pyrrhonism at least maintains an "insistence on the authority of absolute doubt."[536] There does not seem to be such conviction in Swift's prose.

From there the author moves to what Clive T. Probyn calls "a satiric arabesque of contemporary mechanistic cerebral anatomy"[537] which contains caricatures of Cartesian mechanisms, Hippocratic teachings and features of Galenic medicine. Probyn comments that in true Swiftian fashion "the combination is mocked by its own complexity."[538] The mind is described as a "Crowd of little animals"[539] who cling together and the corpuscular nature of its composition creates a caricature of contemporary medical and philosophical theories of its structure. The preacher's voice is a force that impacts their configurations in a way that leads to certain thoughts and eventually plays on the "artificial Enthusiasm"[540] that is generated by the eager mind. From here the Swift proceeds, quite suddenly, to discuss the history of fanaticism which the author takes to mean something like "an apparition transporting the mind,"[541] as Shaftesbury defined it, but its meaning is inverted in the sense that its sublimity comes perversely from within. Swift and Shaftesbury disagree over the role of the individual's judgment in producing fanatic reactions—Swift mocks the rabble whereas Shaftesbury promotes a form of social cohesion that results from the collective operation of individual judgment.[542] The Cambridge edition notes that Swift's target here was possibly John Toland's *Christianity not Mysterious* (1696), but given Swift's propensity for self-reflexive satire, Dryden's *Discourse* may be suggested as an additional source. This would

[536] Noggle 2001, 43.
[537] Probyn 1974, 274.
[538] Ibid, 254.
[539] Swift 2010, 179.
[540] Ibid, 182.
[541] Shaftesbury 2000, 27.
[542] Cf. Noggle 2001, 93.

explain the author's prolonged discussion of the role of Dionysus, Bacchus and their religious festivals attended by "a Set of roaring Companions, overcharg'd with Wine."[543] "It is added," says the author, "that they imitated *Satyrs*, were attended by *Goats*, and rode upon *Asses*, all Companions of great Skill and Practice in Affairs of Gallantry."[544] The fanaticism of the Dissenters is thus associated with the origin of satire and indeed poetry in a way that would vex Puritan sensibilities. Following his usual modus operandi, Swift achieves his satire of the Dissenters by creating an unflattering inverted image from their protests against the superfluous rhetoric of poetry. He then forms illicit associations with the target of his criticism and expands them to include all those he wishes to criticize. Their origin is thus unwholesome, guided by drunkenness and unbridled sexuality and their words poetry, "insignificant Words, Incoherence and Repetition"[545] or mere ornament detached from any real connection to pious devotion. Critics have grown accustomed to Swift's caricatures of the mechanical mind and satirical religion, but few ask if there is any merit to his way of extravagant philosophizing. As *The Mechanical Operation of the Spirit* implodes on itself, one is left mystified. Can one read in his madness a valid argument given the extravagance of the ways in which the text resists interpretation? And what is Swift's ultimate target? To find out the true source of his anger, one may compare Swift's splenetic portrait with a less convoluted exposition of Locke's new theories of identity and personality. Swift detested these and was blinded by anger, but the reasons behind his anger do merit attention.

Lockean ideas were not to Swift's taste, but Joseph Addison was famously enamored of them and built his own theory of aesthetics accordingly. For Addison, wit and its power to please follow Locke's analogy of wit and judgment as the association and dissociation of ideas, respectively. In making the distinction between the two, Locke himself assigns wit the

[543] Swift 2010, 183.
[544] Ibid, 184.
[545] Ibid, 186.

task of "putting those [ideas] together with quickness and variety, wherein can be found any resemblance or congruity, thereby to make up pleasant pictures and agreeable visions in the fancy."[546] That is, not unlike one would go about composing or interpreting, or at least enjoying, an allegory where one joins together metaphors and allusions. But Locke says that the beauty of art is pleasant in itself and that "it is a kind of affront to go about to examine it, by the severe rules of truth and good reason."[547] By this he means that truthfulness in art is of secondary importance and that it would be unreasonable to demand an examination of truth in art if it is the assemblage of constituent ideas which brings pleasure to the viewer or reader. Were one to interpret Locke in an extravagant fashion, one might say that he thus detached the use of wit from moral improvement, relegating wit to the domain of mere pleasure and artificiality, and so gave Addison a problem to which he could respond. Addison responded not long after the 1710 edition of the *Tale* was published. In many ways, it is the Lockean detachment of art from truth, the creation of a separate realm of ideas, whose critique is voiced in the grotesqueries of Swift and Defoe. Swift, at least, found the allocation of the creative impulse into a mechanistic function in a Lockean or Hobbesian theory of the mind objectionable, to say nothing of what he thought such theories did to morality and religious thought. Addison found mechanical views of the mind attractive despite the fact that they had been savagely ridiculed by Swift in the past and would be ridiculed mercilessly by the Scriblerians after Addison's essays were published. Swift himself preferred the likes of Bishop Berkeley. Berkeley's philosophy famously expanded the idealistic aspect of Lockean metaphysics to its logical conclusion—one can almost read Berkeley's views on ontology as satire, though this would hardly be fair to his argument. But it is easy to see why Swift was drawn to Berkeley's philosophy which recognized that a system like Locke's would require that ideas come about through and resemble only other ideas. Its boldness was to turn the

[546] Locke 2001, 118.
[547] Ibid.

hermetic idea theory of the mind inside out and rather deal with the consequences than succumb to speculative model-building which wove itself into existence like a mythical narrative released from the bonds of referentiality.[548] At least it did not lose sight of the world in the manner mechanical views of the mind did when they isolated the mind as an abstract mental space of ideas.

In *The Spectator* No. 62 (1711), Addison contrasts Locke's definition of wit with Dryden's which he deems too broad, "not so properly a definition of wit, as of good writing in general."[549] With Locke's more precise view of wit as an organizing principle of the mind, Dryden's notion of wit as the propriety of words and thoughts adapted to the subject seemed old-fashioned and outdated. Addison was clearly impressed by the explanatory power of Locke's model: "Mr. Lock's Account of wit, with this short explanation, comprehends most of the species of wit, as metaphors, similitudes, allegories, enigmas, mottos, parables, fables, dreams, visions, dramatick Writings, Burlesque, and all the Methods of Allusion."[550] After chiding the bad taste in wit of "mob readers,"[551] Addison remarks that he might continue on the subject later, which is what he did in his essays on the pleasures of the imagination the following year. One can see in Addison's dismissal of Dryden's definition of wit something of the unbearable futility of intellectual and critical debate Swift's satire, if read as criticism, makes painfully clear. If one looks at the history of the term *wit*, one finds that for an Elizabethan like Sidney, the meaning of the term extended to all manner of intellectual gifts.[552] By Jonson's time it had devolved into denoting an aptitude for conceits and the like verbal trickery and from a faculty of fancy and judgment to signify fancy alone. The dissociation of wit from judgment led to efforts to re-associate the two, which is what Dryden

[548] Cf. Fauske 2010.
[549] Addison 1832, 104.
[550] Ibid.
[551] Ibid, 104.
[552] Cf. Gelber 1999, 108.

was trying to do with his definition. This was the stale old Restoration sense of wit Addison objected to, an old conception in a new dress. Summarized in this fashion, the uses of the term had come full circle and a cynic like Swift could see no solution to the problem itself, only the push and pull of vain learned men who had the time and enough interest in the question to debate the matter. In this case wit, too, was indeed "but a *Ball* bandied to and fro" in a debate that was doomed to repeat itself over and over again. The point of Swift's satire in this case is to spell out the ridiculousness of the debate that would never go anywhere as long as the ball remained in play and the players were unable to see it for what it was. In other words, Swift's aim was to transcend learned debate by ridiculing it.

Compared to Dryden, Addison's essays on art and the pleasures of the imagination do carry the abstraction of artistic truth further, but at the cost of finally severing the bond between the medium and the perceiving subject. Addison begins by situating the faculty of imagination in a hierarchy between the senses and the understanding: "The pleasures of the imagination, taken in the full extent, are not so gross as those of sense, nor so refined as those of the understanding."[553] In modern parlance, this tripartite division could perhaps be mapped onto material, perceptual and conceptual sensory and mental processes, but more important than understanding the models Addison spins is to understand how absurd they would have seemed by Swift's standards. The primary pleasures arise when actual objects are perceived and after this point the material medium is no longer relevant to perception, which results in a bizarrely immaterial materialism. The rest of the process is transposed to the level of ideas; differences between actual media can be overlooked as all perception becomes the stuff of the mind. When certain ideas in the mind are called forth, they are reproduced in the imagination as images that recreate the pleasure the mind experienced when they were first perceived. Addison also notes that there need not be a strict resemblance in the artwork and

[553] Addison 1832, 138.

the original idea to bring pleasure: "It is sufficient that we have seen places, persons, or actions, in general, which bear a resemblance, or at least some remote analogy with what we find represented. Since it is in the power of the imagination, when it is once stocked with particular ideas, to enlarge, compound, and vary them at her own pleasure."[554] There is no need to rehearse Addison's entire argument here but to note that in his essays on the pleasures of the imagination he popularized a reading of the Lockean copy theory of the mind. The whole system would have seemed like an exercise in epistemological madness to readers sympathetic to Swift's point of view. As useful as Lockean protopsychology was for the creation of theories of artistic perception, its universalizing tendencies contained problems which Swift, lacking the means to philosophize, expressed in satire and invective. Severed from the world, the idea theory allowed for endless permutations and formulations that were as grotesque as they were devoid of content. In fact, its carnivalistic speculation would have probably seemed not unlike a Bakhtinian form of satire for Swift and his ilk. That is, for a reader of Swift's temperament, modern philosophy was so alien and bizarre that had it not existed, he would have invented it for the amusement of his friends and himself. However, Swift's *Tale* itself should not be read as satire of the Bakhtinian variety but rather a response to what he perceived as a carnivalistic madness in the freedom of opinion in which the speculative philosophers indulged. Addison's push to develop their ideas further showed that the satire Swift had written about them clearly had not worked.

Much like Dryden, Addison speaks of the "perfection of imagination"[555] and artistic education as a prerequisite for enjoying the pleasures of the imagination on any higher level. There is very little to generate controversy in the position itself, but the complications of Locke's theory begin to arise when one examines it in detail. Even those who were sympathetic to Locke's theory sometimes found themselves at an impasse. For example, the

[554] Ibid, 145.
[555] Ibid.

painter Jonathan Richardson could not but turn to satire in one of his manuals of painting and criticism when the constraints of the theory overwhelmed him. In 1715, Richardson published his influential *Essay on the Theory of Painting* and followed it in 1719 with *The Whole Art of Criticism in Relation to Painting* and *The Science of a Connoisseur*.[556] He followed Lockean philosophy in his manuals and believed Locke and contemporary philosophers had proven that light and colors, as secondary qualities of matter, are a product of the ideational mechanisms of the mind and have no real existence outside the realm of ideas. As a painter, he was concerned with sight in particular, painting and its sister art poetry. In the final pages of *The Art of Criticism*, Richardson struggles with Locke's powerful philosophy and pushes it to the point where judgment finally fails. Exhausted, he decides to end his examination by revealing the absurdity of a fundamental tenet of Locke's theory. He refers to Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* and Locke's failure to prove the logical necessity of God. In brief, Locke argues that from the Cartesian *cogito* we know something exists for certain, namely we do, and therefore we must know that an eternal being exists from the intuitive a priori certainty that something cannot come from nothing. A timeless universe of nothing is for Locke impossible and, therefore, "from eternity there has been something."[557] After struggling with the question, Richardson gives up and mockingly gives the role of the critic to his 12-year-old son. He gives Locke's proof to the boy to read and when he is asked what he thinks of Locke's demonstration, the child declares: "Supposing the world to have been created in time this is a demonstration, otherwise 'tis not."[558] If the theory was valid, it would create a closed system that does not allow the spontaneous creation of mimetic novelty. As a flawed argument, on the other hand, it can only accept divine autonomy as a hypothetical point of origin and hence the theory is

[556] For a discussion of Richardson's manuals, see Kakko 2012.
[557] Locke 2001, 516. Modern philosophers note that Locke's argument is flawed and that the sentence "from eternity there has been something" relies on equivocation. Cf. Jolley 1999, 96–7.
[558] Richardson 1719, 207.

groundless. A child could apparently see this. Richardson thus follows Locke, but even he cannot resist writing a satirical vignette when confronted by the breaking point of Locke's ambitious theory of the mind. However, it must be noted that satire here might be the only reasonable reaction, since one can hardly accuse Locke of not explaining the universe in a single chapter of his great work as Swift had accused Homer of not being a true universal genius. It is rather the dichotomy that Richardson seems to challenge, the latent claim that the form Locke's reasoning takes has to proceed through a false juxtapositioning of indefensible claims. To take such claims literally would, as Swift shows in the *Tale*, certainly lead to madness and all manner of buffoonery. Satire in this case acts as a way of looking beyond the petty quarrel that seduces the naïve reader into thinking there is no third way available that can overcome the tendency of modern philosophy to arrive at these impasses. It demands the reader to compose a resolution that is denied by the very form of the controversy.

As Richardson's criticism of Locke's theory shows, there was perhaps some truth to Swift's satirical approach to the question despite its extravagant rhetoric. Elsewhere, Richardson stumbles on another interesting, if unrelated, point when he states that "painters paint themselves."[559] One need not exaggerate the claim too much to pose the ontological argument that poets write themselves into existence in their art. This links Dryden's self-creation to Swift in a way that might be overshadowed by Swift's anger. Zwicker (once again in a later essay) remarks that Dryden reinvented the ironic voice of the author. By this he refers to Dryden's doubleness and purposeful ambiguity. Swift's cousin Dryden was certainly a target of the *Tale*'s mockery. However, Swift's resistance to Lockean models of the mind found a surprising ally in Dryden as well. Dryden's "spectacle of equivocation,"[560] argues Zwicker, was transformed in Swift's fearsome rhetoric into a grotesque version of the original, but Dryden is nevertheless very much the model of Swift's authorial voice in his

[559] Richardson 1725, 228
[560] Zwicker 2008b, 75.

angry satires. The irony, one assumes, was unintended. Defoe may have sought to contain Dryden's ironic voice in a narrative frame, but Swift adapted it for his own purposes and fashioned it into the various ridiculously idealistic authors that inhabit and lash out from the *Tale*. The original literary mask fashioned by Dryden was, of course, much more reasonable: "Dryden did not mean to dispense with ideals, but his embrace is partial, protected from absolutes."[561] The "generous indecision"[562] that Dryden created into his own image was for Swift a target of satire, but it was also the rhetorical dress he had to assume in order to write the *Tale*. Whereas Pope may sometimes appear as a defender of the kind of aristocratic wit Dryden the court poet embodied, Swift was not fond of royal pomp or the mechanistic wit Addison endorsed. Both Swift and Pope shared an ironic pessimism about human nature, Swift's was furious in comparison, but neither could avoid Dryden's influence.

It would be easy to refer to Swift's famous quip to Pope that his purpose in life was to vex the world rather than divert it, but in a recent work examining their correspondence Griffin reminds his readers that this was a response to Pope's letter where Pope hoped that two or three of their circle of friends might one day gather not "to vex our own or others hearts with busy vanities ... but to divert ourselves, and the world too if it pleases."[563] The letters, planned for publication and thus a kind of public discussion, were perhaps not as much a declaration of satiric principles as they were Swift's way of scorning his readers in order to delight them with a witty inversion of Pope's words. Phiddian provides a subtler explanation of Swift's antics by noting that "Swift is clearly a hostile midwife"[564] at the birth of the Author:

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[561] Ibid, 78.
[562] Ibid, 82. At times the comments of critics concerning Dryden and Swift sound very similar. Zwicker notes of *Religio Laici* , for example, that by design "there is no possibility for a univocal reading" (ibid, 81).
[563] Griffin 2010, 4–5.
[564] Phiddian 1995, 103.

> He shows that authors, far from being trustworthy centres of signification, can be fools, knaves, and shreds of artifice. Furthermore, an important lesson of Swiftian parody is that authors do not invent language and consequently cannot control the filiations of the words and discourses they are said to create.[565]

Satire of Lockean mechanistic models of individuality and personality feature prominently in the confusion of the *Tale*'s many characters and voices: "The polyvocal text wants to publish and be claimable for various selves, while the youthful intellectual believes optimistically in his power to gain the sympathy of readers and to reconcile apparent differences in the alchemy of writing."[566] It is thus perhaps fitting that Swift was following Dryden as he parodied new and, to him, absurd theories of what it means to have a personality. What Swift did in response to his view of the nature of language, on the other hand, was perhaps unprecedented. Aware of the slipperiness of language and meaning, he did not try to control his message and dictate his meaning to readers. Rather, he merely gave his scholarly readers a text that made sure they would eventually get entangled in their own wit.

The reader receives little assistance from the bitter author amidst the turmoil of the Swiftian world. Quite the contrary. At times, the task of interpretation is aggressively thrown at the reader who must of necessity succumb to the same semantic complications the author suffers. At other times, the task of interpretation is made to seem redundant, leaving him or her with very little to do. Once again, interpreting satire throws a light on the reader's ability to read. Or rather it points to the vain optimism on the part of those who presume the text must be readable in the first place—most students of Swift have to study the text in detail only to find it impossible to read in any conventional sense. The alchemy of writing is indeed an apt description of what seems to lie behind the *Tale*'s mockery on the whole. It is the utopian goal that drives Swift's age and which his cynicism cannot but mock by showing those who delve into the text the error of their ways in a forceful and even violent manner.

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[565] Ibid.
[566] Ibid.

One not only has to read about the folly of religious innovators and philosophical madmen, one is forced to think them. This is a less optimistic conclusion for the reader than it is for Swift whose ambitions have been proven justified by the continuing success of the *Tale*. As for the carnivalistic or polyvalent nature of Swift's text, one might again allude to a Bakhtinian reading, but to what extent the text actually is either of those things is questionable. Swift, despite the labyrinthine interpretations the work inspires, is nevertheless in control of all the voices that appear on the page due to his ingenious framing device.[567] Only Dryden seems to overpower him. Theoretically, the Swiftian world should therefore have a resolution that coincides with Swift's intention, even if one has to settle on the notion that his intention was to create the ambiguity that has had readers piling footnotes upon footnotes for centuries. In that case, one might posit a Swiftian sublime, one that appears as the object of wonder toward which readers, like Swift's enthusiasts, must strive certain of the failure of their undertaking. One simply chases a mirage that is visible only sporadically and if there is an overall argument in Swift's work, which is somewhat doubtful, it is to let the reader experience the exhaustion that must overtake him or her before the issues are resolved. That is, Swift's aim is not only to write a failed argument in his satire but to transfer the failure and the experience of it to his audience in a way that makes a mockery of what Ehrenpreis calls "imaginative sympathy."[568] As important as Swift was in the elevation of such failures of interpretation from a simple rhetorical device to a central critical problem of modernity, it is in the work of Alexander Pope that the mad chorus of eighteenth-century critics, philosophers and poets finally reaches its apex.

[567] Cf. Griffin 2010, 107.
[568] Cf. section 1.3.

6. Alexander Pope and the Sublime Author

Pope's poetry has the power to spin the reader's mind off its hinges as much as anything Swift ever wrote and much of the pleasure of reading him comes from Pope's awareness of his mastery of the medium. One thinks of *The Rape of the Lock*, for example, more as an application of his skills to a specific problem than the author's self-expression. A similar realization led Coleridge, reflecting in a Romantic mode of criticism on various correlations between language and government, to say that pre-Restoration writers, severe as they were, appear to have had a very different approach to linguistic meaning and interpretation from those who wrote soon after the Restoration: "In them the precise intended meaning of a word can never be mistaken; whereas in the later writers, as especially in Pope, the use of words is for the most part purely arbitrary, so that the context will rarely show the true specific sense, but only that something of the sort is designed."[569] The shift in register, which apparently did not affect Swift whose simplicity Coleridge admired, was linked to the "lightness of manner"[570] that accompanied the new king and his court. Coleridge complains that with the rise of the reading public, an "excess of manner of expression"[571] began to plague English letters and extravagant but flimsy forms of figurative language gave way to simple prose. In his youth, Pope dreamed of joining the ranks of the gentleman wits and courtly writers, but circumstances dictated otherwise. The young Pope was enamored of Dryden, who had been one such courtly writer earlier in his career. The greatest writer of the previous generation, Dryden was a veritable idol for Pope. As a youth Pope famously kept a portrait of Dryden in

[569] Coleridge 1836, 236.
[570] Ibid, 237.
[571] Ibid, 239.

his room and in a 1704 letter he writes: "[W]hatever lesser Wits have arisen since his Death, are but like Stars appearing when the Sun is set, that twinkle only in his absence, and with the Rays they have borrowed from him."[572] Dryden was in later life a working writer, something Pope was able to aspire to after he buried his dreams of courtly life. As Coleridge's lament also shows, this was unusual as the preferred image of the man of letters at the time was still very much the witty gentleman writer, the Restoration amateur. Pope realized he could never achieve fame as one and instead became that rarest of creatures, a successful professional writer, an independent author who answered to no one but the public. And he wanted them to answer back.

Pope's Catholicism was of course a hindrance to his career, but he wore it lightly. His health, on the other hand, was a more severe obstacle. Maynard Mack notes that "by the time he began to be known as a successful poet he was already established in his own mind and in the minds of others as a dwarf and a cripple."[573] The condition he shared with Leopardi meant he was subject to fevers, inflammations, abdominal pain, respiratory problems and cardiac weakness. Common colds and other health problems were made worse by his illness. In addition to complications from the disease, he was also severely short sighted. Mack's exhausting list of Pope's medical problems also includes "the standard horrors of eighteenth-century medical practice"[574] which did not aid his well-being and although he seems to have showed some bravado in the face of disease, the best he could hope for was a spate of "health four days together."[575] Some have made much of Pope's impotence. Given that Pope cut a distinctive and indeed distinguished figure in English society, it is always baffling to note, alongside Coleridge whose observation does have a point, that Pope consistently remains hidden in his poetry, covered in the rags of artifice and manners to the extent that it might

[572] Quoted in Griffin 2010, 28.
[573] Mack 1985, 153.
[574] Ibid, 155.
[575] Ibid, 156.

even be considered (to follow Locke's advice) an affront to try to uncover him. As for Pope's response to such attempts, few would disagree that it was Pope who finally made a fine art of mocking critics. One of the worries he seems to have shared with Dryden, and somewhat paradoxically with Coleridge as well, was the loss of vitality in poetic language. This was perhaps more due to Dryden's influence than anything else, but no doubt also a critical observation Pope must have made in his own voracious reading and imitation of English poetry. In this section, I want to look at ways in which Pope responded to this loss in his poetry and prose satire. I will focus on three works: *An Essay on Criticism*, *Peri Bathous* and *An Essay on Man*. *The Dunciad*, arguably the highpoint of Augustan satire, is unfortunately too broad a work to discuss here, but it could be argued that such an analysis is not strictly necessary either. The maneuvers Pope uses to bring down his critics would read like a shortlist of Scriblerian rhetoric and I wish to discuss Pope's uses of the sublime—whose grotesque mutations are made to shine in *The Dunciad*—in *Peri Bathous* and *An Essay on Man*, because there one finds them in forms that lend themselves better to an examination of Pope's method of transferring the task of interpretation to his readers.

6.1 Lightness of Manner

The *Essay on Criticism* was first published anonymously in May 1711. As was often the case with anonymous publications that were well-received, as the *Essay on Criticism* was by Addison in a December edition of *The Spectator*, the author was quickly identified. The poem brings together the central features of English criticism in a remarkably concise form. Dryden's views are prevalent, although it is difficult to distinguish what in the poem is the influence of contemporary criticism and what stems from Pope's own reading in the classics.

The classical references may be found in any decent annotated edition of Pope's poem, but some of the contemporary topoi should be pointed out here to demonstrate how Pope touches on several of them in his rapid fire delivery of critical principles. The *Essay on Criticism* opens with the lament that critics have multiplied to an alarming extent. Their numbers had by now come to exceed poets ten to one. One is reminded of Rymer's comment to Rapin: "'[T]ill of late years *England* was as free from Criticks, as it is from *Wolves*."[576] In the *Essay on Criticism*, Pope deems their lack of judgment dangerous because of the inherent subjectivity of critical opinion: "'Tis with our *Judgments* as our Watches, none / Go just *alike*, yet each believes his own" (ll. 9–10).[577] Pope engages in the popular critic-bashing of the time and shows most of them act out of envy, incompetence, vanity and other malicious motives. The young poet could have not experienced much critical scorn yet (although when he did the result would be even more magnificent poetry) and one may assume that if one hears a touch of borrowed bitterness in his voice, it is by way of his emulation of Dryden. Nevertheless, he speaks of the "Critick's noble name" (l. 47) and recognizes the qualities that make a good critic, chiefly humility and modesty. The marriage of wit and judgment (l. 84) is a trope of reasonableness, repeated later in the advice to avoid extremes, and the synthesis spans the entire argument. The true critic is once again "the Muses handmaid" (l. 102) who assists and spurs on the poet instead of finding fault, but Pope shows himself a satirist even in his earliest major success by unmasking the motives of incompetent critics who have corrupted the ancient ideal:

> But following Wits from that Intention stray'd;
> Who cou'd not win the Mistress, woo'd the Maid;
> Against the Poets *their own Arms* they turn'd,
> Sure to hate most the Men from whom they *learn'd*
> (ll. 104–7)

[576] Quoted in Patey 2005, 3.
[577] All citations from the *Essay on Criticism* are from Pope 1963.

Pope is an unapologetic Ancient, but he also shows that he is aware of another popular contemporary topos in the following lines which touch upon a medical controversy between apothecaries and the College of Physicians. He draws an analogy between the controversy and neo-classicist criticism, after which he evokes Longinus and, in the didactic spirit of the poem, suggests a response for any critic reading the poem: "Great Wits sometimes may *gloriously offend,* / And *rise* to *Faults* true Criticks *dare not mend*" (ll. 152–3). The sublime poets go "beyond the Reach of Art" (l. 155) and beyond the critic's reproof. The pace of Pope's verse is quite breathtaking as he then moves to a condensed version of Horace's *ut pictura poesis* and its relation to poetic decorum:

> Some Figures *monstrous* and *mis-shap'd* appear,
> Consider'd *singly,* or beheld too *near,*
> Which, but *proportion'd* to their *Light*, or *Place,*
> Due Distance *reconciles* to Form and Grace
> (ll. 171–4)

The parallel between painting and poetry is reiterated throughout, but here it is aligned with the proper response to works that require viewers to adjust their perspective ("Survey the *Whole,* nor seek slight Faults to find" (l. 235)) and a quick dismissal of perfection in art familiar from Dryden's *A Parallel of Poetry and Painting*.[578] The Quarrel receives a brief mention as verbal critics are shown to be vain creatures who squabble over petty details:

[578] In his preface to *A Parallel of Painting and Poetry*, Dryden writes: "The business of this preface is to prove that a learned painter should form to himself an idea of perfect nature. This image he is to set before his mind in all his undertakings, and to draw from thence, as from a store house, the beauties which are to enter into his work" (Dryden 1962b, 183–4). By "perfect nature" Dryden means a conception of the natural world in its perfect state, an image of nature as it should be at its best. It is this nature that has to be imitated in poetry and painting, not the actual world. Of course, it is a more perfect object of imitation than the natural world with its many imperfections could ever provide. Art itself cannot, according to Dryden, reach this perfect ideal.

> Most Criticks, fond of some subservient Art,
> Still make the *Whole* depend upon a *Part*,
> They talk of *Principles*, but Notions prize,
> And All to one lov'd Folly Sacrifice.
> (ll. 263–6)

They serve their own purposes, hang on to their claims like members of Dryden's Roman circus or perhaps even like Swift's bookish warriors, and can be dismissed as ridiculous as their follies. This is of course also a reference to the Moderns and their tedious scholarship to which Pope would have to yield, or on which he would at least have to rely later in his translations of Homer. Dullness makes brief appearances in the *Essay on Criticism*, but only in passing. Words are deemed the dress of thought and the changing of fashions is recognized in an argument that takes into consideration the passing of time as well as propriety. As for the vulgar and the learned, here Pope tries to negotiate a balance between the two by finding blame in both:

> The *Vulgar* thus through *Imitation* err;
> As oft the *Learn'd* by being *Singular*;
> So much they scorn the Crowd, that if the Throng
> By *Chance* go right, they *purposely* go wrong.
> (ll. 424–7)

Dryden's self-consciously old-fashioned approach to poetry is gracefully left unmentioned, but in Pope's criticism of critical cliques one can once again hear Dryden's admonishing voice: "Fondly we think we honour Merit then, / When we but praise *Our Selves* in *Other Men*" (ll. 454–5). Dryden, whose name appears a number of times in the poem, is given as an example in relation to the sad fact that every Homer must have their Zoilus.[579] There is a fixed dynamic in Pope's world that requires such critical friction. Wit reveals unjust

[579] It is curious that Dryden is not named the model critic and is viewed more as a poet. Griffin takes this to be a criticism of Dryden and argues that Pope undermined Dryden "no less than Swift" (2010, 35) did. Even if this is the case, one should perhaps read Pope's point about Dryden's loss of authority as one related to his overall argument of the decay of poetic language rather than a hostile criticism in the Swiftian manner.

criticism, "Th' *opposing Body's* Grossness," (l. 469) but the dynamic that works within this balanced universe of opposing forces does have a downside. Dryden shall be as Chaucer and his language will be lost to future generations as the years grind away the brightness of his words:

> So when the faithful *Pencil* has design'd
> Some *bright Idea* of the Master's Mind,
> Where a *new World* leaps out at his command,
> And ready Nature waits upon his Hand;
> When the ripe Colours *soften* and *unite*,
> And sweetly *melt* into just Shade and Light,
> When mellowing Years their full Perfection give,
> And each Bold Figure just begins to *Live*;
> The *treach'rous Colours* the fair Art betray,
> And all the bright Creation fades away!
> (ll. 484–493)

The decay Pope speaks of here is far from the terror of the final apocalypse of *The Dunciad*, but in these lines one can see clearly that even in the *Essay on Criticism* Pope carried with him a melancholic sense of the fading power of art. This would be amplified to epic proportions later, but the feeling of decay and corruption is clearly present in the *Essay on Criticism* as well. It shows itself in a lament for a grayness that will eventually overtake the most brilliant works of art with the passing of time. It is a reference to yet another contemporary topos in which Pope rises to defend wit as a fragile flower that "ev'n in blooming *Dies*" (l. 499). The image is striking and goes to show that a robust notion of wit was indeed not the standard anymore.[580] The inevitable grayness that follows as the wheels in Pope's mechanism turn creates a "shameful" (l. 533) dullness in the world that one must

[580] Mack comments that though the term "still weakly flourished its quiverful of disparate senses, ranging from smart repartee to artistic invention, genius, and insight, its chief sense as applied to literature was tilting increasingly to the side of decorum … By the time Pope's career began, wit in this older more maverick sense was rapidly losing ground. By representatives of middle-class gravity like Sir Richard Blackmore … wit seems to have been reckoned to the exclusionary badge of a leisure caste" (1985, 169).

guard against. As if in a reply to Coleridge's criticism, Pope places the blame on the merry monarch and the Glorious Revolution:

> In the fat Age of Pleasure, Wealth, and Ease,
> Sprung the rank Weed, and thriv'd with large Increase;
> When *Love* was all an easie Monarch's Care;
> Seldom at *Council*, never at a *War*:
> *Jilts* rul'd the State, and Statesmen *Farces* writ;
> Nay *Wits* had *Pensions*, and *young Lords* had *Wit*:
> The Fair sate panting at a *Courtier's Play*,
> And not a Mask went *un-improv'd* away:
> The modest Fan was lifted up no more,
> And Virgins *smil'd* at what they *blush'd* before—
> The following License of a Foreign Reign
> Did all the Dregs of bold *Socinus* drain;
> Then Unbelieving Priests reform'd the Nation,
> And taught more *Pleasant* Methods of Salvation;
> Where Heavn's Free Subjects might their *Rights* dispute,
> Lest God himself shou'd seem too *Absolute*.
> *Pulpits* their *Sacred Satire* learn'd to spare,
> And Vice *admir'd* to find a *Flatt'rer* there!
>
> (ll. 534–551)

As a result, the presses fed a diluted culture with obscene materials and created an atmosphere where Pope's divine order seems threatened. He therefore advises critics to direct their anger at those who enabled the emergence of the kind of false rhetoric that troubled Coleridge: one should avoid the relativistic "Jaundic'd Eye" (l. 559) that perverts judgment. From this point, Pope moves to demonstrate his own judgment by noting that manners do play their part in criticism, thus perhaps validating Coleridge's point concerning the strange equivocation present in post-Restoration literature: "*Blunt Truths* more Mischief than *nice Falshoods* do" (l. 573). On the other hand, this is a warning to those who enjoy blunt truths for their bluntness rather than their truth. As for "dang'rous *Truths*," Pope advises that they should be left "to unsuccessful *Satyrs*" (l. 592). Silence, as exemplified by Dryden's decision not to engage with petty critics, is often preferable to failed satire—one is reminded of the lessons of the Marprelate Controversy. The poem closes with references to a number of

ancient writers such as Aristotle, Horace, Dionysius, Petronius, Quintilian, Longinus and others, taking care to praise Horace's lack of method. The latter point is a way of once again stating the superiority of the English against the French whose rules in poetry and politics the Britons had successfully rejected in order to flourish.

As a summary of the tradition of English criticism, Pope's poem is an unrivalled display of classical learning and, perhaps even more so, an illustration of the major tenets of contemporary criticism. At the same time, it was of course designed to dazzle readers. Mack notes that its classical references were meant to "depersonalize (or impersonalize) the author's own views"[581] and that Pope's use of Renaissance and contemporary sources was made possible by the fact that his readers would have been sensitive to them due to their education and reading: "To keep the great voices sounding behind his own was to identify his poem with the collective classical tradition, and thus with the sensibility of the society formed by that tradition, whose spokesman in this work he was offering to become."[582] This depersonalization was no doubt at least partly behind Coleridge's concern. Pope's own voice is generally characterized as more careful and restrained than Swift's, whose violent rhetoric was indeed in stark contrast to that of the young poet he praised and admired. On the other hand, when one traces Pope's subsequent career and his increasing fame, Pope's public persona was also a carefully crafted image that finally became indistinguishable from the true author. This bespeaks a commitment to public debate lacking in Swift's *Tale* and his other anonymous or pseudonymous works. In this sense, the critical subjectivism mentioned in the poem was more than a reiteration of classical or modern views and something the reader had to project on Pope himself. Pope continued this self-fashioning even in his personal correspondence with Swift. Pope, to put it bluntly, performed as Pope in writing. This, one

[581] Mack 1985, 171.
[582] Ibid.

assumes, was something he could trust his readers to interpret in his poetry as much as he could trust them to agree with the critical principles he evoked.

Dennis famously attacked the poem, and for good reason, but in hindsight Pope's victory was an easy one. In March Pope's "Sappho to Phaon" appeared in Tonson's edition of *Ovid's Epistles* and more of Pope's poetry, including an early version of the *Rape of the Lock*, came out in May. The next year, *Windsor-Forest* was published, by which time Pope was the young rising genius of the day and en route to Swift's literary sphere. He was praised for being in touch with contemporary mores and the quality he showed in the *Essay on Criticism* that solidified his fame was his urbane wit. *Urbanitas*, contrary to the rough humor of a rustic, can be defined as a kind of polite wit that nevertheless carries with it a sense of superiority, of which both Pope and Swift had a good deal. Cicero speaks of "urbana ... dissimulatio"[583] which points to a kind of sustained irony, staying in character because one is aware of the correct type of response in a given situation and knows what kind of person would respond in that manner. One might call it a kind of mannerist propriety, more aggressive than the lifeless kind of wit Pope shunned in the poem. Pope knew his place in society and the part he had to play, and showed his awareness of the fact that he had to put on a mask for the benefit of his interlocutors. The polite culture of wit of the early eighteenth century encouraged the kind of literary disappearing acts that made Pope famous.

There are few places where this essentially satirical quality of the poet in society can be seen more clearly than in a 1712 letter written to *The Spectator* where the author proposes to write a series of satirical observations on modern society. The authorship of the letter, published August 14, one should point out, is somewhat ambiguous, but the ambiguity is in accordance with its two main propositions. Pseudo-Pope writes:

[583] See Braund 1988, 157–170 for a revealing discussion on this point and the wit in Juvenal's ninth satire.

> I have often thought, that a newsletter of whispers ... might be gratifying for the public, as well as beneficial to the author. By whispers I mean those pieces of news which are communicated as secrets, and which bring a double pleasure to the hearer; first, as they are private history, and, in the next place, as they have always in them a dash of scandal.[584]

The information would be supplied by two urban detectives, Peter Hush and Lady Blast, who would act like urban satyrs mingling among Londoners, scouring coffeehouses for scandalous gossip. They would see and hear everything society hides under its veneer of politeness. They could somehow gain access to very personal and flammable information undetected like their sylvan counterparts, but they would be fully integrated into society. It is difficult to say how serious this proposition was, but in any case the urban, subdued, sophisticated wit that saturates the plan very much defined Pope. It is of course reminiscent of Martin Marprelate's textual terrorism in terms of strategy, but hardly as threatening. If one reads it as a serious suggestion for a series of articles, the author is more or less asking for a warrant to write libel in *The Spectator*. Thus it should probably be read merely as a titillating message to those taking part in society that reminds them of the life that existed behind the masks urban dwellers required. Nothing came of the newsletter, of course, but the author's second proposition created an outline of the Scriblerian project:

> I need not tell you, sir, that there are several authors in France, Germany, and Holland, as well as in our own country, who publish every month what they call An Account of the Works of the Learned; in which they give us an abstract of all such books as are printed in any part of Europe. Now, sir, it is my design to publish every month An Account of the Works of the Unlearned. Several late productions of my own countrymen, who many of them make a very eminent figure in the illiterate world, encourage me in this undertaking.[585]

The planned journal was designed to satirize the pretensions of the learned gentlemen of the republic of letters who were in the habit of gathering together to congratulate each other for

[584] Addison 1832, 200–1.
[585] Ibid, 201.

being such learned gentlemen. The targets of the satire were such titles as the French *Bibliothèque Choisie*, the German *Acta Eruditorum* and the English *Works of the Learned*. These were among a number of journals that published abstracts, summaries and criticism of the works of the learned and the republic of letters in general. The project was more ambitious than writing simple libel and its fruits can be seen in various Scriblerian productions.

One can read in the propositions two varieties of Pope's wit. The leveling impulse that shakes people out of their social pretensions and a second, more urgent concern over criticism. Shaftesbury, more optimistic than either Swift or Pope, saw the function of satire and raillery as a safety valve for society. In *Sensus Communis*, he comments on the skeptical philosophies of Locke and Hobbes by speculating that "[t]he reason, perhaps, why men of wit delight so much to espouse these paradoxical systems is not in truth that they are so fully satisfied with them, but in a view the better to oppose some other systems," such as systems of scholastic philosophy in this case.[586] Once a more general kind of skepticism is introduced into the controversy and all have grown accustomed to it, Shaftesbury continues, the finer points of the debate may be addressed. This necessarily creates additional tension in the controversy and while debating more general issues the participants may get lost in the debate, but Swiftian nightmares are hardly on the horizon. What Pope seems to say, if one wants to place him on a continuum between Shaftesburean optimism and Swift's pessimistic wit, is that one should at least be aware of the dynamics of learned debate and the egregious effects criticism may have.[587] Criticism is a balancing act where the controversialists may or may not be aware of their precarious situation. Pope's early views on the vanity that motivated critics to mechanistic and self-aggrandizing criticism were driven by the same fear

[586] Shaftesbury 2000, 45.
[587] Contrasting Swift to Shaftersbury's modern optimism, Swift's brand of wit may be read as a late form of metaphysical wit, a conceited heavy style to which Pope appeared to object in the *Essay on Criticism*. Cf. Griffin 2010, 36.

of waning vitality that can be read in the *Essay on Criticism* and which would be given a more general form in his *Essay on Man*. Pope's project to "unphilosophize"[588] the men he saw at once sublime and ridiculous was in his mind a necessary undertaking lest all thought descend into extravagance and grotesque trivialities. Petty minds who promote such debates experience the world as small and drain it of color and life. They must be somehow shocked back into their proper place, which Pope attempted to do with considerably more finesse than Swift. This appears to have been the task he assigned himself in his early poetry in which he speaks directly to the reader in a manner described by Griffin as resembling "the unmediated relationship ... characteristic of an oral culture."[589] A rather more cynical Pope worthy of Coleridge's censure emerged soon after he was introduced to society.

Pope is famous for making literary friends, of whom "[t]he most glittering writer in London, the best connected politically, and the most senior"[590] was Swift. After his arrival in 1713, he met many more of the type of people of good breeding and refined tastes to whose tradition the *Essay on Criticism* had given shape and prestige. In the autumn of the same year, Pope announced his plans to translate Homer, a project in which Dryden's Virgil was his main inspiration. Pope's Greek has been a point of criticism from the very beginning of that work and the kind of scholarship he and Swift had mocked so successfully was suddenly transformed from a target of ridicule into a necessary ally. His knowledge of the language was, according to Pope himself, the result of reading the classics and simple imitation, not scholarly study. Therefore, he needed advice and, for better or worse, the help of pedantic scholars. William Walsh, the best critic in England according to Dryden, advised Pope to avoid the mechanical rules of pedants and scholars, but Pope probably could not have done

[588] Cf. Solomon 1993, 66.
[589] Griffin 2010, 37.
[590] Ibid, 29.

otherwise had he tried. In choosing the monumental project, Pope also found himself in the center of the Quarrel. Levine asks the obvious question:

> What was it that prompted him, at this point in his career, a young man who had just discovered his own genius for poetry, who despised pedantic learning and was eager for reputation, to spend the next six or seven years translating a familiar poem in a language with which he was not at ease and with an erudition he found tedious and demeaning?[591]

Levine answers that one of the reasons was simply Pope's love of Homer, but adds that the staying power of ancient literature in the face of the fading English of Pope's own poetry might have been a contributing factor. On the other hand, the flimsy nature of the English language, as Pope saw it, also demanded that earlier translations by Chapman and Hobbes be updated. Furthermore, as bitter as the Quarrel had been over the years, it had made people aware of and interested in Homer and this in turn meant the possibility of executing the work by subscription. Whatever Pope's reasons for embarking on the translation, it meant prefaces, a life of Homer, notes and more notes, poetical indexes and "all the armory of critical learning."[592] It is very puzzling to find even Pope's fellow Scriblerians contributing to the scholarly portion of the project: "Apparently, and without a semblance of embarrassment, they condemned the learning of the scholars Bentley, Barnes, and Dodwell, only to insist on something that looked very much like it in the activities of their friend."[593] The scholarship was largely outsourced and as their project of creating a parallel tradition to pedantic learning rejected the philological studies of men like Bentley, it lacked substance. Despite all this, the despised work was done and Pope willingly made himself "a victim of the same paradox that seems to have plagued all the ancients: to have detested pedantry and yet be compelled to

[591] Levine 1991b, 191.
[592] Ibid, 194.
[593] Ibid, 195.

rely on it."[594] Levine suggests that Pope did not quite know what he was getting into and that the importance of scholarship dawned on him only gradually after work had begun. It finally made him despair. If he did have an inkling of the scholarly requirements of the translation, perhaps he thought that it could be done in a manner that avoided the more ridiculous aspects of the classical scholarship of the Moderns. If so, he was wrong.

Embarrassment is not a word often used in relation to Pope's achievement, but the fact remains that the Scriblerian-aided translation made the satirists of classical scholarship classical scholars. For example, Homer's faults (necessary to point out after Swift's parody of naïve panegyrics of the ancient poet) were found virtues, although Pope hardly thought that the *Iliad* or Homer himself held the origin of all modern knowledge. Swift praised Pope's scholarship with apparent sincerity, but it is difficult not to think that the prickly satirist took some delight in seeing scholarship foisted upon the same reading public whom he had earlier wanted to trap inside his own satirical apparatus. After all, by this time Swift's political ambitions had been dashed and he was living reluctantly in Ireland. Hard at work on the translation, Pope wrote a preface for a 1717 collection of his poetry in which one can hear his brand of reasonableness at work, but it also illustrates Coleridge's point in that Pope now unequivocally passes a part of the responsibility of interpreting the author's work to the reader:

> I am inclined to think that both the writers of books, and the readers of them, are generally not a little unreasonable in their expectations. The first seem to fancy that the world must approve whatever they produce, and the latter to imagine that authors are obliged to please them at any rate. Methinks as on the one hand, no single man is born with a right of controlling the opinions of all the rest; so on the other, the world has no title to demand, that the whole care and time of any particular person should be sacrificed to its entertainment. Therefore I cannot but believe that writers and readers are under equal obligations, for as much fame, or pleasure, as each affords the other.[595]

[594] Ibid.
[595] Pope 1963, xxv.

The critics of the translation, including Dennis, began publishing the same year. Madame Dacier, whose celebrated translation Pope had used extensively, objected to Pope's preface. The pedants who Pope had had to emulate were ready to lash out at him after he had placed himself in the uncomfortable position of a scholar who lacked the tools of scholarship. "Fortunately," Levine notes, "Dr. Bentley had other things to do."[596] These included defending his unfortunate edition of Milton and in any case he did not seem that interested in a new translation of Homer.

Despite the cool reception Pope's Homer received from the Moderns, it can hardly be described as a failure. Pope's next editorial project, his 1725 edition of Shakespeare, on the other hand can. Levine is very brief about Pope's inadequacies as a textual critic, but Lewis Theobald's critical biographer lists them at some length, concluding that "[t]he only supports of his critical method are collation, carelessly followed, metrical skill and taste."[597] In other words, Pope followed the principles of the Ancients in preparing an Elizabethan work as Bentley had followed those of the Moderns in preparing his Milton and, perhaps surprisingly, the faults in Pope's judgment were more visible in his work on Elizabethan texts than in his Homer. In some perverse way, then, he vindicated himself in failing to edit Shakespeare, but critics nevertheless did damage Pope's public character. Levine writes: "They had spoken truly and, however briefly, penetrated the mask of satire and provoked the poet and his fellow wits."[598] The critics, from Theobald to Bentley, were repaid by their inclusion in *The Dunciad* and paid handsomely. The episode also gave Pope the push to begin work on *The Dunciad*, another resounding success which satirized the debates that had scarred him. His resentment unleashed, he was able to explore both Swiftian entrapment strategies as well as

[596] Levine 1991b, 223.
[597] Jones 1919, 63.
[598] Levine 1991b, 232.

the Longinian sublime and left deeper scars on his adversaries whose disfigured portraits remain in the English canon even when their criticisms have been ground into dust by time and faded into the grayness Pope so feared.

6.2 Criticism as Satire

That the Scriblerian project occasionally took the form of parodies of critical manuals and philosophical treatises is not surprising. In them, rhetorical inversions and the questionable arguments of adversaries could be presented in a genre that allowed the famous satirists to wind up their rhetoric to frighteningly absurd lengths whilst preserving some semblance of argumentative force. *Peri Bathous* is sometimes overlooked, because it does appear to be a simple inversion of Longinus' treatise and merely a negative reiteration of the principles of the *Essay on Criticism*. However, recent readings of Pope's use of the sublime have revealed yet more questions pertaining to interpretation, textuality and Pope's intentions in writing the satirical tract. Pope begins by taking advantage of the ambiguity of the words "bathos" and "altitude," which allows him to speak simultaneously about the base and the sublime. Or rather Martin Scriblerus speaks as a representative of the rabble of critics deplored by Dryden, defending them by saying, in true Swiftian fashion, that whereas other critics are known for the quality of their work, they are known for the quantity of theirs. Pope's own concerns can be seen in the opening statement that welcomes the decay of the present age which has become "too reasonable"[599] to care for intellectual refinement and the sublime. The sublime, in turn, is deemed a perversion compared to man's natural inclination toward bathos. This echoes Dryden's reasonableness and Longinus' noble simplicity of the sublime,

[599] Pope 2006, 198.

but in a negation that recurs over and over again in *Peri Bathous* they are tilted to reflect critical misreadings that mock the critic's cause instead of promoting the methodizing of nature for which the *Essay on Criticism* argued. Several similar inversions follow. Bathos is for Martin, as it was for Swift's mad critic in the *Tale*, a vent for the discharges of the brain. These, oddly enough, appear to follow the seasons, pouring out poetry in the summer and "*pamphlets* and *speeches* for and against the ministry" in winter.[600] The introduction of the inversions acts as an announcement that the critic shall be very elaborately shooting himself in the foot for the rest of the thesis and also gives the reader the tools to interpret the satire. True to Pope's definition of wit in the *Essay of Criticism*—an excellent example of the very thing it defines—Martin writes the art of "falling gracefully"[601] even as he falls, demonstrating an alignment of form and function.

The profound poet, Martin advises, should "consider himself as a *grotesque* painter" and master an "anti-natural way of thinking" devoid of common sense and wit.[602] Several examples of Blackmore's analogies of God as a mundane workman follow and prove, according to Martin, that merely following nature or instinct could not produce poetry so base. Instead of the best things in nature, the profound poet should, like a physician, study its excretions and "the dregs of nature."[603] Raising the insignificant to the sublime is also Pope's method of creating bathos when he defines amplification as "making the most of a *thought*; it is the spinning wheel of the Bathos, which draws out and spreads it in the finest thread."[604] This type of idling language as an opiate that quells the passions is methodically analyzed into the sleep-inducing abuse of certain figures and tropes. These include figures intended to confuse: catachresis, metonymy, synecdoche, aposiopesis, metaphor, and mixed figures that

[600] Ibid, 199.
[601] Ibid, 200.
[602] Ibid, 201.
[603] Ibid, 207.
[604] Ibid, 211.

result in unintended humor and antitheses. Magnifying and diminishing figures enable the movement between heightened and low rhetoric expressed in the ambiguity of the term bathos itself: hyperbole, periphrasis, anticlimax, vulgarity, infantile speech, inane parenthetical remarks, tautological statements and expletives. As in his more general remarks about imitation, Martin here apologizes to the reader for using Latin and Greek, because he is certain his readers will not know the classical languages. The simple advice concerning inversions given to the reader states that art should not be concealed when the figures are inverted to create bathos. This perverse symmetry is maintained in Martin's discussion on style where an adequate obscurity of an expression should be "proportionately low to the profundity of the thought."[605] He also suggests installing grammatical errors into the text in an effort to simulate the errors the Longinian sublime dismisses as negligible mistakes. That is, feigning a kind of error that tells of the presence of the sublime. All this would be fairly self-explanatory were it not for the sublime which seems to transcend such inversions and the rules of parody in general, creating rifts in any reading of the text which remain even after the inversions of *Peri Bathous* have been explained.

There is another way of reading Pope's manual that approaches it in terms of amplification, but a very different kind of amplification from Pope's "spinning wheel of bathos." Christopher Fanning calls attention to a Scriblerian conception of the sublime by bringing together satire and sublimity in a discussion that draws on and criticizes the work of Noggle and Jonathan Lamb. Fanning's aim is to try to maintain the creative tension between satire and the sublime so that one will not subsume the other and to examine specific forms of textuality that emerge when the two are brought together. The break between *res* and *verba*, an important point of departure in Fanning's analysis, is not unlike what Coleridge points out in his criticism of Pope. It is a change in register that came about as a response to the

[605] Ibid, 224.

changing conditions of literary production and the rise of mechanical philosophies. It is also what provoked the Scriblerians to devise novel entrapment strategies. The Scriblerians famously engaged in deliberate and purposeful provocation within the new paradigm by trying to alienate certain readers, pushing them away from the presence of the author to provoke a reaction. However, observing these changes falls short of explaining Pope's inversions in *Peri Bathous* according to Fanning. Fanning's characterization of the Longinian sublime and its relationship to art makes the sublime one of the driving forces of early modern literature. According to him, the sublime enables "an exploratory discourse, pushing the frontiers of neo-classical rhetoric while remaining within traditional purviews."[606] That is, the sublime is what enables a search for truth in art as well as Scriblerian provocation. It is an impossible goal that disappears beyond the horizon but nevertheless motivates the artist—in its satiric guise it is an aesthetic void, similar to the final *fiat nox* of *The Dunciad.* This explains an abstract quality of Scriblerian prose, but theoretical problems begin to accumulate when one recognizes that the satirical sublime is in some ways essentially similar to its actual sublime counterpart.[607] These lead to the realization that satiric modes of such explorations are not to be read quite as straightforwardly as one might expect, because the same mechanism informs both kinds of artistic and critical explorations. They also complicate any reading of *Peri Bathous,* since the inversions Martin invites the reader to make are clearly not simply a matter of switching around Longinian terms and enjoying the ensuing ironies, even though individual reversals of this sort appear to make up the main body of the work.

Fanning terms this enigmatic result a "self-reflexivity" that threatens the distinctions between the author and the reader, subject and object, in the sublime moment. The same applies to the familiar pairing of critic and poet. The notion of Longinian transport, the

[606] Fanning 2005, 653.
[607] Williams, for one, objects to the notion that there might instances that require readers "to accept parody of the sublime as a form of sublimity" (2005, 201).

enchanting effect elevated rhetoric has on the audience, is at the root of the instability. This Fanning also sees at work in Pope's satire, but because Pope seems to utilize both the tragic and the comic sublime at the same time, one may occasionally get confused whether one is being elevated by Pope's rhetoric or sinking into bathos. The similarity between the two sublimes in Fanning's reading stems from the fact that both discourses "function around an implied norm and its violation."[608] In other words, the way they act on the reader is similar in form. An expression of sublime ambiguity of this sort is clearly discernible in the absurdity of *The Dunciad* as well, but it is in *Peri Bathous* that the combination of the two sublimes appears at its most confrontational. In terms of their arguments, the epic grandeur of *The Dunciad* is easier to read satirically than the critical argument of *Peri Bathous*. As the sublime shows little regard for generic borders—Fanning quotes Pope's own example of the sublime bombast of *Don Quixote*—the distinction between the tragic and comic sublime relies on the reader's awareness of the rhetorical mode the author has adopted. The way the text should be read is marked by what Fanning calls the self-reflexive or "the self-conscious orchestration of juxtapositions,"[609] in terms of the structure of the work. The strategy guiding Pope's structural irony is a kind of amplification, a configuration of opposites which signals to the reader the skeptical mode of reading he or she is to adopt to approach the text. This creates the conditions for the argument Pope's satire wishes to advance, but at the same time Pope contradicts himself by making his message ambiguous. The ambiguities produce the humor in the work, but there is a curious side effect to Pope's structural irony. What readers are left with, in Fanning's analysis, is the modern problem of the lack of transcendence in language as they try to decide between the true sublime and its satiric counterpart. As Fanning puts it, the effect is to "cause the mind to oscillate between original and copy,

[608] Fanning 2005, 655.
[609] Ibid, 656.

creating a sublime founded upon the defects in representation."[610] The failure of communication thus communicates something essential about language itself. Namely, its fundamental impotence in conveying meaning or representing the world.

The self-reflexive mode of Pope's satire is ultimately viewed by Fanning as an extension of the Longinian sublime:

> What is important here is the continuity of the satiric and sublime modes: just as the adjective "sublime" describes both the object perceived as well as the experience of the subject-perceiver, so does satire examine in a subversive light both the satirical object and the satirical subject: Pope mocks his own lines [in *Peri Bathous*]; in *A Tale of a Tub* Swift revels in the guise of the hack; and both the *Tale* and *The Dunciad* function by sharing the printed trappings of their satiric targets.[611]

This is no doubt the case and the specific historical moment of Scriblerian satire, their "deep distrust of print's potential to replace authorial agency,"[612] played its part in the rhetorical strategies Pope and Swift chose to employ. The way the *Tale* implicates its readers and mocks its own methods, for example, could only be achieved by a shameless narrator who flaunts convention, who appears to lose control of his text, and whose moral blemishes and unreasonableness become the reader's own. Under Pope's scheme, criticism can be written as satire and satire as criticism. What is required to complete the picture is an inexhaustible rhetoric that can uphold both artistic and critical explorations. Again, one such device can be found in the rhetorical ambiguity of More, Montaigne's self-perpetuating failure of judgment ("either we can absolutely judge or absolutely we cannot"), in the anarchic wit of Martin Marprelate, Nashe's anatomizing, Dryden's insistence on his changeability, in the groundless epistemological grotesqueries of Defoe's hallucinating crowd, Swift's infuriating dead ends and, finally, Pope's own view of the sublime. What connects all is that they are able to

[610] Ibid, 658.
[611] Ibid, 660.
[612] Ibid, 661.

provoke any number of competing interpretations that remain as ambiguous as the originating device. Their origin may be related to how language reflects itself as language, but the question of origin is rather less important here. Rather, one should perhaps try to create an understanding of what happened when Pope got his hands on the sublime in more concrete terms.

As in the *Essay on Criticism*, Pope appears to detach himself from previous tradition even as he cites precedent. If the *Essay on Criticism* can be read as an imitation of Horace's *Art of Poetry* and a way of raising it "to the second power"[613] by writing criticism as poetry, *Peri Bathous* also dabbles in exponentiation, does the same to Longinus and allows Pope to write criticism as satire. Due to its form, it overrides neoclassical principles concerning the critic's duty to refrain from merely finding faults in the works of poets. Dryden's statements of his unwillingness to continue writing lest he slips into satire are forgotten and Pope's chosen method of ironic criticism enables him to scold poets and critics who had criticized him. That is, Pope is able to amplify his criticism and push it to reach a level of ironic invective rarely seen in criticism proper. The "ineffectual rhetorical excess"[614] of Pope's ridicule significantly spares irony from blame and while this might be read as providing Pope with a getaway clause that enables him to spare his theodicy (laid out later in the *Essay on Man*), it also serves another function. As Fanning states elsewhere, the primary problem Scriblerian satire faced was the fact that "while showing the world its errors, satire implicates itself in an intimate knowledge of those errors."[615] Not only does satire do this, it also threatens to infect the reader's thoughts with the errors it wants to criticize, as Defoe's plague writing instills fear in its readers. Swift even incorporated the reader in the debasement of society at large in

[613] Wimsatt and Brooks 1957, 236.
[614] Lamb 2005, 398. As Lamb notes, Pope is very often "preoccupied with the power of words to do what they say, rather than with the accumulation of figures" (2005, 397). In his preoccupation, he "does not propose these as instances of quotation upon quotation, a modernist trope which his brother Scriblerian Swift specifically held up for ridicule, but as the rightful inheritance of true wit" (ibid).
[615] Fanning 2003, 369.

the *Tale*. Problems of implication and contamination of this sort were no doubt very clear to the Scriblerians after Pope's Homer. There is thus a practical need to raise satiric rhetoric to the second power, so to speak, as a way of creating a firewall of irony between the reader and the author's pernicious argument. This is difficult to accomplish in plain terms and so a formal shift, perhaps of the kind Coleridge himself attempted to criticize, is preferable to a far more dangerous plain style.

Interesting as these readings are, one must at some point stop to wonder if they also show that the critics have been snared by the satirist's trap. They complicate the more conventional reading of *Peri Bathous* as a straightforward inversion of Welsted's translation of *Peri Hypsous* and Pope's own *Essay on Criticism*. They of course result in a more interesting reading of Pope and therefore one could hardly object to them on these grounds alone. But they also seem to do so in an effort to save Pope's reputation as a moral poet by creating distance between Pope and his audience. One way of approaching *Peri Bathous* that does not do this is to view it simply as a malicious attack on the bad poets with whose verses Pope illustrates the manual, chiefly Blackmore. Griffin, who presents precisely such a reading when he reads Pope in conjunction with Swift, notes that Pope decided to publish the work at a time when Blackmore was still writing his epics in order for the satire to reach its target. In a footnote, Griffin points out Abigail Williams's defense of the Whigs, that by the 1720s Pope's depiction of Whig writers as fanatical radicals who clumsily rushed to take advantage of the sublime was "strangely old-fashioned."[616] The Whigs had already secured political power and had rather more refined poets in their ranks than Pope implies. The incompetent enthusiasm parodied in depictions of the Whigs by Tory satirists, Williams says, "should be read as an attempt to discredit a status-quo position, not as a serious indication of the political

[616] Williams 2005, 47.

or cultural marginalization of Whiggism."[617] This may be so, but Griffin dismisses Williams's reading of Pope's caricatures by emphasizing the fact that Pope focused on the literary sins of his adversaries without much regard to politics. More importantly, however, Griffin continues, *Peri Bathous* may have simply been an elaborate ruse to get Pope's opponents, Whigs and non-Whigs, to attack him. These attacks provided Pope additional material in preparation for *The Dunciad Variorum* and gave him a moral advantage in the writing of the work. That is, he was able to claim he was not the aggressor in the literary debates in which he reveled but merely defending himself against the attacks of his critics. Read like this, Pope sounds more like a Martin Marprelate than the greatest poet of his age wielding the sublime while engaged in critical thought, although in his case the two do also seem to come together in one brilliant feat of wit. If Pope did plan *Peri Bathous* primarily to incite attacks—which sounds plausible once the possibility has been introduced—he was fabulously successful. Griffin states that "between the publication of 'Peri Bathous' on March 8 and *The Dunciad* on May 18 Pope was attacked in print on at least twenty occasions."[618] Considering the time frame, Pope would have had to plan his strategy very carefully. Once again, one finds disparate readings which, while not compatible, seem equally reasonable. And yet again, one should perhaps assume Pope intended the ambiguity.

Pope, who thought *Peri Bathous* might also be of some use as a genuine manual of rhetoric and hence a valid way of writing about bad writing, very likely wrote the work to present the argument of *The Dunciad* in prose. It can thus be read as a kind of companion to *The Dunciad*, but it was clearly a homage to Swift's *Tale* as well. Compared to the *Tale*, however, it is more concerned with the containment of the morbidly bad poetry that corrupts readers even as it shoves the lamentable works in their faces. Its ironies are thick and require detachment from the reader, which is made clear when the reader is addressed directly.

[617] Ibid, 48.
[618] Griffin 2010, 105.

Pope's author congratulates himself: "Thus have I (my dear countrymen) with incredible pains and diligence, discovered the hidden sources of the Bathos."[619] The familiar statement of the critic's woes echoes Swift's mad critic in the *Tale* and his self-pitying Drydenic manner. When one looks further back in English letters, one finds there is little left of the seriousness of Elizabethan Puritan critics in Pope. Pope piles mockery upon mockery and as he does so it is difficult to see how his accumulating mockery could be taken to signal anything but a warning not to get sucked into the quagmire of the critic's madness. If the strategy is to be read as a sign of Pope's final position on criticism, as Fanning, Lamb and others seem to suggest, is it not the case that in doing so one has to abide by the terms of Pope's implicit scheme and make concessions that will eventually entrap the reader? The pleasures of Pope's entrapment are apparent, but surely a modern critical reading of the work should not repeat the past mistakes of critics who first fell victim to Pope's satire.

The need for the reader's detachment or his or her ability to withhold assent is also apparent in the saturated prefatory materials of *The Dunciad Variorum*. Because the two works are related, one might find advice on how to approach *Peri Bathous* in *The Dunciad*. As the *Essay on Criticism* collected neoclassical principles of poetry, Pope collects several of the satirical tropes and figures that those before him had presented either in earnest or ironically. The "Letter to the Publisher" excuses Pope's critics by recognizing that "whoever publishes, puts himself on his tryal by the country,"[620] restating a Jonsonian lament as well as Defoe's parody of the author's plight. The letter's author excuses himself by saying: "I am no author,"[621] although it is quite certain the letter was Pope's doing; and Pope, if anyone, was an author. The letter discusses the dangers of obscurity in satire and the work's numerous allusions, encouraging the reader to concentrate on the satire's targets. It plays with paralipsis

[619] Pope 2006, 230.
[620] Pope 1963, 319.
[621] Ibid, 320.

and notes that even poor poets are worthy of ridicule. It even touches upon Pope's own deformity as it points out and expands one of Dryden's justifications for lampoons:

> Deformity becomes the object of ridicule when a man sets up for being handsome; and so must Dulness when he sets up for a Wit. They are not ridicul'd because Ridicule in itself is or ought to be a pleasure; but because it is just, to undeceive or vindicate the honest and unpretending part of mankind from imposition, because particular interest ought to yield to general, and a great number who are not naturally Fools ought never to be made so in complaisance to a few who are.[622]

The Dunciad begins to unfold and shows Pope at his most brilliant. But, to advance a daring argument, entrapment in *The Dunciad* nowhere appears as hazardous as in *Peri Bathous*. The just critique that works in favor of honest and unpretending people is never mentioned. Moreover, the inversion of sublimity appears in the former as monumental as the sublime itself, its excessive hyperbole fails to create tension, and pleasure inevitably runs over the need for judgment. It is an orgy of mockery whereas the latter retains too much of its critical nature to lift off, or indeed sink, and transport the reader in any conventional sense of the word. However, some of its sublime qualities remain. What also remains, quite annoyingly, is the discrepancy between modern readings of *Peri Bathous* as a manifestation of Pope's metaphysical views and as a simple marketing scheme for *The Dunciad*.

Theoretical approaches to the sublime have a tendency to regard the sublime either with suspicion—as a way of imposing authority on the subject—or as a moment of "genuine instability."[623] To conclude my remarks on *Peri Bathous*, I turn to Neil Hertz's essay on the sublime which features an ironic interpretation of the sublime experience. Hertz's essay, Paul de Man writes, "ironized, though not finally exorcised" the long tradition of the Longinian

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[622] Ibid, 322.
[623] Noggle 2001, 10.

sublime.[624] Hertz reads Longinus and notes that "at certain points one becomes aware of a thickening of texture."[625] He continues:

> These are pages where, challenged by an aspect of his theme or by the strength of a quotation, Longinus seems to be working harder at locating his discourse close in to the energies of his authors. At those moments, he too is drawn into the sublime turning, and what he is moved to produce is not merely an analysis illustrative of the sublime but further figures for it.[626]

Longinus' engagements with Demosthenes are mentioned as instances where the effect is palpable, because Demosthenes is an orator who does not deal in fictions. Hertz cites long passages where Longinus, citing Demosthenes, presents "a bewildering assault on the reader" as the critic himself succumbs to the enthusiasm of the passage and his argument begins to fall apart.[627] New motifs are "brought together in an enigmatic connection, as overlapping figures teasingly out of alignment" which readers have to parse together as best they can.[628] Their apparent chaos, Hertz continues, is one that is cleverly planned to draw the reader's attention away from the weak argument with vivid imagery, a strategy Longinus also employs more directly by his citations. There is a symmetry of scale in the passage that is made to appear at this moment to overwhelm readers, and it should leave them puzzled but impressed nonetheless. It might be described as a technique that uses the metalepsis of the author or hypotyposis for effect as well, but technical terms fall short of capturing what has happened. This is what perhaps most clearly illustrates the sublime moment, not a vision of a chain of being that spans the universe but a manifestation of a more modest chain that links

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[624] De Man 1996, 110. De Man himself continues the exorcism by presenting Hegel's sublime as an antidote to the tranquility of the Kantian order that takes hold of and secures the subject after the sublime moment. De Man also refers to Bloom's preoccupation with the sublime, a project which Bloom aligned with a "[t]ransumptive or metaleptic" form of literary criticism which "relies upon a diachronic concept of rhetoric, in which the irony of one age can become the noble synecdoche of another" (Bloom 1982, 74). The sublime has generated much interest as of late, but it seems the diachronic rhetoric Bloom planned as a challenge to the hegemony of deconstruction at the time has been all but abandoned by modern literary criticism.
[625] Hertz 1983, 585.
[626] Ibid.
[627] Ibid, 588.
[628] Ibid.

together the author, his citations, the imagery of both and what the author himself is trying to accomplish. That is, a transparent moment that reveals the textuality of the text. Whether it also reflects the author's view of the underlying structure of the universe is debatable. Infectious in its enthusiasm, it takes over the author as well as the reader, crossing the hermeneutic boundary between subject and object, and as such it would have been an ideal way for Pope to bait his opponents. The fact that *Peri Bathous* employs a similar rhetorical scheme for the purposes of satire is problematic, because once again the sincerity of the author is at stake. But this at least explains something of the discrepancy between the interpretations of the work as either genuinely engaging or as a malicious ploy to lure critics into Pope's trap. In any case, one of the main effects of the sublime, satirical or not, is to transfer agency to readers who find themselves, as Hertz puts it, "in a rather peculiar relation"[629] to language and duty-bound to construct their own meaning from a text that is falling apart. Specifically, they are in a position where the artificiality or figurality of language appears to reveal its artificiality or figurality in a way that engages the reader even in the absence of Longinian transport. Satire is hardly the genre to generate the full emotional impact of the sublime and as with Swift's *Tale*, *Peri Bathous* is more concerned with showing that pining for the sublime can only reveal the ugly reality of materialism.[630] The problem of transcendence is not present in *Peri Bathous* with full force, because Pope had to secure a satirical reading and in doing so raise the work into the realm of artifice and skepticism. Not to read it as a delirious descent into the profound depths of bathos would be to overlook the staying power of Pope's spleen. Compared to the *Tale*, *Peri Bathous* is not nearly as engaging or infuriating in terms of interpretation, but it might just as easily still lead the reader into dangerous thinking. The reader may be provoked into an active search for virtue, but as Pope drags the waters of bad poetry, the sublime retains its power to drag the

[629] Ibid, 590.
[630] Cf. Griffin 2010, 62.

reader down with him. The firewall of satire that is erected between the reader and the pernicious rhetoric criticized in the work is porous by design and as it was used by Pope in order to write criticism that exclusively finds faults in his contemporaries, it stands mostly for Pope's own protection.

6.3 An Essay on Man

A more benign if less exciting version of Pope's ironic sublimity can be found in *An Essay on Man*. The poem's combination of a casual tone and philosophical content are treacherous as well, or so many critics say. There is a baffling number of conflicting readings of the poem and interpretation is complicated as soon as one begins to survey critical opinion. Solomon notes a number of these in his list of misreadings, including damning appraisals from Dr Johnson, De Quincey, Leavis, Bloom and many others. On the other hand, Voltaire and Kant famously appreciated the poem's argument. To some extent this must reflect the ancient rift between poets and philosophers, but it is probable that most readers today would agree with De Quincey that the poem's combination of poetry and philosophy, however self-contradictory, also makes the poem one that most would count as their least and most favorite poem by Pope.[631] However, it is also safe to say that few would read it as philosophy but for the sake of historical scholarship today and that the philosophical points can be found, as critics are quick to remind readers, more clearly formulated in Bolingbroke's essays or even in its classical poetic form in Lucretius unembellished by Pope's subtle rhetoric. Dr Johnson, for one, thought the poem's pretty casing disguised its egregious and vulgar substance, from which one can infer that the philosophical substance is in turn diluted by the poetic dress

[631] Solomon 1993, 19.

Pope found so convenient. Such opinions, although dangerous to dismiss without careful scrutiny, seem to revert back to Puritan modes of argument even when they show more concern for the purity of poetry than that of the poem's moral message. In many ways, the poem is yet another disappearing act that leaves the reader alone with an impossible task of interpretation, forcing him or her to self-reflect in the true sense of the word. Pope writes trite maxims that are, once again, true on the surface and more problematic once the reader's thought catches the wind, but in the end Pope the author is nowhere to be found to guide him or her. He is replaced by a promise of a sublime moment that never comes.

Pope's universe is spelled out clearly in the poem, as is its debilitating mechanism that leads to the loss of vitality, but the tone is one of resignation. Comparing Pope's views to Arthur O. Lovejoy's classic examination of the idea of the chain of being is instructive. Lovejoy's principle of plenitude, "the realization of conceptual possibility in actuality"[632] where a cosmic order obeys a necessary metaphysical hierarchy, is of special interest. Building on Lovejoy's theory, Charles Taylor summarizes Pope's scheme succinctly:

> The order we are being asked to admire here is not an order of expressed or embodied meanings. What makes the collection of entities that make up the world an order is not primarily that they realize an interrelated whole of possibilities ... The principal thing that makes the entities in the world into an order is that their natures *mesh*. The purposes sought by each, of the casual functions which each one exercises, interlock with the others so as to cohere into a harmonious whole. Each in serving itself serves the entire order.[633]

[632] Lovejoy 1936/1964, 52. In his classic work, Lovejoy expands this definition to include "not only the thesis that the universe is a *plenum formarum* in which the range of conceivable diversity of *kinds* of living things is exhaustively exemplified, but also any other deductions from the assumption that no genuine potentiality of being can remain unfulfilled, that the extent and abundance of the creation must be as great as the possibility of existence and commensurate with the productive capacity of a 'perfect' and inexhaustible Source, and that the world is the better, the more things it contains" (ibid).
[633] Taylor 1989, 275.

The chain for Pope is an expression of abstracted love, "that interconnection of mutual service which the things in this world of harmonious functions render to each other."[634] This love is of course related to the love that holds together the epistemology of the Galenist physicians. What Pope appears to do in the poem, to approach the matter in a rather abstract manner, is to claim to substitute his model for an older paradigm of a transcendental nature that was no longer serviceable. Taylor states that the older model was "predicated on an ontic logos"[635] also of Platonic origin: "As the metaphysical basis of the earlier view erodes, in particular with the growing success of mechanistic science, the new vision can step into the vacuum."[636] To clarify the concept as Taylor renders it—that the world somehow *is* less for moderns—Frederick A. Olafson points out that "[a]n ontic logos would be an order that is meaningful in a much stronger sense than is the sort of conceptual or representational order which, Taylor says, is the only kind we are willing to recognize at present."[637] If this is the case and the experience of an ontic logos cannot be fully realized or has become essentially unthinkable, Pope's description of the metaphysical order of the universe should not shock modern readers and hence it should appear innocuous as an update to a quaint image of an older order. Then again, Pope appears to deliberately confound the substitution to achieve the desired effect. Solomon points out that Hume and Kant saw in Pope "the nature of human intellect as an aporia terminating all metaphysical ambitions,"[638] but it is difficult to see where Pope's skepticism ends and where his ambition to replace old modes of knowing that had been churned to dust by critical debate begins. Pope does at times sound like a Shaftesburean optimist or appear to be abiding by the latter's Stoic principles, but the obvious outrage of the poem that no reader can avoid lies in the poem's insistence on its position

[634] Ibid.
[635] Ibid, 276.
[636] Ibid.
[637] Olafson 1994, 194.
[638] Solomon 1993, 66.

toward transcendent knowledge. Pope's metaphysical position is either shallow or illustrates a subtle skepticism. As critics like to point out, whatever his position is, Pope is not a Kantian idealist nor is he a Humean skeptic. Nor is he a Mallarmé.

But to put the above in simpler terms, Pope takes advantage of the reader's and presumably Man's failure in general to transcend the human condition. What Pope eulogizes as a harmonious order of the cosmos is indeed produced by a marriage of opposites and so he drives his reader toward impossible contradictions through a number of seemingly self-contradictory turns. The second epistle spells out the tension in explicit terms and chides readers who may have up to this point been fooled by Pope's rhetoric of harmony:

> Extremes in nature equal ends produce,
> In man they join to some mysterious use;
> Tho' each by turns the other's bound invade,
> As, in some well-wrought picture, light and shade,
> And oft so mix, the diff'rence is too nice
> Where ends the virtue or begins the vice.
> Fools! who from hence into the notion fall,
> That vice or virtue there is none at all.
> If white and black blend, soften, and unite
> A thousand ways, is there no black or white?
> (ll. 205–214)[639]

Here, perhaps in one of the more distinctive gestures of the poem, Pope dangles the mysterious answer in front of readers only to snatch it back, denies closure and maintains an epistemological skepticism of his own premise. The gesture is repeated numerous times and his ironies align self-love and social, passion and reason, and any number of contraries together to argue for transcendence by denying transcendence. The fundamental tension in the poem, the certainty which Pope exhibits as he surveys the universe versus the negation of his ability to do so, may be traced to the influence of Dryden's *Religio Laici* as Pope's

[639] All citations from the *Essay on Man* are from Pope 1963.

preface speaks of "steering betwixt the extremes of doctrines seemingly opposite."[640] The preface also contains a familiar Lockean qualifier (originally Locke's nod to the greatness of Newton) as Pope presents himself as an underlaborer or a humble mapmaker who has merely sketched the major outlines of the topos and must leave the details for those who follow. Solomon examines *Religio Laici* as one of Pope's sources and quotes Dryden's lines:

> Thus anxious thoughts in endless circles roll,
> Without a centre where to fix the soul:
> In this wild maze their vain endeavours end:
> How can the less the greater comprehend?
> Or finite reason reach infinity?
> For what could fathom God were more than He.
> (ll. 36–41)

This is compared to the beginning of Pope's poem:

> Let us (since life can little more supply
> Than just to look about us and to die)
> Expatiate free o'er all this scene of man;
> A mighty maze! but not without a plan;
> A wild, where weeds and flow'rs promiscuous shoot;
> Or garden, tempting with forbidden fruit.
> (ll. 3–8)

The wild mighty maze that occurs in each poem grabs one's attention, but the irony of a map of a maze that only shows outlines should not be lost on anyone. As with Dryden, one also finds more distressing allusions. "Forbidden fruit" and the final line of the stanza, "vindicate the ways of God to Man," once again point to Milton. Solomon dramatizes this intertextual trickery: "Just when we thought we were really in control, univocally on Pope's wavelength and ready to interpret, his polysemous rhetoric betrays us."[641] Elsewhere, Pope echoes Blackmore's philosophical epics which he had destroyed in *Peri Bathous*. Solomon points

[640] Pope 1963, 502.
[641] Solomon 1993, 51.

out that "[s]tylistically, every allusion to Blackmore's *Creation* is an invitation to compare the fashionings of a genius to a dunce ... The manifestly greater art of the *Essay* simply subsumes its predecessor; and, priorities reversed, Blackmore's original can only be read as an anemic, bombastic, servile imitation of Pope."[642] Perhaps Pope was indeed trying to outblackmore Blackmore and if this was his intention he seems to have once again won the battle between the poets. Here again one sees Pope's willingness to put himself in danger of ridicule in order to create a parallel tradition to the one he argues against and usurp it by his superior talent. But in terms of posterity, it is important to remember that that parallel tradition had long been under attack and the critics' long "dissatisfaction with the *Essay*'s deviation from the logocentric ideal of transparency, a univocal and anti-rhetorical ideal correspondence between words and things"[643] was nothing new even in Pope's time. After all, Pope himself was, as Engell argues, shaping it to fit the mold of his own age.[644] The window of opportunity between the rigid opinions of the Puritans and the Enlightenment virtuosi was brief enough for one to feel grateful for the ontic confusion Pope tried to produce.

Pope lets the reader know of his views by refusing closure, by not settling on a position in metaphysics, and thereby tries to show and simultaneously argue for the kind of thinking he wants to provoke in the reader. The equation is of course impossible and one has to assume that this was yet another device designed to fail. If Defoe warned his reader about overinterpretation and a kind of hermeneutic pride, Pope is issuing a more or less similar warning about interpreting the world, of a "metaphysical pride."[645] At the same time he is trying to become something of a transdiscursive author by trapping the reader inside the maze

[642] Ibid, 53.
[643] Ibid, 87.
[644] Cf. section 3.3.
[645] Solomon, 80. Solomon continues the thought to its inevitable irresolution: "If we dominate the objective world from our subjective perspective, we become metaphysical mythmakers telling ourselves what we want to hear; on the other hand, if our subjective perspective is swallowed up by our cosmic objectivity, we simply make mechanistic and fatalistic myths of another kind" (1993, 83).

of his conundrum. The problem of transcendence in this sense is aptly summarized by Noggle:

> The absolute perspective and the limited perspective are at once incompatible and inseparable: incompatible because the limited perspective may never adequately conceive of the absolute and must turn away from it but inseparable because the limited perspective must meaningfully refer to the absolute to define itself as limited.[646]

Pope seems to be too much at ease with the effects of the sublime moment and dwell too comfortably in the realm of the self-reflexivity that reveals the impotence of language and man's inability to fathom the universe. Noggle continues to say that the *Essay on Man* "furthermore reflects the skeptical attitude toward the sublime apparent in Dryden and Swift: the absolute is only truly so, truly authoritative, if it lies beyond our capacities of representations."[647] In calmly refusing knowledge of the absolute, or closure for the reader, Pope mocks the impulse of the human mind to look for definitive meaning in texts and in the world. The *Essay*'s "neutral rationalism,"[648] "deference to the unknown particular"[649] and its celebration of the "sublimely indescribable"[650] stimulate Noggle to criticize Solomon's reading of the poem as an argument for moderation and to read Pope as a Pyrrhonist at the final step of skeptical thought before it falls into madness—man in his epistemologically precarious state cannot even be sure if he can be aware of his own limitations. The contradiction noted by critics, Pope's apparent failure to fully address the question of transcendence, is thus made into a sign of his true intention. There is clearly something of Swift's self-perpetuating satire in the *Essay on Man* as well: "No matter how strongly Pope's language denies its autonomy, no matter how skeptically it renounces its claim to judge the

[646] Noggle 2001, 98.
[647] Ibid, 102.
[648] Ibid, 109.
[649] Ibid, 111.
[650] Ibid, 122.

universe and to reason with authority, it nonetheless also affirms the reason that makes its self-questioning possible."[651] But the reader only finds the rhetoric of Pope's strategic failure in a stubbornly self-contained form and this prompts Noggle to write perhaps his best definition of the skeptical sublime: "Skepticism, far from abolishing a sense of the sublime, elevates it out of sight, itself a paradoxical movement that generates a commanding but peculiar authority."[652] As Pope does not write his skeptical sublime, it has to be inferred by the reader. Thankfully, Pope pushes the failure of his rhetoric to the very surface of his text and presents it unapologetically. A sympathetic audience might find in its relative lack of refinement an enjoyable satirical frankness, a recognition of human frailties without the usual trappings of satire. That is, the conceptual loop Pope creates for the reader to enjoy is unambiguously an engine of ambiguity. Whereas "Swift offers a theoretical picture of subjectivity that cannot work without failing in its effort at depiction,"[653] Pope merely states this bluntly over and over again. He is slave to no sect, but enslaves thought to circle around the question of the absolute and enjoy the learned idleness of poetry. Those in search of knowledge are thus mocked by their incapacity to reflect on their own thought should they fail to notice the trick. One can look for a metaleptic break where the poet reveals himself, but there is only one Pope who in turn is never fully visible. There is little of the violent emotion that usually prompts the author to appear and the calm tone is sustained throughout.

Christopher Yu finds a contradiction in Noggle's argument that reveals the continuing potency of Pope's ambiguating mechanism. This is precisely what one would expect Pope's contradictory rhetoric to generate even in his most agile readers. Yu points out an obvious discrepancy between the radical epistemology Pope espouses and Noggle's view of Pope as a political conservative. Pope, says Yu, is difficult to place "within the customary ideological

[651] Ibid, 115.
[652] Ibid, 127.
[653] Ibid, 78.

spectrum"[654] Noggle tries to utilize in explaining the poem. "Noggle," Yu argues, "stretches the conventions of political descriptions to the breaking point,"[655] because the conventional terminology of liberal and conservative, Whig and Tory, succumb to Pope's contradictions. The tension generated by the poem's contradictions drags the terms into uneasy pairings when one tries to apply them to Pope's ambiguous assertions of authority. These require the denial of authority, or a radical denunciation of traditional values that should nevertheless, according to Noggle, lead to conservatism. This is perhaps not as much Noggle's failure to keep his terminology in check as it is a sign of the power of Pope's poetry to confuse his readers. If Yu is correct in his criticism, Noggle's unsuccessful attempt to generalize the social and political forces reflected in Pope's poem may serve as a warning not to take Pope's militant agnosticism lightly. Yu's characterization of Pope as an outsider, on the other hand, hardly follows the spirit of the *Essay on Man* even if it is accurate. Surely Pope was an outsider in many ways, but he escapes these categorizations in the *Essay on Man*. While it is easy to agree with Yu in many respects, it is not as easy to agree that Pope sees himself as an outsider in the poem which explicitly argues against the very possibility. Then again, by writing from an apparently transcendent position Pope appears to escape the category of Man as well. Simply put, he does not appear to be anywhere when one tries to follow the patterns of the poem's reasoning. Pope's continuing fascination with erasing himself as a force guiding interpretation seems to carry him away from the critics' grasp.

Despite criticism, Noggle's reading does present other opportunities which are perhaps more instructive than talk of Pope's political affiliations which he had momentarily put aside in order to indulge in philosophy. What seem to be holding Pope's argument together are its limited scale and lack of agency. Contingent things are suitable for Pope's arguments, absolutes and certainties are fundamentally unknown. Whether or not this is a sign of

[654] Yu 2003, 50.
[655] Ibid, 51.

conservatism is debatable, but Pope himself refuses to reveal answers. As provocative and confusing as his philosophy is, it simply wants to leave everything as it is. This Noggle recognizes as well. Pope published the epistles anonymously and took great pleasure in their reported readings,

> and when the secret was out he told Swift that the poem's authority depended on its effacement of links to any identifiably interested position. ... Pope attains the authoritative philosophical scope of the *Essay* by refusing to express any position that would betray his identity, any concrete religious, political, social, or even philosophical alignments. The *Essay*'s generalizing tendency is an effort not so much to claim godlike authority for himself as to imply that nobody in the universe may arrogate it.[656]

In light of Pope's parody of the sublime and his delight in provoking his enemies, Noggle's point sounds valid but for the final generalization. Pope's refusal can be read as a function of self-reflection, oddly satirical in a poem that can hardly be called satire, that erases the poet or at least removes him from the picture as much as possible to force the reader's hand. The poem was not only anonymous but published by a bookseller not previously associated with Pope. He was trying to remain a cipher, it seems, in order to shift the full burden of praise or blame onto his readers. There might be a connection between Pope's position (or lack thereof) and the politics of the 1730s. There were efforts to build a party neutral consensus as Bolingbroke planned to unite the Whigs and Tories against Walpole's court clique, but it is difficult to tell how important this was to Pope. His self-erasure is also seen in the poem's many tautologies which are secure in their truth, but do not actually mean anything: they represent certainty without meaning. As Pope leaves the reader with no way of sounding meaning against the author, the self-reflexive scheme of the poem becomes complete. What remains are the reader and the task of interpreting the text without the author's help when Pope removes his mask and one finds nothing behind it. The poem does not traffic in

[656] Noggle 2001, 107.

meaning between two subjects, but in whatever the mind of the reader can do in the odd slippery space the poem creates. It is not about the horrors of nothingness as much as about handing over the role of the meaning-maker to the reader who is forced to attempt to find or create meaning in endless play in a closed system that cannot be escaped. Pope's art, like Swift's, was to make the realization enjoyable. Unlike Swift, however, Pope does not merely shift his position until the reader is exhausted. Pope vanishes and in so doing creates a final act of self-fashioning by becoming the author as the sublime object.

7. Conclusions: Spiders and Bees

The point of the above discussion has been to show that eighteenth-century satirists concerned themselves with the failure of interpretation and with arguments that could be used to prompt that failure. An examination of their work has shown that many of them consciously transferred the experience of the failure of interpretation to the reader and forced them to take responsibility for that failure by denying the author's agency. It is Swift's *Tale* one thinks of as the paradigmatic example, if only because of its vicious assault on the scholarly reader. But even before Swift, English literature had a longstanding convention of character-based satire that rested on the figure of the author whose moral ambiguity was more than a mere parodic device meant to amuse readers. The critical component in character-based satires such as the Marprelate tracts is important to recognize as the major element that lifted the argument of satires into a form of public discussion, inadvisable as Bacon and others deemed partaking in it. Nashe's role may in some ways be seen as one that tried to disarm the most trenchant qualities of the kind of satire the Marprelate authors created. He might have undermined the force of their arguments through popularization and parody, but whether he succeeded remains unclear. On the other hand, if one reads him as an innovator who was quick to pounce on the rhetoric of a character-based satire of the Marprelate variety, he appears to have simply been after fame and fortune. Even in this case, his failure to impress his patron may act as an indicator, however insignificant, of what the metaleptic satire of his time could accomplish. Dryden's role is twofold. First, he created of himself a character in writing that was inherently ambiguous, but also deeply human in that his inconsistency, if one may call it that, followed his conscience and his pen, which

eventually seemed to guide him into dangerous waters. Secondly, he placed the character of the satirist as the Author—a more or less theoretical Livius Andronicus—at the center of the genre and as he distanced his preferred true satire from the English tradition he simultaneously reinforced it in terms of its emphasis on character. In effect, Dryden placed himself as a critic and satirist at the helm of the genre and made the tradition his own. The Author's agency thus remained in play and was further complicated by Defoe, Swift and Pope against Dryden.

A study of this kind can of course only scratch the surface, but the canonical examples suggest that the cases sketched above were part of a broader shift in satirical rhetoric. If this was not the case at the time they were written, their influence has since helped to shape the genre into what it is today. Canons are of course odd creations in that literary works that surprise readers by their peculiarity are more likely to be included than texts that accurately represent the age, but the oddities that are included are nevertheless the ones left for posterity. What I have mainly tried to focus on are the mechanisms of denial these texts use to lure in and frustrate readers, the ways in which authors tried to erase themselves from their works. The denial of meaning and closure from the reader and, more specifically, the shifting of the failure of the texts' arguments to the failure of interpretation appear to be a consistent trait they share. By reading them alongside modern interpretations that emphasize failure I have also advanced the argument that the way one reads them today is complicated by the fact that interpretation of literary texts is more often than not seen as an always already incomplete task. That is, modern readers may not hear failures of interpretation as a significant part of the experience of reading the texts because, theoretically at least, failure is ever present. As with Gosson's moving heavens, we never hear them because we ever hear them. However, especially in Swift's case one becomes aware of the aim of the text to frustrate the reader only when one is goaded to assume that the *Tale* should be decipherable and experiences

failure first hand. One wonders whether this is possible anymore and, if so, to what extent is it possible if one subscribes to some form of contemporary hermeneutic nihilism, as it seems one must if one is a truly modern reader.

When one places the cases discussed above in the broader context of the story of the Author, it becomes clear that the entrapment strategies of the authors—including the ambiguating devices that do their part in upholding their canonical status—can at the very least be used to write out a strand of literary history that explains how the failed argument of eighteenth-century satires came into being. The satires themselves may act as a sign of the presence of a line of critical thought in English literature that is brought into stark focus by the ruthlessness of satirical rhetoric. Satire is especially apt for a case study of a period that witnessed the birth of the Author, because satire is in the habit of making things explicit by transgressing artistic and rhetorical conventions. It is when present conventions seem to coincide with past practices one risks falling blind into the task of reading the past. The cracks in literary history that appear thanks to the rhetorical violence of satire help one to reorient oneself and examine caricatures that are more telling to the shortsighted modern reader than texts that present their case in plain terms. Confusion over Dryden's *Religio Laici*, for example, is a clear sign of the problems of earnest argument in this case. Moderns might see in the Swiftian denial of meaning a validation of the fundamental impasse of all reading, but even so one must naturally read with the assumption that writers write to be understood, however one wants to qualify that understanding. Satire of the kind that has been discussed in this study brings that failure back to the reader as an exceptional state of affairs in a palpable way and as such the experience is valuable. Semantic relativism pointed out by, for example, Defoe's case is hardly a threat but in the abstract and while the nihilism that follows is a problem for modern philosophy, in literary criticism one can always fail better. However, while the relevance of these issues to modernity might be obvious to some, a brief

digression may be permitted in conclusion to spell out an important point the readings highlight in modern criticism.

Gabriel Josipovici's *What Ever Happened to Modernism?* became perhaps surprisingly the subject of a recent literary controversy in Britain. Josipovici criticized a number of contemporary British authors and his critique was not met kindly by the mainstream press. He eventually replied to his critics by stating that newspapers and broadcasters had invited him to comment on the affair and he in turn had informed them he would do so only if he could bypass all the critics he had apparently led astray and focus on the argument of his book. The invitations were promptly cancelled, presumably because the press was more interested in the personalities behind the controversy than in the words that started it. In his book, Josipovici examined a range of topics relating to modernism such as Greek tragedy, *Don Quixote*, Wordsworth's poetry, philosophy from Kierkegaard to Wittgenstein, disenchantment, Picasso's and Duchamp's art, and referred to various other modernist artists, artworks and phenomena. One of these was Mallarmé's "Le vierge, le vivace et le bel aujourd'hui." Mallarmé acted as an example of a difficult author in Josipovici's argument and his analysis, which largely followed Malcolm Bowie's *Mallarmé and the Art of Being Difficult* (1978), also allowed the reader to approach the semantic breaking point for which Mallarmé's modernist language is famous. In his analysis, Josipovici reminded his readers that Mallarmé claimed meaning in his poetry was created through short-cuts, hypothetically and that it self-consciously avoided narrative. The moral of Josipovici's story was that if readers demand solid meaning, a description of an ideal or actual object, or distance themselves from meaning by maintaining that Mallarmé was merely engaged in wordplay, they have not understood what poetry and especially modernist poetry is all about. Josipovici's argument was harsh on fashionable modernist authors who appeared to have withdrawn into free-floating textual wordplay. An unarticulated meaning which is necessary

to motivate even non-narrative texts rests, in part, on the failure of communication, but it is not of course the business of modernist artworks to serve communication by means of realism or idealism either. Josipovici often referred to the art of Francis Bacon to illustrate the delicate balance between representation and abstraction in modernist art which must try to breathe life into artifacts that have lost touch with the transcendental source of their meaning. This is of course impossible after the disenchantment of modernity, but an attempt to do so at least creates the opportunity to remember what aesthetic experience lost after the moderns lost their gods and Romantic geniuses. Josipovici's point seemed to be that recycling artistic conventions in the manner modern art tends to do, at least in his opinion, is not much different from mere wordplay where meaning is largely irrelevant. Both create closed semantic domains where meaning is either rigidly fixed or lacking in depth. True modernist writing, according to Josipovici, looks for that which refuses convention and closure and refuses to become art. The repercussions of relinquishing the search for truth and meaning are felt in literature when literary and linguistic innovations are transformed into mechanical and conventional exercises. There was a distinctly Benjaminian dread of mechanical and meaningless art behind Josipovici's criticism. One could also hear in his rhetoric Dryden's unwillingness to engage with critics as well as protests against Baconian spiders (of *The Advancement of Learning* fame) who are content to weave their webs without any regard to the outside world. His uncompromising position meant that he could not agree with Lodge in that "those of judgment can from the same flower suck honey with the bee, from whence the spyder (I mean the ignorant) take their poison."[657] In this case one sadly cannot draw honey from the weed.

From this one may infer that had Swift written his *Tale* for Josipovici's contemporaries, it might have been received as a joyfully anarchic satire devoid of the kind of argumentative

[657] Lodge 1853, 23.

force its diabolical trap still retains. Perhaps the same could be said of the radical misreading that fuelled the rhetoric of the Marprelate authors, Nashe's metaleptic trickery, Defoe's negation of the transparency topos, his satiric grotesqueries and Pope's manipulation of the sublime. Dryden, on the other hand, would resist such a reading as he insists that satire has to be of its time and he puts a stop to any speculation that would detach satire from its historical moment. The historicity of satire is also apparent when one compares the fate of Nashe's metaleptic devices to Dryden's transgression of the generic border between manuscript and print satire or Defoe's opportunistic parodies of allegorical interpretation. However, there is something in the satirists included in this thesis and Swift in particular that speaks directly to the modern reader, if only because of their influence on Beckett. The nostalgia apparent in the longing of those who want to rejoin *res* and *verba* can also be seen in Beckett's case and therefore, as Frederik Smith points out, he may also interpret the eighteenth century for modern readers.[658] Reading the eighteenth century through Beckett's work, Smith focuses on epistemological questions prevalent in both Swift's *Tale* and Beckett's *Watt*, among them the failure of fiction to represent the world: "In both works the attempt to tell a story, to make order and sense out of the raw materials of fiction, is inseparable from the attempt to understand the world, to make order and sense out of a physical and intellectual experience."[659] The narrators of both works are self-conscious authors and so reflect their actual authors on the page, but at the same time "Swift and Beckett have arranged things in such a way that they can satirize their speakers' mismanaged narrations while at the same time recognizing the irony of their own struggles to create."[660] Both mock the self-consciously flawed yet earnest efforts of the performative author to create a coherent

[658] Cf. Smith 2002, 156.
[659] Smith 2002, 42.
[660] Ibid.

narrative and his "lack of authorial control."[661] The point of the mockery is, according to Smith, to show that "it is impossible to squeeze contingent reality into neat beginnings, endings and chapter divisions."[662] Language itself is suspect, "a dubious means of discovering or conveying truth."[663] There is nevertheless a purpose in the many failures of Swift and Beckett. Smith writes: "What Beckett wants his reader to experience is beyond words and beyond explanation."[664] He then resorts to the first person pronoun to overcome the challenge ("Beckett has me where he wants me"[665]; "Swift has a good laugh—on me"[666]), but another way of expressing what both authors want to achieve is to say that they do not want the reader to experience something beyond words but to experience the beyond-wordness of the world in their representations. The only way to achieve this, it seems, is to fail and let readers experience the failure of words. The crippled, mad and paralyzed characters found in Swift and Beckett are the unfortunate scapegoats who must act as their messengers. They "dramatize the weakness of their writing as a way of demonstrating the frailty of their own existences."[667] The message tells of the fading strength of language and reason, akin to Pope's preoccupation with vitality:

> In Pope the fragmentary echoes of the pastoral, along with his inability to sustain a Miltonic epic in the present age, reflect on his own limitations as a poet. Beckett likewise feels impotent in the face of a larger force, victimized as he is by the postmodern sense of a flickering out of any hope of human understanding, or originality as a writer, much less knowing happiness.[668]

The message is bleak, but knowing how Beckett amused himself with unhappiness one reads in his work the antics of a metaphysical slapstick comedian. His nihilism and humor are part

[661] Ibid.
[662] Ibid, 42.
[663] Ibid.
[664] Ibid, 73.
[665] Ibid.
[666] Ibid, 84.
[667] Ibid, 106.
[668] Ibid, 153-4.

of a more earnest nostalgia, one that reminds Smith of Swift's spiders and bees: "[L]ike the spider [Beckett] wants to spin his art out of himself; like the bee, however, he finds himself by necessity feeding here and here and here, his art dependent on the nectar of a multitude of flowers."[669] His nostalgia, in turn, comes from a deep need to engage the world and to make a connection with the reader by showing how the failure of representation can create something more authentic than representation itself.

While translating *Molloy*, Patrick Bowles discussed language and meaning with the author. Bowles's 1955 notes enable one to eavesdrop on how Beckett's views on language, meaning and linguistic depth had evolved. Among other things, Bowles and Beckett discussed a Blanchot quotation: "All philosophy of non-signification, as soon as it is expressed, rests on a contradiction."[670] One can see the form of Montaigne's Pyrrhonistic riddle in the statement: in order to express the impossibility of signification one has to express a fact that should be, in principle, inexpressible. The result is the familiar self-referential and paradoxical environment where readers can exhaust themselves in trying to reach a conclusion that can never be reached. Bowles thought Blanchot's circular reasoning was faulty and that Blanchot had committed a rudimentary category mistake. He suggested there were two levels of meaning at play in the kind of scenario Blanchot proposed: the world with its mute material aspects that resist the power of linguistically imposed order and the linguistic level where the world in all its muteness can be represented in language. Bowles used the ruthless logic of reason (to use Blanchot's phrase) that enables one to say that the logos will subsume the absurd and so produce meaning. In short, if one conceptualizes these two levels of meaning in the world, the paradox will disappear and create a kind of dialectic

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[669] Ibid, 160.

[670] Knowlson and Knowlson 2006, 111. ["Toute philosophie de la non-signification reste sur une contradiction, dès qu'elle s'exprime."] In all likelihood, Bowles is referring to "Réflections sur l'enfer" which Blanchot published in a 1954 edition of *La Nouvelle Revue françaises*. Camus' original sentence was perhaps only slightly less dogmatic: "Toute philosophie de la non-signification vit sur une contradiction du fait même qu'elle s'exprime" (1951, 21).

instead. Beckett disagreed: "There is only one level."[671] His views on language and writing were quite radical: "This kind of writing can even *kill* a man."[672] In Beckett's opinion, artists had traditionally worked with an assumption very much like the one Bowles was proposing, but a modern artist should recognize that he or she is already in the world and that a mute world cannot be expressed or communicated without getting involved with something like Blanchot's paradoxical remark. The artist who is already in the world cannot express meaning in a world that is mute, because in that case the world would and would not be mute. However, this was not a logical problem for Beckett. Rather, the breakdown of language showed that there were "times when [words] can be employed with success, and times when their very employment is inappropriate."[673] There may be nostalgia and a longing for a kind of meaning that perhaps never was, but a separate metaphysical realm of ideas has vanished—as noted above, there is no second process by which meaning is created. Simple structuralist schemes, on the other hand, fail for the reasons pointed out by Josipovici. If the speaker does not realize that he or she can use the failure of expression and communication to represent things in the world, to use the failure to express as a form of expression, he or she cannot express anything to anyone or even tell anyone that expression of any kind is impossible. The realization can be liberating, but most of Beckett's characters are not happy and they are certainly not liberated. All this suggests that if there is real meaninglessness in Beckett, it is perhaps that of the readers who choose to torment themselves with the possibility of transcendent meaning.

The semantic paralysis that Beckett's characters suffer from is not unlike the danger to which readers of the arguments of eighteenth-century satire subject themselves. Those committed to following Swift to the end of his tether will eventually find themselves in a

[671] Knowlson and Knowlson 2006, 112.
[672] Ibid, 114.
[673] Ibid.

situation similar to Beckett's characters who gaze into the distance ravished by semantic nostalgia. It is a promise of monosemic meaning that may bring a memory of something lost back to life. On the other hand, since Swift's outrageousness helps one break whatever spells he casts on his readers, the appalling nature of the proposition becomes obvious. Instead, the true problem is perhaps again one of historicity, since, as Dryden writes in his poem to Congreve on his *Double-Dealer*, "[t]he present age of wit obscures the past" (l. 2). If there is nostalgia for monosemic meaning in Beckett's characters, it soon becomes clear that nostalgia for failure cannot be far behind. That is, when the possibility of producing univocal interpretations of, say, the texts presented in this dissertation is overruled at the outset, experiencing true failure of apprehending the authors' intentions and their meaning will be impossible as well. Josipovici, for one, argues for a modernism where writers and artists recognize that certain modes of expression have become unreadable or otherwise dismissed as stale convention. Having done so, they try to force progress in the arts by searching for new modes of expression. In effect, this is very much like a Barthesian argument that states that a true modernist is one who sees what type of art is no longer possible. But it also recognizes with Pope that recycling artistic and critical conventions leads to dullness. If this is the case, one must ask if the deliberate production of texts that are unreadable by design, whose arguments fail by design, is becoming rare especially at a time that makes eighteenth-century advances in printing seem like the feeble first steps toward a society that must now apply its genius for forgetting more vigorously than ever in order create new forms of literary expression. This is also why the failed argument of eighteenth-century satire is still valuable. It reminds readers that they have to look for new modes of failure and, perhaps more importantly, new ways of failing to interpret what the author meant. This, finally, is thinking dangerously: recognizing that it matters who is speaking when the Author's voice disappears in a voluntary act of self-annihilation and one is left alone with the deliberate failure of the

text. Recognizing that self-annihilation was one of the first actions the Author took soon after his birth, in turn, should tell careful readers something about themselves. That is, that freedom to assign meaning also entails the freedom to relinquish hermeneutic agency. When one is faced with the absence of the Author as an intentional act in satires written at the turn of the eighteenth century, one must also face the fact that modern discourses that deem them undecipherable are orbiting an artificial and intentional problem of interpretation. The fundamental choice in this case is not, as with More, between realism and idealism, but whether one laments or rejoices in the freedom created by the hollow core. The Death of the Author in this context may be seen as a pernicious trope, as Bloom does, but in light of the push and pull of satirical texts that confront questions pertaining to the reader's and the author's responsibilities in interpretation, it begins to look like another case of extravagant reasoning that warrants not disengagement but rather a continuing engagement with the Author. This is supported by the puzzled efforts of modern critics to read the eighteenth century. One reads Dryden's indecision, Defoe's outright lies, Swift's manipulative accusations and Pope's sublime violence as monumentally arrogant and elusive, but one reads nonetheless.

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