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THE UNENDING *DUNCIAD*

Pope's Weird Revenge

Cedric D. Reverand II

Something often happens, usually late, in the careers of artists, authors, and composers. They produce a work that is strange, unexpected, complex, and rich, but extremely difficult to deal with. Think, for example, of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony (1824—he died in 1827). Symphonies do not have vocal parts. They do not have choruses. They do not have words. Final movements of symphonies generally do not have twenty-five different tempos. And although as a major work, indeed, arguably the single best-known piece of Western classical music, the Ninth has received a massive amount of critical attention, scholars still tend to throw up their hands and confess defeat. As Charles Rosen puts it, “The Ninth is apparently difficult enough to understand even today,” and he is by no means alone in that opinion.¹ Or consider Dickens's *Bleak House* (1852–53),

¹ Charles Rosen, *The Classical Style*, rev. ed. (1971; New York: W. W. Norton, 1997), 386. See also, for example, Jan Swafford, “The Beethoven Mystery: Why Haven't We Figured Out His Ninth Symphony Yet,” <http://www.slate.com/id/2084948/>: “Figuratively speaking, everybody

admittedly, although written in the mature phase of his career (he was in his forties), it is not terribly late, but it is strange: two separate narratives, one written by an omniscient narrator, one in the first person by a character, Esther Summerson.² Where did he get that idea? From Faulkner, maybe? The omniscient narrator speaks in the present tense, whereas the first-person narrator, telling her tale about eight years later, speaks in the past tense, which is disorienting, because as you move from one narrative to the other, you shift back into the present, then forward into events that are already over. This is simply a different reading experience, different from all the other Dickens novels, as Beethoven's Ninth is different from the rest of his symphonies. Plenty has been written about *Bleak House*, and the oddities do not at all prevent us from getting absorbed in the novel, but in treating it as another Dickens novel, we may have been underestimating its weirdness. Bear in mind that the Ninth Symphony always sounds like Beethoven, and *Bleak House* is always Dickensian, but this seems to be Beethoven and Dickens at a new order of magnitude.

Pope's *Dunciad in Four Books* is, I think, one of these strange, elusive, but major, late works—Leopold Damrosch describes it as Pope's "weird masterpiece"—and I emphasized the unusual form when speaking of Beethoven and Dickens, because this applies to the *Dunciad* as well.³ There is nothing quite like it in Pope's previous work. It is probably most frequently compared to *The Rape of the Locke*, for obvious reasons: both are mock-heroic. But Belinda's world of puffs, powders, patches, bibles, billet-doux, lap dogs, snuff boxes, amber canes, china, of coffee- and tea-drinking, is a far different one from that of Cloacina's privy, chamber pots, catcalls, Bedlam, Bridewell, Grub Street, and the sewer of Fleet Ditch, where dunces dive to "prove who best can dash thro' thick and thin" (2: 276); trying to win at ombre is different

knows the Ninth. But has anybody really understood it? The harder you look, the odder it gets. In a singular way, the Ninth enfolds the apparently contradictory qualities of the epic and the slippery."

² If we were to look at a late Dickens novel, I think I could also make a case for the weirdness of *Our Mutual Friend* (1864–65), the last novel he completed. I choose *Bleak House* instead only because its form, with two separate narratives and two time frames, is atypical, while *Our Mutual Friend*, for all its strangeness—characters who collect dust, who assemble body parts, who make a living dragging the Thames for bodies—reverts to the standard Dickens novel format, without jumping back and forth between different time frames.

³ Leopold Damrosch, "Pope's *Dunciad*," in *Teaching Eighteenth-Century Poetry*, ed. Christopher Fox (New York: AMS Press, 1990), 264. Also: "The most important thing a teacher can do is to remember how strange the *Dunciad* is" (263).

than trying to win a pissing contest.⁴ And in *Rape*, there is no Scriblerus, or Theobald, or Bentley, helpfully mucking everything up. There has been a monumental amount of scholarship on the *Dunciad*, of course, from classics, such as Aubrey Williams's *Pope's Dunciad* (1955), which attempted rescue the poem from being merely a gigantic libel written by a malignant dwarf, instead focusing on the Virgilian "progress" from the crass city to the polite world of Westminster, to recent feminist criticism that sees Pope not so much as a champion of classical values but as a defender of masculinity in the face of encroaching feminist activity (remember, Dulness is a monstrous woman).⁵ But most of the criticism gives the impression that the poem is more controllable, more approachable, than it actually is. We seem to sense that the poem is unreadable. And then we go ahead and read it.⁶ As Emrys Jones pointed out years ago, much of that scholarship "has worked so devotedly to assimilate the poem and make it more generally accessible, that, inevitably perhaps, we may now have reached the point of distorting it out of its original oddity" (612).⁷ I am going to try to bring back some of that oddity.

⁴ Unless otherwise noted, the edition used throughout is that of Alexander Pope, *The Dunciad*, ed. James Sutherland, vol. 5 of the Twickenham Edition of the Poems of Alexander Pope (1943; London: Methuen, 1965). This has been replaced by a more recent Longman annotated edition, edited by Valerie Rumbold (1999), which I will consider later in the essay. But since the vast majority of those who have written on the *Dunciad* have used the Twickenham edition, and since all the anthologized versions of the *Dunciad* that students might use rely on the Twickenham text, it makes sense to use it when discussing how to read the poem.

⁵ Aubrey Williams, *Pope's Dunciad: A Study of Its Meaning* (London: Methuen, 1955), at the middle part of the century, and toward the end, Catherine Ingrassia, "Women Writing/Writing Women: Pope, Dulness, and 'Feminization' in the *Dunciad*," *Eighteenth-Century Life* 14.3 (1990): 40–58.

⁶ G. S. Rousseau, in "Et in Arcadia Homo': Opera, Gender, and Sexual Politics in *The Dunciad*," from *More Solid Learning': New Perspectives on Alexander Pope's "Dunciad"*, ed. Catherine Ingrassia and Claudia N. Thomas (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2000), offers a reading of the poem focusing on how Pope saw himself refracted through "anatomic ambiguities and gender stresses" (37—think "castrati"); Rousseau hits the nail on the head when he calls the work "an unreadable poem for a multitude of reasons ranging from its hundreds of allusions and references to its elliptical grammar and mordant syntax" (60). Still, although all the other contributors to the Ingrassia-Thomas volume would probably agree with Rousseau, the net impact of essays that deal with themes, issues, and so on, makes the *Dunciad* appear to be approachable, coherent, comprehensible, just very complex. We lose a sense of the strangeness, and the elusiveness, of the work, and when we try to fit it into Pope's poetic, I think we lose the sense of how different it is from the rest of Pope.

⁷ Emrys Jones, "Pope and Dulness," *Pope: Recent Essays*, ed. Maynard Mack and James Winn (Hamden: Archon Books, 1980), 612, originally published in *Proceedings of the British Academy* 54 (1968): 231–63.

The complicated sequence of *Dunciads* has been thoroughly worked out. First, there is the *Dunciad* of 1728, a fifty-two-page pamphlet, with a preface and a mere nineteen brief notes. Since Pope had used initials rather than proper names for those he was satirizing, it was not completely clear whom he had in mind; Swift, the Earl of Oxford, and even George II, who had been handed a copy of the poem by Sir Robert Walpole, were among those requesting a key, which encouraged Pope to find a way to clarify his satire.⁸ This actually suited Pope's instinct perfectly, because he was a veritable pack rat, transcribing miscellaneous bits on backs of letters, saving snippets, collecting published scraps of material he might one day use—he even had Tonson bind for him some of the attacks against him, in volumes with such titles as “Libels on Pope,” “Curll and Company.” It is frightening to think what he might have produced if he had access to a word processing program with a cut-and-paste function. Remember also that Pope, unlike Dryden, who seldom revisited his poems once they had been published, was an inveterate tinkerer and reviser, and it was generally in the direction of expansion. The example that comes quickly to mind is *Rape of the Locke*, which first appeared in 1712, in a two canto version, then was expanded in the second edition, 1714, with Pope adding much of the epic machinery, and then topped off, in 1717, with the addition of Clarissa's speech at the opening of canto 5. What began as a 334-line poem grew into the 794-line poem that we now read.

To clarify his satire, and effectively use much of the miscellaneous material he had been saving, Pope next expanded his fifty-two-page pamphlet into the *Dunciad Variorum*, with a prolegomena, letter to the publisher, testimonies of authors, synopses, learned introduction (by Martinus Scriblerus), index, and, of course, a minefield of footnotes. The hero is Lewis Theobald, thanks to his *Shakespeare Restored: or, A Specimen of the Many Errors, as well Committed, as Unamended, by Mr. Pope in his late Edition of this Poet* (1726).⁹

⁸ For a long time, it had been thought that the 1728 *Dunciad* was a setup, issued in hopes of eliciting counterattacks that would give Pope an excuse to publish a more complete version (and a counter-counterattack). Scholars such as David Vander Meulen and James McLaverty, in working out the exact sequence of editions and variants, have argued otherwise. Shef Rogers, in “Pope, Publishing, and Popular Interpretations of the *Dunciad Variorum*,” *Philological Quarterly* 74 (1995): 279–95, provides a summary of that research, and a good account of the current view of Pope's plans, which I am following.

⁹ It was long thought that Theobald's *Shakespeare Restored* was the occasion that prompted Pope to write *The Dunciad*, but as James McLaverty, in “Pope and Giles Jacob's *Lives of the Poets: The Dunciad as Alternative Literary History*,” *Modern Philology* (1985): 22–32, argues, Pope may well have been working on the poem before *Shakespeare Restored* appeared, perhaps completing a draft by October 1725, although, of course, Theobald ultimately became the

Not only was he one of many Pope critics, but he was also a professional writer of dramatic farces, periodical pieces, and occasional (bad) poetry, thereby being part of the Grub Street world that Pope is attacking, the world of hired pens, and those who hired them, along with functionaries of the trade, such as booksellers, especially Edmund Curll. (In attacking those poor souls who were forced to write for a living, Pope seems not to have been bothered by the fact that he, too, was dependent on booksellers, and that his translation of Homer, for instance, made him something in the vicinity of £10,000).¹⁰ Theobald also made a handy target because, like Richard Bentley, he was one of those supposedly pedantic textual editors—by our lights, he would seem to be a good, if stuffy, historical contextualist—a conspicuous Modern in the ongoing battle of the Ancients and the Moderns. With the *Dunciad Variorum*, Pope has found an effective vehicle, a mock authoritative edition, a perfect way to satirize, among other things, textual editors who produce variorum editions.

With the *Dunciad Variorum*, Pope has arrived at the complicated and, for him, unprecedented form, featuring a continual contest between the poem and its commentators, with the notes containing serious commentary, or parodying serious commentary, or making commentary on commentary. Part of the complexity comes not merely from the multiplicity of voices in the notes, but from our not knowing which are serious, which parodic, or even which ones were written by Pope: most of them, probably, but Swift may have had a hand, Richard Savage may have had a hand. And Pope helps us out enormously here by dropping misleading clues, even at one point claiming “As to the Notes, I am weary of telling a great Truth, which is, that I am not Author of ’em.”¹¹ I do not know anybody who regards this as truth, great or otherwise. As with Beethoven in his Ninth Symphony, or Dickens in *Bleak House*, with the variorum of 1729, Pope has hit upon an intriguing, complex, strange, different form: it still sounds like Pope, but not quite like any Pope poem we have read before.

hero of the first version, perhaps at Swift’s suggestion.

¹⁰ As Robert D. Hume reports, in “The Economics of Culture in London, 1660–1740,” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 69 (2006): 509.

¹¹ Pope to Aaron Hill, 26 January 1731, from *The Correspondence of Alexander Pope*, ed. George Sherburn, 5 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), 3:165. Elsewhere, in Pope to William Warburton, 27 November 1742, Pope explains to his future editor that he will be adding “*Graver Notes* . . . to those of Mr Cleland [William Cleland] & Dr Arb [Dr. Arbuthnot]” (4:428). All subsequent references to Pope’s letters will rely on this edition, referred to by volume and page number.

One of the things that characterizes these late works is expansiveness, an enlarged scope. Although Pope has discovered, or invented, the mock-variorum genre, we are not quite at Ninth Symphony or *Bleak House* level yet.¹² Time passes. Pope publishes a sequel, the *New Dunciad*, in 1742, and in the following year, adds the *New Dunciad* as book 4 to the three-book *Dunciad Variorum*, producing the final version: *The Dunciad, in Four Books* (1743). There is, of course, one central change, which entails revising the earlier books: the throne of Dulness now descends to Colley Cibber, the Poet Laureate. Cibber, first of all, is a much bigger target than Theobald, because he is not just a third-rate hack, but the nation's official poet, the voice of the nation, connected with both Walpole and George II, taking over the post once held by Dryden, for goodness sakes. And just as the target is bigger, book 4 considerably extends the reach of the satire, which, I think, is what qualifies it as one of those expansive, late works. The earlier version, as I mentioned, concentrated on dull writers, dull critics, booksellers, and the like. Book 4 goes well beyond the Grub Street world. It is about as sweeping as a satire can get. In addition to all the earlier targets, who are still there, Pope now attacks Italian opera, arbitrary sway, the divine right of kings, philosophers and logicians, classicists, geometricians, aristocrats, hunters, those who go on the Grand Tour, and, speaking of the Grand Tour, Italians, play managers, forgers of ancient manuscripts, numismatists, botanists, amateur Egyptologists, virtuosi—who collect flowers, toads, funguses, humming-birds, and moss—the king and queen of England, Walpole, gardeners, patrons, scholarly editors, fops, teachers, Oxbridge dons, their dumb students, Royal Society projectors, mathematicians, priests and preachers, tax collectors (Thomas Gordon, commissioner of wines), free-thinkers, knights of the garter, honorary degree ceremonies and recipients, French cooking and wine experts (about six lines and two notes on the one, one line and one note on the other), gamblers, horse-race enthusiasts, footmen, entomologists (well, at least one entomologist), people who make stockings out of spider webs, the revels at the inns of court, and cricket enthusiasts.¹³

¹² Aside from the *Dunciad* being a parody of the variorum edition, another possible precedent for the genre, suggested by Aubrey Williams, in *Pope's "Dunciad,"* is the *Epistolae Obscurorum Virorum* (1515–19), which was published in a 1710 London edition, a hoax launched by a group of German humanists, wherein, as Williams puts it, "Scholarly dolts who are foes to humanistic learning are made to expose their folly in what purport to be real letters addressed to a historical personage" (61–62). The 1710 English edition appears in *ECCO* under the title *Epistolarum Obscurorum Virorum*. It has a dedication, in Latin, by Isaac Bickerstaff, or, to be precise, Isaaco Bickerstaff. See *ESTC* T131824.

¹³ In a letter to Hugh Bethel, 1 January [1742], Pope presents his own catalog of targets: "An Army of Virtuosi, Medalists, Ciceronis, Royal Society-men, Schools, Universities, even Florists, Free thinkers, & Free masons, will encompass me with fury. It will be once more

It gets larger still. As the laureate son ascends the throne of Dulness and takes charge, Chaos gradually shuts down all the cultural lights: Wit, Art, Truth, Philosophy, Science, Mathematics, Religion, Morality, all flicker and die, until we reach the final couplet: "Thy hand, great anarch, lets the curtain fall / And universal darkness buries all" (4:655–57). The problem in the *Dunciad* of 1743 has gotten a bit bigger than: London is filled with bad writers. What was an irritating nuisance in 1729 is now but a small part of a newly envisioned army of dunces threatening to destroy culture itself.

And now, the oddity. We all know this as a major poem by the major English poet of his age. How, exactly, does one go about reading it? This is where, like the Ninth Symphony or *Bleak House*, things become slippery. Let me demonstrate the problem by taking a passage and playing the role of an industrious reader, somebody who is not content with a general overview but would like to explore the poem thoroughly, in depth, somebody who wants to know exactly what Pope is talking about, somebody who reads in the way we try to teach our students to read. And let us suppose this reader is working on the following passage, where a harlot form comes sliding by. The footnote tells us this is Italian opera. She

Cast on the prostate Nine a scornful look,
Then thus in quaint Recitativo spoke.
"O *Cara! Cara!* silence all that train:
Joy to great Chaos! let Division reign:
Chromatic tortures soon shall drive them hence,
Break all their nerves, and fritter all their sense.
One trill shall harmonize joy, grief, and rage,
Wake the dull Church, and lull the ranting Stage;
.....
Another Phœbus, thy own Phœbus, reigns,
Joys in my jiggs, and dances in my chains."
(4:52–59, 61–62)

There are four footnotes to this passage. I have already summarized the first one, which is about ten lines long, explaining that this is Italian opera and

Concurrere Bellum atque Virum. of Conscience a bold Spirit, & Zeal for Truth at whatsoever Expence, of whatever Pretenders to Science, or of all Imposition either Literary, Moral, or Political; these animated me, & these will Support me" (4:377). Naturally, like the *Dunciad* itself, the list of targets kept growing as Pope kept writing.

referring back to book 3, where the coming of opera was prophesied. This is followed by a note on “let Division reign” that compliments Handel, pointing out that he had to “remove his Music into *Ireland*,” because English musicians were not up to it, instead devoting their time to “the false taste of playing tricks in Music with numberless divisions.” Another brief note explains “Chromatic tortures,” which are “odd irregularities, of the *Diatonic* kind,” and as such, “languid and effeminate.” So far, so good. We are learning something about English music and its supposed deficiencies. Look at the opening of the last note:

thy own Phoebus reigns]
Tuus jam regnat Apollo. Virg.

Ah, yes. And of course, we all remember the Virgil passage, don't we? Or do we dutifully look it up? The Twickenham editor tells us it is from the fourth eclogue, which I will quote, in translation, from my nearby copy of the Loeb text:

Now is come the last age of the song of Cumae; the great line of centuries begins anew. Now the Virgin returns, the reign of Saturn returns; now a new generation descends from heaven on high. Only do thou, pure Lucina, smile on the birth of the child, under whom the iron brood shall first cease, and a golden race spring up throughout the world. Thine own Apollo now is King!¹⁴

The passage celebrates the beginning of a glorious age, a rebirth. Now the Virgin returns, the reign of Saturn returns. Wait a minute. Saturn? Didn't we encounter Saturn somewhere else in book 4? This could be a thematic pattern worth noting. Yes, here it is:

Then rose the Seed of Chaos, and of Night,
To blot out Order, and extinguish Light,
Of dull and venal a new World to mold,
And bring Saturnian days of Lead and Gold.
(4:13–16)

So, Pope has deliberately inverted Virgil's golden age. And there is a note:

¹⁴ Virgil, *Eclogues, Georgics, Aeneid I–VI*, trans. H. Rushton Fairclough, Loeb Classical Library (1916; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 29.

Of dull and venal] The Allegory continued: *dull* referring to the extinction of Light or Science, *venal* to the destruction of Order, or the Truth of Things.

This is to be the reign of a different Saturn, and Pope is having fun with a pun. The age of Saturn is the golden age, but Saturn is the technical name for lead, so Pope's Saturnian age is leaden, that is, heavy and dull, and it is golden in the sense of being venal, . . . which is exactly what a subsequent note tells us:

Lead *and* Gold] *i.e.* dull and venal.

Nothing like going to the bottom of the page and discovering the obvious. However, while the meaning of "Saturnian days of Lead and Gold" would be perfectly clear to informed scholarly readers, it would be news to our students, which means we have a footnote that is a joke for some of us, and simply helpful information for the rest of us.¹⁵

Back to Virgil's fourth eclogue: one notices that it also mentions Lucina, goddess of childbirth, smiling on the birth of a child. This rings a bell. Oh yes; it comes right after the passage we just looked at:

She mounts the Throne: her head a Cloud conceal'd,
In broad Effulgence all below reveal'd,
(Tis thus aspiring Dulness ever shines)
Soft on her lap her Laureat son reclines.

(4:17-20)

¹⁵ An especially alert reader will perhaps recall that Pope had brought up the idea earlier, in the first book:

From thy Boetia tho' her Pow'r retires,
Mourn not, my SWIFT, at ought our Realm acquires,
Here pleas'd behold her mighty wings out-spread
To hatch a new Saturnian age of Lead.

(1: 25-28)

And in the third book:

"Now Bavius, take the poppy from thy brow,
And place it here! here all ye Heroes bow!
This, this is he, foretold by ancient rhymes
Th'Augustus born to bring Saturnian times."

(3: 317-20)

But since in book 4 Scriblerus does not refer us back to the these passages from books 2 and 3, we should not refer to them either.

Of course, Dulness is smiling on the birth of her laureate son. As we might imagine, with this specific mention of the laureate, there is a footnote. Here it is:

her Laureat son reclines] With great judgment it is imagined by the Poet, that such a Colleague as Dulness had elected, should sleep on the Throne, and have very little share in the Action of the Poem. Accordingly he hath done little or nothing from the day of his Anointing; having past through the second book without taking any part in anything that was transacted about him, and thro' the third in profound Sleep. Nor ought this, well considered, to seem strange in our days, when so many *King-consorts* have done like. SCRIBL.

This verse our excellent Laureate took so to heart, that he appealed to all mankind, "if he was not as *seldom asleep as any fool?*" But it is hoped the Poet hath not injured him, but rather verified his Prophecy (p. 243 of his own *Life*, 8vo. ch. ix.) where he says "*the Reader will be as much pleased to find me a Dunce in my Old age, as he was to prove me a brisk blockhead in my Youth.*" Wherever there was any room for Briskness, or Alacrity of any sort, *even in sinking*, he hath had it allowed to him; but here, where there is nothing for him to do but to take his natural rest, he must permit his Historian to be silent. It is from their *actions* only that Princes have their character, and Poets from their *works*: And if in *those* he be as *much asleep as any fool*, the Poet must leave him and them to *sleep to all eternity*. BENT.

Ibid. *her Laureat]* "When I find my Name in the satirical works of this Poet, I never look upon it as any malice meant to me, but PROFIT to himself. For he considers that *my Face* is more *known* than most in the nation; and therefore a *Lick at the Laureate* will be a sure bait *ad captandum vulgus*, to catch little readers." *Life of Colley Cibber*, chap. ii.

Now if it be certain, that the works of our Poet have owned their success to this ingenious expedient, we hence derive an unanswerable Argument, that this Fourth DUNCIAD, as well as the former three, hath had the Author's last hand, and was by him intended for the Press: Or else to what purpose hath he crowned it, as we see, by this finishing stroke, the profitable *Lick at the Laureate?* BENT.

It would seem that this is a note upon a note upon a note, amounting to a conversation, in three—or is it four?—different voices, about the laureate, with Cibber himself involuntarily contributing, and it has cross references both back to book 2 and to Cibber's *Apology for the Life*. We were watching Dulness receive her laureate son—back to the lines that occasioned the lengthy note. She has many offspring, because all the dunces are her sons, and the metaphor runs throughout book 4. We meet one of her sons, just after the pedants leave, who is presented to the goddess before going on his Grand Tour, from which he will learn nothing:

In flow'd at once a gay embroider'd race,
And titt'ring push'd the Pedants off the place:
.....
The first came forwards, with as easy mien,
As if he saw St. James's and the Queen.
When thus the th'attendant Orator begun.
"Receive, great empress! thy accomplish'd Son:
Thine from the birth, and sacred from the rod,
A dauntless infant! never scar=d with God."
(4:275–76, 279–84)

There are five footnotes to this passage, of which two seem particularly interesting:

And titt'ring push'd, &c.] Hor.
Rideat & pulset lasciva decentiùs ætas.
A dauntless Infant! &c.] Hor.
—sine Dis Animosus Infans.

The first is from Horace's *Epistles*, book 2, epistle 2, the second from Horace's *Odes*, book 3, ode 4. Stop. Are you ready to give up? Do you remember where we started? It takes a few seconds (we began with Italian opera). Trying to read this is fun, but I am basically suggesting that the *Dunciad* is unreadable: wherever we start, we end up wandering through other parts of the *Dunciad*, with side trips to other authors, in this journey, Virgil and Horace, but we will also find frequent allusions to Homer and Milton. Depending on where we start, we are going to go off in different directions and find different things. And each person reading it is likely to do it differently, which means, it is a different text for everybody. In this respect, the 1743 *Dunciad* is not

unlike *Finnegans Wake* in that the reader can begin anywhere, and will keep wandering off to different places. Perhaps it does not matter whether a reader finishes it, and that may even be perfectly appropriate, since Pope, who loved to revise, probably never finished it either.¹⁶ Nonetheless, even in the one example I worked with, it is clear that the work is not disorganized: the notes, the allusions, all seem to emphasize the ways in which the world of the dunces, overlooked by Chaos, protected by their mother, Dulness, inverts classical visions of order. It might be accurate to call this hyperorder, entailing, as I have said, a complex wandering, and stumbling. I rather think this is exactly what Pope had in mind: he took pedants to task for being narrow minded, for not being able to see the forest for the trees. What better way to make the point than by writing a work that keeps running us into trees.

According to a survey conducted by Wallace Jackson and R. Paul Yoder in connection with their MLA-produced *Approaches to Teaching Pope's Poetry* (1993) volume, as far as Pope's poetry is concerned, the *Dunciad* is second only to *The Rape of the Locke* in being taught to students, which surprises me. However, it is taught "often only in parts and, of those parts, often only book 4."¹⁷ In either case, the editions used have severely reduced annotations. The good news is that many students are apparently "reading" the *Dunciad*, but the survey also confirms my notion that the poem is unreadable: of all the students who are being assigned the poem, along with their teachers, one supposes, virtually none of them actually reads it, not all of it.¹⁸

¹⁶ Blakey Vermeule, in "Abstraction, Reference, and the Dualism of Pope's *Dunciad*," *Modern Philology* 96 (1988): 16–41, remarks: "Any mode of reading, from the most formalist to the most historicist, will fail to make the poem coherent because Pope failed to make the poem coherent. . . . Pope never stopped revising, despite the straightforward mode of reference he practiced in the poem's early drafts. Why not? Pope never felt sure his work was done" (17–18). Little wonder, then, that readers cannot "finish" it, or make it cohere, either.

¹⁷ *Approaches to Teaching Pope's Poetry*, ed. Wallace Jackson and R. Paul Yoder (New York: Modern Language Association, 1993), 3.

¹⁸ In a plenary talk at a South Central Society of Eighteenth-Century Studies conference, to an audience of about five hundred scholars of eighteenth-century literature and culture, I addressed this issue. Assuming that everybody was well familiar with the *Dunciad*, I asked how many had read *all* of it, every word. Sheepishly, several hands, about twenty or so, went up. I added, "including the notes?" Every hand went down. I have it on good authority, however, that Howard Erskine-Hill, Valerie Rumbold, James McLaverty, and David Vander Meulen have all read every word, including the notes.



Since this essay is part of a collection in honor of Gabriel Hornstein, a man whose whole life has been devoted to books, it is only appropriate that I should specifically address the problems raised by the printed texts of the *Dunciad*. Luckily, Pope was considered sufficiently important at the earlier part of the last century that resources were devoted to producing an authoritative edition, the Twickenham edition, under the general editorship of John Butt. This is the authoritative text on which the vast majority of Pope scholarship has been based; it is the text used by those who taught me, the text I have used for my entire career, and the text my graduate students have used, thanks to the fact that a one-volume version, including all of the Twickenham text and notes, but without the rest of the scholarly apparatus, is still in print.¹⁹ The volume devoted to the *Dunciad*, volume 5, was edited by James Sutherland and first published in 1943. This has now been supplanted by the 1999 Longman annotated edition, edited by Valerie Rumbold (more of that in a bit).

If ever there were a text apparently designed to give a textual editor nightmares, it would be the *Dunciad*. First, there is the problem of which version to publish. The first edition, of 1728, just the poem, but no notes, is not all that significant. The consensus is that we start with the *Dunciad Variorum* of 1729, with the complete apparatus. Seventeen forty-two saw the production of *The New Dunciad*, but again, that is something of a first draft, and we wait until Pope incorporates it, as book 4, of the finally revised *Dunciad* of 1743. Thus, Sutherland chose to produce two texts, the *Dunciad* (A) and the *Dunciad* (B), the first being the variorum edition of 1729, the second being the “final” *Dunciad* of 1743. There are, of course, variants to be collated, because there are at least five 1728 editions, five 1729 editions, and then the first version of the *Dunciad* reappeared during Pope’s lifetime in his *Works*, published in 1735, 1736, and 1741—Sutherland actually examined seventeen editions. But, once we have decided to collate toward two main texts, we are over the first hurdle.

The next problem one might call “Pope’s revenge.” An authoritative edition, of course, must be thoroughly annotated, which means the scholarly

¹⁹ In their survey of what editions teachers use, Yoder and Jackson, in *Approaches*, confirm that the one-volume Twickenham edition is considered “useful, especially for graduate students,” but they go on to cite one respondent as complaining that “the format of *The Dunciad* in four books in the Butt edition is absolutely frustrating” (4).

editor must participate in the very activity Pope is satirizing; he has to annotate annotations, some of which are parodies of annotations, and, as I mentioned, Pope left it unclear as to which are the real and which the mock annotations. This means that the ordinary problem of getting lost in the references is compounded because the references have references. Sutherland indicates which are his, and which belong to Pope, or rather, which we *think* belong to Pope. And some are by Pope's posthumous editor and executor, William Warburton, which are generally labeled "P. W.," meaning "by Pope, that is, according to Warburton." To say the notes are cluttered would be an understatement, and embedding the modern annotations (they are set off by < and >) in the Pope annotations was not a great idea.

Then, Sutherland has to deal with the basic problem of duplicate material; much of *Dunciad* (B) merely repeats *Dunciad* (A). Perhaps to save space, or to save on the expense, Sutherland produces a full text of the poetry for *Dunciad* (B), but does not repeat the annotations if they had already appeared in the A version, instead, merely providing cross-references to *Dunciad* (A). This, alas, makes an unreadable text even *more* unreadable. For example, suppose we are attempting to make our way through the following passage from book 2 in *Dunciad* (B):

Thrice Budgel aim'd to speak, but thrice suppress
 By potent Arthur, knock'd his chin and breast.
 Toland and Tindal, prompt at priests to jeer,
 Yet silent bow'd to Christ's No kingdom here.
 (2:397–400)

Here are the annotations as they appear at the bottom of the page:

397. *Thrice Budgel aim'd to speak* <A ii 365>

399. *Toland and Tindal*] Two persons, not so happy as to be obscure, who writ against the Religion of their Country. <Cf. A ii 367>

400. *Christ's No kindgom, &c.*] This is said by Curl, key to Dunc. to allude to a sermon of a reverend Bishop. <Cf. A ii 368>

Obviously, to be thorough, we have to go back to A. Brace yourself.

365. *Thrice Budgel aim'd to speak*] Famous for his speeches on many occasions about the *South Sea Scheme*, &c. "He is a very in-

genious gentleman, and hath written some excellent Epilogues to Plays, and *one small* piece on Love, which is very pretty." JACOB Lives of Poets, vol. 2 p. 289. But this Gentleman has since made himself much more eminent and personally well-known to the greatest statesmen of all parties <as well as to all the Courts of Law-1742-51>, in this nation. <He spoke on Sept. 20 and Sept. 30, 1720, and printed his speeches, which went through numerous editions. Budgell's oratorical gifts are satirically referred to in *Donne* iv 51. He is said to have lost £20,000 in the South Sea failure. Budgell's most famous epilogue was a humorous one which he wrote for *The Distrest Mother* (1712) of Ambrose Philips. It was "received with such uncommon applause, that it was called for by the audience during the whole run of that tragedy, and continued to be spoken many years after, at the representation of the same play." (*Biographia Britannica*, 2nd ed. Art. BUDGELL.) For further elucidation of Pope's note, see Biog. App., Budgell.>

The first set of diagonal brackets indicates a phrase added in 1742. The second set is Sutherland's own explanation of Budgell, which concludes by sending us to the biographical appendix, at the back of the volume:

BUDGELL, Eustace (1686-1737). A ii 365; B ii 397. A cousin of Addison's, who gained a considerable reputation in his earlier life as a writer of real talent and as an administrator in Ireland. In addition to the celebrated epilogue mentioned in Pope's note, he wrote some thirty essays for the *Spectator*, and produced an admired translation of Theophrastus. Personal difficulties in Ireland with the Duke of Bolton, and severe losses in the South Sea year seem to have unsettled Budgell, and from 1721 onwards he became more and more irresponsible in his behaviour. In April, 1728, not long before Pope's note on him was written, he stopped the King as he was on his way to Cambridge and invited him to partake of a cold collation by the roadside (*The Craftsman*, April 27, 1728). A long-standing enmity against Walpole culminated on April 21, 1730, in his kneeling at Court and presenting the King with a petition in which he set forth "the wrong and injustice done him by Walpole" (Egmont, I. 96). Pope's reference to "Courts of Law" in the later editions probably alludes to Budgell's troubles in 1733 over the will of Matthew Tindal, though he was

never called upon to face a charge in court (cf. *Ep. To Arbuthnot*, 378–9); but his later life was one long litigation. In 1737, overwhelmed by his various troubles, he ended his life by jumping into the Thames. Egmont recorded in his Diary (ii 407) that “he was the most conceited pragmatistical cur I ever knew, but he was a good scholar and wrote well.” See also vol. iv, Biog. App., and pp. 124*n*, 125*n*.

Why we would need to know that Budgell once offered cold food to the king, or that he jumped into the Thames, is beyond me. Perhaps it is inevitable, given the nature of Pope’s own notes that both amplify and distract, that annotating the annotations results in self parody. I quote the entire excerpt largely because it contains no less than eight further references, to *The Craftsman*, the *Epistle to Arbuthnot*, to another biographical appendix, in volume 4 of the Twickenham edition. What Pope started seems to be expanding infinitely, with annotations leading to references, leading to other references. And I have not yet gotten to the next note, on Toland and Tindal, which is even more involved, and more digressive.

Thank God for Valerie Rumbold’s edition of *The Dunciad in Four Books*, where she prints Pope’s poetry, Pope’s notes, and then, after a break in the page, marked with a horizontal line, her own notes, easy to tell from the rest, because they are physically separate. She also wisely reproduces one of Pope’s finest typographical jokes: after plowing through many pages of prefatory material—thirty in the 1729 London first edition of the *Dunciad Variorum*, thirty-eight in the London 1743 first edition of the *Dunciad in Four Books*—when we finally get to the poem itself, we discover that the first page has a grand total of one couplet: the rest is all annotation. And the first note, supposedly by Theobald, argues that the title should be *Dunceiad*, “Dunce with an *e*, therefore *Dunciade* with an *e*,” to which there is a responding note, supposedly by Bentley, disagreeing, then an anonymous note criticizing Bentley, and finally a comment by Scriblerus agreeing with Theobald, that it should be spelled with an “*e*,” but Scriblerus announces that, all the same, he will “not amend this error in the Title itself, but only note it *obiter*, to evince to the learned that it was not our fault.” In short, we have gone through the notes and gotten nowhere, except back where we started, with the original spelling of *Dunciad*.

Rumbold’s modern edition cannot produce the look of the original, and in this case, the look actually has a bearing on the meaning. As James McLaverty has pointed out, Pope probably has in mind the Dutch *variorum*

editions, which were at the time the epitome of textual scholarship.²⁰ His typography and layout resemble those of Richard Bentley's 1717 edition of Horace—who better to copy than the self-satisfied Modern scholar who had so consistently irritated the Ancients—but Pope's page even more closely resembles that of the 1716 Geneva edition of Boileau, edited by Claude Brossette (figs. 1 and 2). The text of the poem is substantially bigger than that of the notes (true for the Twickenham edition, but not for the Longman). The notes are subdivided into sections, in Brossette, labeled *Changemens*, *Remarques*, and *Imitations*, in Pope, just *Remarks* and *Imitations*. The notes are run in two columns, separated by a vertical dividing line, and the lemma is in italics, ending with a square bracket separating the lemma from the annotation. All this is both in Brossette and Pope's *Dunciad*. In short, an informed bibliophile stumbling upon the *Dunciad Variorum*, and on the *Dunciad in Four Books* later on, would see what looked like a learned edition of a classical author. Indeed, a textual scholar like Bentley would, one suspects, be all the more irritated when his nemesis produced a volume that not only attacked Bentley but also looked rather like a Bentley authoritative edition. The format itself not only adds to the joke, but also elevates Pope's poetry, both by implication, and literally, since the poetry is above the notes (and it is conspicuously larger).

Although the modern editions do not capture the look of the original—Rumbold does include an illustration showing a page from the original—nothing is lost in efficacy, because few modern readers are going to be familiar with eighteenth-century arcane variorum editions from Amsterdam or Geneva. In fact, though, Rumbold's edition, by happenstance, succeeds in translating the effect into our own times, because this is, after all, a Longman annotated edition, and Longman annotated editions are devoted only to authors who are considered classics of English literature. That the current price at bookfinder.com for Rumbold's hardcover edition of the *Dunciad in Four Books* ranges from \$154.15 (only one bookseller) to \$356.83 makes this this nearly a rare book, further elevating Pope. By contrast, last year, I bought a 1729 Dublin first edition in duodecimo, a real rare book, for \$350.²¹

²⁰ James McLaverty, "The Mode of Existence of Literary Works of Art: The Case of the *Dunciad Variorum*," *Studies in Bibliography* 37 (1984): 82–105.

²¹ Longman seems to be in the habit of producing excellent annotated editions, and then letting them go out of print rather quickly, which means that scholars who do not notice the publications early in the game often have to pay higher prices than the original list price. For instance, I believe the first volumes of the five-volume Longman annotated Dryden, edited by Paul Hammond and David Hopkins, went out of print before the final volumes had been published.

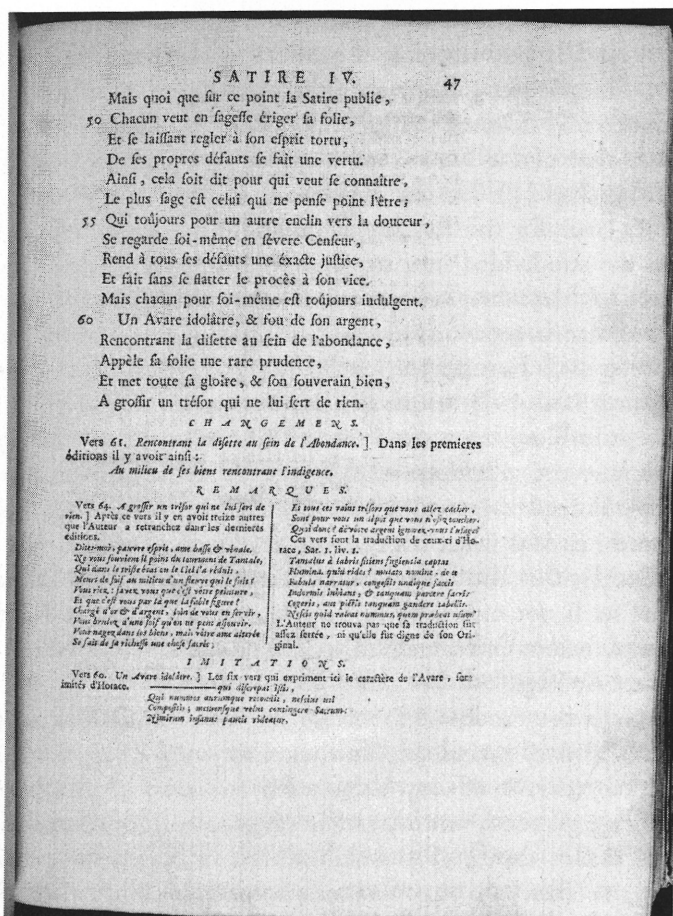


Fig. 1. Nicolas Boileau, *Oeuvres*, ed. Claude Brossette (Geneva, 1716), © British Library Board, 12237 h.3

Rumbold's invaluable edition (1999) should serve the current generation, and next generation, of scholars, well, but bear in mind that, as I said, all the major *Dunciad* scholarship from the last half century—and there is an immense amount of it—relied on the Twickenham edition, which was invaluable, much appreciated, seldom complained about, even though it is filled with reroutings, detours, and switchbacks that make reading more difficult. With Rumbold's edition, we no longer have to deal with compound unreadability, but can return to the simple unreadability of the original. Students using her text of the *Dunciad* will benefit from her wise advice about a strategy for reading it:

Book II. The D U N C I A D. 35

Earleſa on high, ſtood un-aſhaſ'd Deſec,
 140 And Tutchin ſagrant from the ſcourge, below:
 There Ridpath, Roper, cudgell'd might ye view;
 The very worſted ſtill look'd black and blue:
 Himſelf among the ſtoried Chiefs he ſpies,
 As from the blanket high in air he flies,
 145 And oh! (he cry'd) what ſtreer, what lane, but knows
 Our purgings, pumpings, blankerings and blows?
 In ev'ry loom our labours ſhall be ſeen,
 And the freſh vomit run for ever green!
 See in the circle next, Eliza plac'd;

150 Two babes of love cloſe clinging to her waſte;

REMARKS.

Verſe 140. Tutchin ſagrant from the ſcourge, below. Tutchin was a death-bed repentance, a liſed on the late Duke of Dumbrie and on the R. Rev. Biſhop of Peterburgh, &c.
Verſe 141. There Ridpath, Roper, cudgell'd might ye view. The hiſtory of Cur's being laid in a blanket, and whipp'd by the ſcholars of Weſminſter, is ingeniouſly and poeticaly related in a poem entitled *Black or Nothing*. Of his purging and vomiting, ſee *A full and true account of a horrid revenge on the body of William Cur*, &c.
Verſe 142. See in the circle next, Eliza plac'd. In this game is expoſ'd in the moſt conſpicious manner, the profligate licenſiousneſs of thoſe famous ſcriblers (for the moſt part of that ſex, which ought to be capable of ſuch malice or impudence) who in li-

IMITATIONS.

Verſe 143. Himſelf among the ſtoried chiefs he ſpies. A parody on theſe of a late noble writer.
Verſe 144. His bleeding arm had ſcarcely all their runs. A parody on theſe of a late noble writer.
Verſe 145. And ran for ever purple in the loom. A parody on theſe of a late noble writer.
Verſe 146. Two babes of love cloſe clinging to her waſte. A parody on theſe of a late noble writer.
Verſe 147. Cryſta geſſus, Editha, geminipue ſub mare nata. A parody on theſe of a late noble writer.

Figure 2. Alexander Pope, *The Dunciad Variorum* (London, 1729).

A practicable approach would be to start by getting familiar with a few of the most central figures—those discussed in the paragraphs that follow—and then to read the verse for the first time without pausing over the detail of the original or editorial annotation. In subsequent readings more attention can be paid to the original and editorial commentaries. Thus more detail about issues and individuals can be absorbed into and can adjust the reader's general sense of the shape of the work, until a complex sense emerges of the tensions between the roles that persons and events are made to play and what we might discover about them from other sources and points of view. This can only be done gradually, in repeated readings, for this is not a work that allows even the illusion of a single, unified reading. (6–7)

I admire Rumbold's optimism in assuming that students will not only read it, but reread it, and re-reread it. But behind that strategy lies a view, I think,

similar to mine. We cannot achieve a unified reading, and we have to keep attacking the text from different angles. I would only add that not only are repeated readings necessary, but each reading, given the way industrious readers attempt to assemble information, trace themes, establish context, will be a different reading. And this is not so much a text that keeps on giving as a text that keeps on going.²²

Earlier, I argued that most of the scholarship devoted to the *Dunciad* gives the mistaken impression that the work is more accessible than it actually is. I have been arguing that as we approach such strange, mysterious, expansive works like *The Dunciad*, we find ourselves somewhat at a loss, able to comment, certainly able to enjoy, but often not quite able to grasp them or to feel that we have them under control. I will make some suggestions as to why this may be the case. First, most obviously, these are complicated works; they challenge our explanatory powers, and they lie just beyond the edge of our experience. There is nothing up to Beethoven's Eighth that quite prepares us for the Ninth. And part of our difficulty, I think, is that we are confronting works that are both original, in unexpected ways, and expansive. Although we are comfortable with ambiguity, paradox, and irony, since all of these things usually constitute a consistent pattern, we are not comfortable with works that defy closure.²³ The lock in *The Rape of the Lock* cannot remain in contention between the belles and the beaux. Something definitive has to happen to it. Satan may be wonderfully appealing in the opening of *Paradise Lost*, but we all know he has to get his comeuppance. Pip has to reconcile himself with Magwitch. When we listen to the Hallelujah Chorus, after a good deal of kings of kings and lord of lords, we find ourselves relieved, and satisfied,

²² Shef Rogers, in "Popular Interpretations of the *Dunciad*," explains: "What looks in any single version like a massively inert and definitive monument to Dulness proves from a diachronic perspective to be an endlessly mutating conglomeration of disparate, carefully preserved instances of folly and misguided pride" (290). Not only is endless folly and pride endlessly mutating in the text, but, as I have argued, the text itself keeps mutating as it moves through different readers.

²³ I would add that a generation of formalists have made the *Dunciad* seem more usual and coherent than it is primarily because they instinctively believed in organic unity. Frederick V. Bogel, in "Dulness Unbound: Rhetoric and Pope's *Dunciad*," *PMLA* 97 (1982): 844–55, mentions this "rage for unification" (845), and notes that, when the oddities spring up, there seems to be a "compulsion that drives nearly all recent critics of the poem first to acknowledge something particularly unsettling, and then to try to explain that something away." Similarly, Blakey Vermeule, in "Dualism of Pope's *Dunciad*," comments on the "various formalist bandages" that were applied to cover up the poem's holes," which she describes as "redolent of special pleading on behalf of organic unity" (17).

when the choir ends by singing—guess what—Hallelujah. And no matter how many times we read *Pride and Prejudice*, or see adaptations, we yearn for that moment, and feel wonderfully relieved when it comes, when Darcy and Elizabeth finally work things out. In fact, we don't give a damn what happens to them for the rest of their lives. Nor is it just the positive resolution that satisfies us. We know that Clarissa is going to die, since that is where Richardson is inevitably headed, although it takes us about three years of our reading time to get there. We are much more ill at ease, however, with a work that has us stumbling and wandering, a work that we will never be able to pull into a unified *Dunciad*, but something more like a large number of virtual texts, as many as there are individual readings, and all of them, open ended.