Dignity and Certainty in Augustan Satire

> ‘There is more dignity in the knowledge of Dryden, and more certainty in that of Pope'

For Samuel Johnson, knowledge is the key source of pleasure in the experience of literature and the distinction he here makes is both just and illuminating when pursued in depth and applied to the satire of Dryden and Pope. ‘Certainty' is defined in Johnson's Dictionary as 'exempt from doubt, that which is real and fixed.'[2] This corresponds to the solid ground of empirical knowledge. 'Dignity' is a more complex word for Johnson. Not only does it signify 'rank of elevation' and 'grandier of mien' but more importantly 'maxims' and 'general principles'. Principles bring in a specific connotation of moral tenets and Johnson further illustrates the word dignity with a Greek phrase from Epicurus that translates as 'the peculiar tenet of a philospher.'[3] Dignity is thus a reference to the generality, the magnitude and moral significance of knowledge, and Johnson never uses it but with a sense of excitement. Humanity's highest task is to comprehend the final purpose of human destiny as decreed by God and to improve upon Man's fallen state by using God's gift of reason. The speculative dignity of ethics and theology operate upon Johnson's emotions as well for it is a kind of intellectual sublime that thrills the passions by challenging the mind.

It is with the differing notions of certainty and dignity that Johnson frames his assessment of Dryden and Pope. Dryden is a poet equipped with a 'scholastick'[4] education and his 'compositions are the effects of a vigorous genius operating upon large materials.'[5] Dryden thus possesses a superior quality of genius, 'that energy which collects, combines, amplifies and animates,'[6] and the ambition that propels humanity forward into the 'unexplored abysses of Truth.'[7] Pope, by contrast, is characterized by a 'dilatory caution' that produces consistent success in versification, description and observation.[8] Johnson applauds these as definite virtues but he concedes that certainty alone will not win his wholehearted approval. Pope's definition of 'True Wit' as 'What oft was thought but ne'er so well expressed' (297-8)[9] is dismissed as it depresses wit 'below its natural dignity, and reduces it from strength of thought to happiness of language.'[10] Strength of thought best catches the dignity of Dryden's work while certainty is the source of Pope’s elegance and precision. Certainty is a laudable achievement but it has

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limitations and for this reason Dryden wins pride of place in Johnson's judgment. Everywhere Johnson would assert that 'Elegance is surely to be desired if it be not gained at the expense of dignity.'[11]

Turning to satire, one finds that the dichotomy of generality and particularity is again found to be crucial. A satire is a 'Poem is which wickedness or folly is censured' and 'Proper satire':

> is distinguished by the generality of the reflections, from a Lampoon which is aimed against a particular person[12]

A lampoon is a personal satire 'written not to reform but to vex.' Thus Johnson's approach to satire mirrors his larger attitudes to poetry in general. It is the infusion of general principles into art that gives its dignity and just so proper satire receives a dimension of reasoned justification not available in the lampoon. In turn, justified censure implicitly indicates the positive alternative needed for reform. The effect of true satire is to reform and improve while that of the lampoon is merely to belittle and to destroy. T.S. Eliot shares a similar attitude with Johnson and he finds the 'Dryden continually enhances: he makes his [satiric] object great, in a way contrary to expectation' while Pope is suited to the 'miniature' and not the 'caricature'. 'When Pope alters', Eliot finds, 'he diminishes.'[13] Just so Johnson's distinction between the dignity of Dryden and the certainty of Pope infers that, within the form of satire, Dryden's virtue is the strength of generality that governs his use of particulars while Pope's achievement lies in the success with which observation brings particulars into clear view and care delivers unfailing formulation. With these broad distinctions in mind, one is ready to enter England's great age of satire.

Thomas Shadwell was Dryden's uncomfortably competent rival on the stage and he was by no means an unskilled writer. Yet when Shadwell attempts invectives, a lack of intellectual sophistication cripples the effort. In fact, Shadwell can be used to present a satirist who, in his art, is neither certain nor dignified. A quotation from 'The Tory-Poets: A Satyr' (1682) attacking Dryden will serve:

> His muse was prostitute upon the stage,
> And's Wife was Prostitute to all the age:
> The Wife is Rich although the Husband Poor,
> And he not honest, and she a Whore,
> An ill, deformed, senseless earthly load,
> and he the Monster of the Muses road (52-57)[14]

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The structure supposedly parallels Dryden with his wife as both abase themselves to make ends meet. Yet there is none of the intelligent word usage, varied sound patterning or wit that can raise insults above straight name-calling. Furthermore, there is simply too little truth in the attack for it to appear as anything but malicious spite. After the example of Rochester, Shadwell appears as a weak satirist indeed. In fact, this piece is charged with unconscious meaning. Written after the circulation of Macflecknoe, this poem, like so many others Shadwell was to write in the 1680's, struggles to respond to Dryden's infinitely more effective attack. The style consciously imitates the imagery and semantic density of Mackleckne but the result is only disjointed and confused lines like 'An ill, deformed, senseless earthly load' which does not visibly relate to the passage in which it sits. It is a sad piece because the total effect is, contrary to Shadwell's intent, not an attack on Dryden but a sustained display of frustrated anger, desperate for revenge but reduced to impotent mud-slinging. Given that the issue at hand is wit, Shadwell's disgrace is complete. Shadwell suffered, no doubt unjustly, as the victim of the greatest lampoon ever written and, despite its deep-seated good humour, he carried the marks of injury to his grave.

With Macflecknoe, Dryden takes up the essential ingredients of the lampoon, a name, a grain of truth and a score to settle, and manipulates them with a skill and good humour never before seen in the form. Among the grains of truth that Dryden fastens upon is Shadwell's poverty as a satirist:

> With whate'er gall thou sett'st they self to write,
> Thy inoffensive Satyrs never bite.
> In thy fellonious heart, though Venom lies,
> It does but touch thy Irish pen, and dyes
> (199-202)[15]

Dryden shows Shadwell how repetition can be used to crushing effect. Twice there is a danger that personal 'Venom' will inspire a genuine satire and twice the expression is thwarted by inability. With marksman-like accuracy, Dryden exposes the frustration of impotence that characterizes Shadwell's satiric efforts. The rise and fall within each couplet can be read with contempt, as Dryden might, or with rapture, as the monarch Flecknoe would upon seeing the spectre of good satire dissolve into feeble aspersions. To

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employ Johnson's terminology, one could praise the certainty of Dryden's performance: he selects a central flaw in his victim, exaggerates it sufficiently for the comic effect and presents it to the world in verse that threatens to be timeless.

As for the ordering of the work, one finds this to be its most entertaining aspect. Procreative sexuality, the stock material of the lampoon, is converted into the motif of succession which gives the poem its structure, its action and its thematic focus. As the intellectual underpinning of the poem, the theme of the succession of one human generation by another could not be more universal or significant. All forms of progress, the security of private property, political stability, and the movement of history through its epochs as marked by an Augustus or a Christ all turn upon the idea of succession as the cornerstone of civilization and its chief defense against the fact that 'All humane things are subject to decay'(1). But the succession of Shadwell to his father's 'Mantle' (216), by contrast, represents all those forces of cultural entropy that besiege and threaten to destroy what humans have built. Thus the succession Macflecknoe is an inversion of the positive human and divine models which, through allusions, are constantly present. So it is that out of everything that is dark and contemptible, from the raw sewage that floats along the Thames to the stench of trade and hack-writing that lingers in the back streets of the City, arises Shadwell's empire of dullness complete with its own inverted hierarchy that sets at the pinnacle that which is most base. Shadwell comes to symbolize the principle of decay and this theme ensures that the somber grandiloquence of the opening generalization that 'All humane things are subject to decay'(1) is not entirely inappropriate. One man who happens to earn his living by the London stage suddenly feels the hand of Dryden's genius and balloons into the gloriously benighted ruler of a cultural pandemonium and is destined, like Satan, 'To Reign, and wage immortal War with Wit'(12).

Exploiting this structure, Dryden avoids the tone of direct abuse, common in libels, and lets the action and abdicating ruler speak for themselves. Celebrating his heir, Flecknoe delivers, in this inverted world, condemnation enough. With biblical humility, he describes his own role as a harbinger for a new ruler who will usher in a new and magnificently dull age. The allusion to John the Baptist is unmistakable as Flecknoe hails Shadwell:

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Even I, a dunce of more renown than they,
Was sent before but to prepare thy way;
And coursly clad in Norwich Drugget came
To teach the Nations in thy greater name (31-4)

In stark contrast with the attempts to exclude James from the English throne, this succession is so fitting as to appear pre-ordained:

All arguments, but most his Plays, perswade,
That for anointed dullness he was made (62-3)

Duly recognized, Shadwell enjoys the adulation of his subjects who, as the Jews did on Christ's triumphant entrance into Jerusalem, scatter fitting tributes in his path and the scene becomes a greater ticker-tape parade. Links with a coronation ceremony or a Lord Mayor's feast are also unavoidable:

No Persian carpets spread th'Imperial way,
But scatter's Limbs of mangled Poets lay:
From dusty shops neglected Authors come,
Martyrs of Pies, and Reliques of the Bum.
Much Heywood, Shirly, Ogleby there lay,
But loads of Sh- almost choakt the way (98-103)

The details please but it is the orchestration that sweeps the reader up. It is a brilliantly envisioned scene but the power and humour are derived from the epic associations and the portrayal of Shadwell's procession of dullness being impeded by his own productions. Again we see Shadwell frustrated and a dullness so potent that a successful march against civilized taste and Westminster defeats itself.

What Dryden has done is to write the most dignified of all possible lampoons. Shadwell is made so ludicrously important that the portrait ceases to be an insult, although he never seemed to have discerned this. It is crucial to note that Macflecknoe is not a personal attack so much as a matter between professionals; Dryden is lambasting Shadwell's claim to be a writer of distinguished wit and thereby deflating a rival's ability to compete. Shadwell, the man, is in fact well treated in Macflecknoe when we compare it to the sketch of 'Og' in The Second Part of Absalom and Achitophel (1682) which, apparently picking up on Shadwell's efforts at rebuttal, gets dirty:

With all this Bulk there's nothing lost in Og
For ev'ry inch that is not Fool is Rogue:
A Monstrous mass of foul corrupted matter,

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As all the Devils had spew's to make the batter
(462-65)

Still Dryden turns damning insults into poetry and so Shadwell, the man, meets the same fate as Shadwell, the writer. Macflecknoe, then, was designed as a witty joke, which in being offered was in part a compliment to Shadwell, but as he failed to see its humour so he proved its truth.

Despite the obvious thematic links with The Dunciad, there is perhaps a more illuminating comparison to be made between Macflecknoe and The Rape of the Lock. Like Macflecknoe, Pope's mildest satire focuses upon a single character and embodies a frame of mind in a world of details. The main difference between the poems is a matter of scale. In Macflecknoe everything is inflated and so Shadwell looms above a comic empire of dullness, while The Rape of the Lock concentrates upon recreating the private world of fragile objects and naive beliefs which shields the young socialite from the facts of life. Whereas Dryden imports successive layers of meaning into his portrait, Pope introduces the inner mechanisms of Belinda's personality by a careful description of her delicately manicured surroundings. Belinda's mind and sympathies invest every detail in her world with an inappropriate significance or an exotic mystique and nowhere is this more apparent than at her toilet, the focal point in her daily preparations:

This Casket India's glowing Gems unlocks,
And all Arabia breathes from yonger Box.
The Tortoise here and Elephant unit,
Transform'd to Combs, the speckled and the white.
Here Files of Pins extend their shining Rows,
Puffs, Powders, Patches, Bibles, Billet-doux
(I, 133-8)[16]

It is a luminous scene wherein the tools of beauty mix with the shreds of religion and romance, both required in the life of a marriageable virgin, and are 'in mystic Order laid' (I, 122). Belinda sits safely in an illusion of timeless innocence, beauty and youth, and here the threats of age, sin and marriage are implied and disguised by cosmetics, leather bibles and childish love-notes. Amid this scene, Pope sets Belinda, the one mortal component, facing herself in the mirror:

A heav'nly Image in the Glass appears,
To that she bends, to that her Eyes she rears;
The inferior Priestess, at her Altar's side,
Trembling, begins the sacred Rites of Pride

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(I, 125-8)

Pope, for an instant, lets a hint of reproach interrupt the scene with the abrupt mentioning of Belinda's 'Pride'. More importantly, Pope is here explaining Belinda, the nature of her mistake, her world and the subject of the poem. Penetrating deep into human nature, Pope discerns that Belinda is, as the 'inferior Priestess' to her own hopelessly idealized self-image, curiously aware of her own precariousness and so she trembles as she deploys artificial defenses against age and mortal corruption. The inclusion of 'Patches' (I, 138), designed to cover various blemishes, in her wares is proof enough that even in the glory of youth she is not completely safe. This explains why Belinda invests so much emotional importance in apparent trifles like a lock of hair. So long as the external illusion can be sustained, the truth of life can be ignored and the socialite need never leave the 'Happy Valley', to cite Johnson, for such commitments and gambles as marriage. So it is when 'black omens' (II, 101) portend no good to Belinda, it is her entire world that is under threat:

> Whether the Nymph shall break Diana's Law,
> Or some frail China Jar receive a Flaw,
> Or stain her Honour, or her new Brocade,
> Forget her Pray'rs, or miss a Masquerade,
> Or lose her Heart, or Necklace, at a Ball;
> Or whether Heav'n has doom'd the Shock must fall
>
> (II, 105-10)

The real threats to a nubile young lady in eighteenth-century society were the loss of virginity or an injury to her reputation because these adversely effected her chances of a good marriage on which her future depended. But in the mind of a cloistered child, these serious matters mingle undistinguished with the trivial. She is determined to defend herself but she does not know how nor truly from what. Time marches on in the rotations of the sun, which Pope constantly keeps in the background, but the illusion goes on. This is Pope's subject in The Rape of the Lock and his particular treatment is a function of his remarkably economical descriptions, versification that mimics the 'moving Toyshop' (I, 100) of a coquette's heart and mind, and an acute sensitivity to Belinda's plight.

In Belinda, Pope recognizes a universal trait in human behaviour and as a result he can sympathize with her self-delusion. This theme is in fact every bit as universal as the principle Dryden uses in Macflecknoe but there remains a vast difference in how the two poets approach general meanings. With Dryden, one finds that ideas are dealt with on

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an abstract level then deduced down into their implications for particulars, which are, as a result, aggrandized. Pope, as The Rape of the Lock demonstrates, moves toward the central meaning by way of details, proceeding as it were inductively. Thus one sees Dryden trumpeting the theme of Macflecknoe in its first line, while Pope is more circuitous preferring that an entire disposition with its folly be gradually revealed.

This conclusion is further borne out by the fact that the governing framework in The Rape of the Lock is supplied by a fantasy of sylphs and epic structural devices, and that this framework mirrors Belinda, running parallel to her disposition, without importing the large scale historical, biblical and political associations noted in Macflecknoe. Given that Belinda's world is already supercharged with private importance, the introduction of tiny decorative deities is not a major thematic departure. As the poem's fantasy opens, one sees that even the sun, the symbol of nature's inexorable processes, is reduced to serving Belinda's outlook:

> Sol thro' white Curtains shot a tim'rous ray,
> And ope'd those eyes that must eclipse the day
> (I, 13-14)

It is a scene in which Ariel does not appear in the least out of place. The separation between Belinda and the Sylphs is minimal and both are in the end helpless against the real forces of love and decay. Even the moral of the poem, delivered by 'grave Clarissa' (V, 7) herself a gnome, that the life of the coquette must end for 'she who scorns a Man, must die a Maid' (V, 28) is ignored. Clarissa is trying to tell Belinda, as Howard Weinbrot observes, that the Lord should be considered seriously as a suitor because Belinda will not always be young nor always have eligible men being charmed by her hair[17]. The structure of The Rape of the Lock reflects the poem's subject and gives it form but it does not govern its meaning.

The end result of Pope's preference for particularity in The Rape of the Lock is tenderness, but under other circumstances this same quality gives Pope a lethal accuracy when on a real offensive. Two of the most famously effective attacks delivered by Pope appear in his Apologia for satire, The Epistle to Dr Arbuthnot. One is a retrospective glance at the long-dead Joseph Addison who was widely respected though Pope had seen a less congenial side to the Whig pundit. Pope's task is very specific and quite difficult to execute. He could not simply denounce Addison as his own mixed reputation as a satirist

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would neutralize the attack. Pope's solution is to paint a portrait that is at once recognizable and slightly stilted, giving the impression that Addison had contrived a public persona which belied his true character. This insinuation of artifice immediately begins to corrode the myth of the benign author and Pope can get to work picturing the gestures of duplicity:

> View him with scornful, yet with jealous eyes,
> And hate for Arts that caus'd himself to rise;
> Damn with faint praise, assent with civil leer,
> And without sneering, teach the rest to sneer
> (199-202)[16]

Pope mimics the ease of Addison's own style, and like Addison, laces it with malicious meaning. Focusing on a past friend, Pope constructs a detailed study which becomes a general type precisely because it so accurately captures a living particular. He orgnanizes the glimpses of Addison so as to reveal his true nature and this becomes a guide to the ways of civil incivility as the engine of social exclusion. Pope's performance is perfect and Addison never really recovers his pristine reputation intact.

The other dissection, one Johnson found particularly mean,[19] is that of Lord Hervey under the name of Sporus. What exactly Hervey might have done to draw such venom is unclear but the fact that he was a high-ranking member of Walpole's political juggernaut and that he had helped with Lady Mary Wortly Montagu's acid attack on Pope, in 'Verses Address'd to the imitator of the First Satire of the Second Book of Horace' (Feb., 1733), seems provocation enough. Pope's intent is to arouse disgust in the reader by offering a vivid depiction of a gloriously successful sycophant. So much does Pope wish to execrate Hervey that a breakdown in the structure required of a formal verse satire[20] coincides with the mere mention of his name when the Adversarius, the otherwise even-handed Arbuthnot, loses all control:

> Let Sporus tremble - 'What? that Thing of silk,
> 'Sporus, that mere white Curd of Ass's milk? (305-6)

Hervey becomes a 'bug with gilded wings'(309), ‘a painted Child of Dirt that stinks and stings'(310), and a mere 'Amphibious Thing!'(326). Hervey is denied a place among responsible humanity: he is placed beneath correction. There is then no requirement for larger meanings which would imply a positive alternative. Although Hervey, Queen Caroline's favourite, is cast in the role of Eve's tempter, this biblical allusion only further

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belittles Hervey's significance:

> Or at the Ear of Eve, familiar Toad,
> Hald Froth, hald Venom, spits himself abroad,
> In Puns, or Politicks, or Talks, or Lyes,
> Or Spite, or Smut, or Rymes, or Blasphemies (319-22)

Satan became a snake to mislead Eve, but Hervey is just a toad who, far from orchestrating a sinful endeavour, half actively, half passively, participates in the petty squabbles of court life. This biblical aside enforces diminishment as opposed to linking Sporus to some larger thematic structure. Hervey is something to be squashed and this is what Pope has done. As in the portrait of Atticus, Pope pulls together grains of truth to form a character, assesses the tactical situation and them executes a careful plan of attack. That these characters appear partly generalized attests to Pope's success in capturing real personalities so completely that some truth about human nature is invariably typified. As instruments of satire, Pope valued the ability of such portraits to expose vice and thereby humiliate the vicious.

Particularity, especially in the naming of names and the anatomizing of faults, becomes somewhat of a creed for Pope as a satirist. The Epistle to Arbuthnot and The Epilogue to the Satires, especially Dialogue II, largely turn on a defence of this particular brand of satire. The former was in fact composed as a tribute to Pope's dying friend, Arbuthnot, who had among his last requests urged Pope to pursue satire 'more to reform than to chastise.'[21] Arbuthnot, in life and in the poem, advocates a more general satire as the more prudent course in violent times but Pope will have none of it, replying:

> To attack Vices in the abstract, without touching Persons, may be safe fighting indeed, but it is fighting with shadows[22]

It was absolutely clear to Pope that 'General satire in Times of General Vice has no force, and is no Punishment.'[23] Satire's main purpose was punishment because injury is the one thing the corrupt will always avoid. Thus the sharper the satire, the greater its ability to find out criminals and deal out revenge, the better for Pope's purpose. He had no reservations and no regrets. In Dialogue II, and unrepentant Pope stands by his method:

> Yes, I am proud; I must be proud to see
> Men not afraid of God, afraid of me (208-9)[24]

By shifting satire into a closer proximity with the lampoon, Pope not only achieves his

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aim but also leaves himself open to the charge, often used, that he is not a poet but a mere libeller.

Satire must have an edge - both Dryden and Pope agree to that. But Dryden is less concerned with this aspect of satire than Pope. Dryden is careful to subordinate the lampoon as a necessary but minor component to satire:

> These are the Underwood of Satire, rather than the Timber-Trees: They are not of General Extension, as reaching only to some Individual Person[24]

Dryden has clear reasons for this subordination and he considers that 'We have no Moral right on the reputation of other Men. 'Tis taking from them, what we cannot restore to them.' Ultimately he has the highest authority for his reservations:

> All Offences are to be forgiven; as we expect the like Pardon for those which we daily commit against Almighty God[26]

Johnson's argument would be empathetic and deeply felt. Larger principles constantly dominate Dryden's practice and he does find that he can justify some measure of personal satire on the grounds that "Tis an Action of Virtue to make Examples of vicious Men.'[27] Johnson concurs that personal folly can be used 'To point a moral, or adorn a tale'(222)[28]. Dryden's method differs substantially from Pope's when he approaches living victims. He does not anatomize their faults as an end in itself but rather he makes 'Examples of vicious Men'. An ulterior motive is constantly present in any characterization by Dryden. He chooses such details as will make a humourously recognizable figure and then distorts the truth so as to mould that character into a thematic emblem. He wants to simplify his art in terms that clearly identify him as a literary caricaturist. A satirist's attack is 'to draw a full face, and to make the Nose and Cheeks stand out, and yet not to employ any depth of Shadowing.'[29] The direction of this distortion will be governed by the thematic requirements of the whole work. So it is that Shadwell is transformed and expanded into the embodiment of universal dullness. This is also how Dryden handled his most brilliant portrait, that of Achitophel.

Dryden set out to write Absalom and Achitophel amid political crisis and the key figure to be dealt with was the leader of the Whigs, Lord Shaftesbury, the primary threat to a secure succession. Pure aspersion would have been folly and ineffective against so powerful a figure.[30] But the situation itself suggested a plan of action and so Dryden

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parallels the Eclusion Crisis with the biblical tale of Absalom's doomed rebellion against his father, King David. Within this heroic framework, Shaftesbury becomes the great deceiver, a variation upon Lucifer, a man who is 'Bold'(153), 'Trubulent of Wit'(153) and 'Pleas'd with...Danger'(160), and this grandiose role in fact compliments Shaftesbury's skill even while it reproaches its abuse.[31] With Achitophel, Dryden has captured the facts of Shaftesbury's role as chief agitator against the succession of a Catholic monarch to the English throne. He has also equated Shaftesbury's actions with the fundamental sin of pride which, in politics, leads to dangerous innovation and, in religion, to the final rupture with God. Similar to Shadwell's fate, Achitophel becomes a great emblem of maverick pride and beneath him are ranged the forces of anarchy, the 'dregs of a Democracy'(227), which like Pandemonium must be his support in rebellion and company in failure. Another portrait which Dryden particularly enjoyed was that of George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham and past lampooner of Dryden, as Zimri, the prodigal aristocrat, 'Blest Madman'(553) and dilettante extraordinaire. It is a portrait that resembles, in some respects, the style of Pope in treating a figure like Timon. Dryden has a minor score to settle with Buckingham, who was chiefly responsible for the stage parody of Dryden's heroic drama in The Rehersal, and so creates a more personal, but eminently witty, sketch. Still Dryden gives Zimri a place in the overall scheme as the embodiment of that energetic fickleness that makes the people, whom Buckingham loved to incite during his Popish Plot, so malleable to great wits like Achitophel and so dangerous to public order. Dryden was confident that Buckingham was himself too witty to take offence. He hoped that Shaftesbury would react similarly and in the Preface to Absalom and Achitophel he pleads a caricaturist's defence:

> I have not, so much as an uncharitable Wish against Achitophel; but, am content to be Accus'd of a good natur'd Errour[32]

The 'good natur'd Errour' was the distortion and aggrandizement that changed the leader of the Whigs into the harbinger of chaos.

The work that corresponds to the scope of Absalom and Achitophel in Pope's canon is his own execration of dullness in The Dunciad.[33] Johnson tellingly stated that The Dunciad 'affords perhaps the best specimen that has yet appeared of personal satire ludicrously pompous.' It is telling because he views The Dunciad as a vehicle for

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retribution governed, not as in Absalom and Achitophel by 'public principles', but by a farcical fantasy. Johnson explains his reservations:

> That the design was moral, whatever the author might tell either his readers or himself, I am not convinced[34]

He also notes the 'petulance and malignity' and the 'physically impure' ideas but he 'cannot think it very criminal' because dullness is ultimately fair game for the satirist.[35] But on the whole he does not find the kind of clear thematic control which he so appreciates in Dryden. He does, with most readers, notice the growing generality of the Fourth Book and he is finally transported by 'the crowded thoughts and stately numbers which dignify the concluding paragraph.'[36] The reasons behind Johnson's reaction should now be clear - he applauds verse as dignified when principles are presented for all to see. He takes a genuine interest in other forms of knowledge, such as Pope's certainty in presentation, but never with the same enthusiasm. Johnson's attribution of certainty to the knowledge of Pope is sound but this need not prevent one from qualifying Johnson's evaluation somewhat.

In The Dunciad as elsewhere, Pope proceeds by example and the characters and the fantastic epic machinery gradually combine into a complete picture of the nature of dullness. Herein it surpasses Mackflecknoe. The poem itself is ostensibly written amid the last glimpses of lucidity before the 'Daughter of Chaos and eternal Night'(I, 12) reasserts her 'dread Empire'(IV, 653) and 'Universal Darkness buries All'(IV, 656). Through an epic structure of coronation, celebration, prophecy and fulfillment, dullness is presented in action with a detailed portrayal of events and participants. There is an illuminating example in the Second Book with the Goddess opening the Fleet Ditch races with the command "Here strip, my children!'(II, 275) at which the contestants disrobe without shame and take to the filth, eager to compete. What is so striking here, as elsewhere in the poem, is the glee with which the basest pursuits are tackled. There is a childlike contentedness in the figures, much as Belinda is pleased with her state, and this points to the self-absorption and resulting lack of discrimination by which one recognizes dullness. It is a confession, on Pope's part, that as in The Rape of the Lock the deluded are by definition incapable of reform. The satire loses even the pretence of inculcating reform and one suspects that Pope never put much hope in correction. The poem ends,

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appropriately, with an Apocalyptic scene as the great Renaissance experiment collapses back into barbarity. Dullness here has been dissected and Pope's conclusion is not positive.

Certainty was what Johnson found in Pope and it is a valid conclusion. Pope does pursue details in objects, in characters and in his versification, and his work displays his obvious success. But this empirical precision is not Pope's real achievement; rather, it is the means to that end. Out of close observation arises a kind of knowledge by induction which gives Pope moments of insight, as when Belinda trembles before her mirror, that are inescapably true. With respect to his satire, these insights into human nature can promote a tender indulgence, as with Belinda, a lethal accuracy, as with Sporus, or a recognition that reform is not a genuine possibility among the vicious and the deluded. This last recognition of the limitations for human improvement is one that Johnson would find disturbing but also true. The emotional force behind Pope's more particular attacks is not then, as he protests, the desire to reform but the desire to harm and injure. Once one recognizes the truth of human incorrigibility, it is all but impossible to avoid the slide into gloomy rage, as Swift ultimately did. It is the final certainty in Pope and from it Johnson fees toward Dryden, a poet who like Johnson looked to God as a source of hope.

Given humanity's fallen state, the object for Dryden is not only to understand reality, as Pope does, but to change it. Through religion and ethics, the speculative mind must pursue moral ideals on how humanity should be as opposed to the way it is. The resulting principles are then to be used to guide reality toward improvement. So it is that Dryden views satire as an instrument of change and he had no doubts about 'the True end of Satyre' as 'the amendment of Vices by correction', nor about the role of personal satire as a necessary evil employed like 'harsh Remedies to an inveterate Disease.'[37] In the practice of his satires, higher principles inform every aspect. Satiric victims become emblems and rhetorical strategies focus entirely on maximizing the effect on the reader. Dryden pursues general principles and ideals and refuses to abandon hope for a better world. It is this quality of intellectual ambition, moral courage and religious hope that Johnson praises in Dryden as dignity. And so it is that Johnson is surely right to say that 'there is more dignity in the knowledge of Dryden, and more certainty in that of Pope' and to prefer dignity to certainty.

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1. Samuel Johnson, Life of Pope, in The Lives of the English Poets, ed. George Birkbeck Hill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1905) III, 222.

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7. Johnson, The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson, IV, The Rambler, eds. W.J. Bate and Albrecht B. Strauss (New Haven Conn.: Yale University Press, 1969) 362. Hereafter the Yale Edition will be abbreviated YE. Vols II to V contain The Rambler.

8. Johnson, Lives, III, 19.

9. Alexander Pope, The Twickenham Edition of the Poems of Alexander Pope, I, Pastoral Poetry and an Essay on Criticsm, eds. E. Audra and Aubrey Williams (London: Methuen, 1961). Hereafter the Twickenham Edition will be abbreviated TE.

10. Johnson, Lives, I, 19.

11. Johnson, Lives, III, 239.

12. Johnson, Dictionary.

13. T.S. Eliot, Homage to John Dryden, (London: Hogarth Press, 1924) 15, 18.

14. Thomas Shadwell, The Complete Works of Thomas Shadwell, ed. Montague Summers (London: Fortune Press, 1927) V, 273.

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17. Howard D. Weinbrat, "The Rape of the Lock and the Contexts of Warfare", Eighteenth Centure Satire, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988) 114.

18. Alexander Pope, TE, IV, The Imitations of Horace, ed. John Butt, 2nd ed. (London: Methuen, 1953).

19. Johnson, Lives, III, 246.

20. See Mary Claire Randolph, "The Structural Design of the Formal Verse Satire", Philological Quarterly, 21 (1942) 368-384.

21. Dr. John Arbuthnot, "To Alexander Pope", 17 July 1734, The Correspondance of Alexander Pope, ed. George Sherburn, 5 vols. (Oxford: Oxfrod University Press, 1956) III, 417.

22. Pope, "To John Arbuthnot", 26 July 1734, Correspondence, III, 419.

23. Pope "To John Arbuthnot", 2 August 1734, Correspondence, III, 423.

24. Pope, TE, IV, Imitations.

25. Dryden, CE, IV, Discourse, 35.

26. Dryden, CE, IV, Discourse, 59.

27. Dryden, CE, IV, Discourse, 60.

28. Johnson, The Vanity of Human Wishes, YE, VI, Poems, eds. E.L. McAdam Jr. with George Milne (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1964).

29. Dryden, CE, IV, Discourse, 70.

30. James Anderson Winn, John Dryden and His World, (New Haven Conn.: Yale University Press, 1987) 326. On 18 December 1679, in Rose Alley, John Dryden was severely beaten, in all likelihood, by hired thugs revenging a supposed injury to an aristocrat.

31. Dryden, CE, II, Poems 1681-1684.

32. Dryden, CE, II, Poems 1681-1684, 4.

33. Pope, TE, V, The Dunciad, ed. James Sutherland, 3rd ed. (London: Methuen, 1963).

34. Johnson, Lives, III, 241.

35. Johnson, Lives, III, 241.

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36. Johnson, Lives, III, 242.

37. Dryden, CE, II, Poems 1681-1684, 5.

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