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## Unit -2 □ The Garden: Andrew Marvell

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### Structure

- 2.1 Andrew Marvell (1621-78): Life & Works
- 2.2 The Garden: Commentary
- 2.3 Interpretations
- 2.4 Questions
- 2.5 Suggested Readings

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### 2.1 □ Andrew Marvell (1621-78): Life & Works

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Marvell was born at Winstead in Holderness, Yorks. In 1624 the family (Andrew, his parents, and three older sisters) moved to Hull on his father's appointment as lecturer at Holy Trinity Church. Marvell attended Hull Grammar School. He matriculated at Trinity College, Cambridge, as a sizar in December, 1633, being elected to scholarship in April 1638 and graduating B.A. in 1639. In 1637 he had contributed Greek and Latin Verses to a Cambridge volume congratulating Charles I on the birth of a daughter. His mother died in April 1638, his father remarried in November. In January, 1641 his father drowned while crossing the Humber. Between 1643-47 he travelled for four years in Holland, France, Italy, and Spain, learning languages and fencing, and perhaps deliberately avoiding the Civil War.

From 1650 to 1652 Marvell tutored young Marg Fairfax, daughter of the parliamentary general, at Nun Appleton in Yorkshire. In this period he wrote 'Upon Appleton House' and lyrics such as 'The Garden' and the mower poems. In 1653 he might have written 'Bermudas'. In 1654 with 'The First Anniversary' he began his career as an unofficial laureate to Cromwell and was appointed Latin Secretary to the Council of State.

From June 1662 to April 1663 Marvell was in Hbland on an unknown political business, possibly espionage and in July 1663 he travelled with the Earl of Carlisle as private Secretary on his embassy to Russia, Sweden, and Denmark. His satires against Clarendon were published in 1667. Later that year he composed his finest satire 'Last Instructions to a Painter', attacking financial and sexual corruptions at Court and in parliament and took part in the impeachment of Clarendon. The Rehearsal Transpos'd which set new standards of irony and urbanity, appeared in 1672.

The history of Marvell's reputation is extra-ordinary. Famed in his day as patriot, satirist

and foe to tyranny, he was virtually unknown as a lyric poet. Even when his poems were published in 1681, they were greeted by two centuries of neglect. Charles Lamb started a gradual revival. It was not until after the First World War, with Grierson's *Metaphysical Lyrics* and T.S. Eliot's *Andrew Marvell*, that the modern high estimation of his poetry began to prevail.

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## 2.2 □ The Garden: Commentary

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Of Marvell's longer lyrics 'The Garden' is probably the best-known and most enjoyed. It has wit and beauty, variety and depth. It is very original and adventurous. It is also very difficult.

A keen analyst will see that the nine stanzas divide into two sets of four, with a final singleton by way of a coda. It is no accident that only I, V and IX start with exclamations, or that IV and VIII alone delve into the past.

In stanza I the poet deprecates ambition, which driven men to distraction as they vie for hollow honours, crowns of leaves from this tree or that plant. The slight shade cast by an isolated tree or plant hints at a prudently possible life-style. The thick shades of congregated trees and flowers in the garden weave the only garlands worth having, 'garlands of repose'.

In II, III, IV he goes on to say that, far from being ambitious himself, he has long sought Innocence and Quiet, those inseparable sisters. He has looked for them for years in great cities. Now he has stumbled on them in the garden, where he ought always to have expected them to be. No society is half as civilised as this solitude: no women are as loving as these trees. Foolish lovers do not understand this, but the God of Love does; it is to the garden that Cupid comes to relax when not employed in affairs of the heart. Garden trees and plants were what the ancient gods loved on earth all along. The myths have misrepresented their aims.

Stanza I is a single sentence, despite the heavy punctuation employed to slow the pace down. Thus the antecedent of 'Whose' in line 5 is 'Herb or Tree', more especially 'Tree'. The limited shadow cast by the isolated tree reproaches, from the standpoint of prudence, the professionals who overtax themselves in the sun. 'Narrow verged' is a compound adjective despite the lack of hyphen. It covers many square yards. In line 7 'Close' means 'Combine'.

A crown of palm leaves traditionally rewarded the warrior, a crown of oak leaves the citizen or athlete, a crown of laurel (bays) the poet. Marvell seeks on Laurel here for himself. Crowns were also woven in classical times from grass or parsley, wild olive or pine, ivy or myrtle: 'Some single Herb or Tree' could be any one of these.

The word 'heat' provides the first pun in the poem. In Marvell's day gentlemen 'ran a heat' when they raced their horses against each other for practice; for purses they 'ran a

course'. There was also the 'heat' engendered by the 'Passion' of love, the 'Flame' of line 19. Love too was hotly competitive. 'When we have run our passions heat' plays on the two senses.

There is a second pun on 'race' in line 28, or so it would seem. There was the obvious 'race' on foot between the fleeing Daphne and the ardent pursuing god. But, as such races always ended in the metamorphosis of the maiden, which happened here. Daphne's barrenness was the end of their 'race' or family. 'It is your duty to give me grandchildren'—Perseus, the father of Daphne, had told her in Ovid.

There is no pun or ambiguity, however, in 'retreat' in line 26, where the keyword is 'hither'. Freed for a time from active service, Cupid 'makes his best retreat' to this garden. He travels to it as unerringly and expeditiously as he can. The Garden is not being called a retreat.

In V the poet is the innocent lord of creation as he wonders through the garden-alone: innocent, because he is free, and the place is free, from all carnal desires—there are not even any animals about; lord, because he is so much superior to the trees and the plants. But he can still be the target of innocent love. Mature fruits play the feminine role. They welcome his approach and, within their physical limits, ply him with their individual charms; his senses are innocently gratified.

Stanza VI takes a step up the scale of values. 'From pleasure less', meaning (as Leishman rightly says) 'from the lesser pleasure of the senses'; the mind withdraws 'to the greater pleasure of its own inner happiness'. The withdrawal began in line 39 (hence the 'Meanwhile' of line 41). Significantly 'the Mind' is not called 'my mind'. The pleased body, now mindless, remains on the grass. 'Withdraws' is not a military metaphor, but a social one. It is as though the lord leaves the high table on the dais in the thronged hall for the privacy of the quiet withdrawing room.

The new paramountcy of 'the Mind' is asserted and hammered home by the repetition of the word in the triplerhyming 'Mind-kind-find' of lines 43-4. Thus detached, it becomes the reader's mind as much as the poet's; the mind of man.

The 'ocean' metaphor is born of the belief, old as Pliny, that each 'kind' of land creature has its counterpart or close 'resemblance' living in the sea. Similarly in the mind. Marvell argues, the image or idea matches the reality; they recognise each other straight-away ('straight' is an adverb).

Since stanzas V and VI form one episode. It is likely that Marvell intended 'a green thought in a green shade' to epitomise the active mind of the abstracted thinker, physically passive in shadow on the grass, where line 40 Left him. As M. C. Bradbrook and M.G.

Lloyd Thomas wrote, 'There must be a green shade, otherwise no green thought: that is, he only achieves the power of complete detachment through the instrumentality of that particular time and place'.

Between VI and VII there is an interval of time and a change of scene. And though in VII the poet resumes in the same present tense, he is in fact recalling separate ecstasies in different parts of the garden on various occasions in the recent part:

Here at the Fountains sliding foot,  
or at some Fruit - trees mossy roof...

In VIII the tone changes completely and Marvell goes back to the part with his tongue in his cheek, as he had done in IV. There it was the mythical part of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Here it is the Biblical part of Genesis, the story of Adam and Eve.

A thorough re-reading of stanzas V to Vn will show that, in selecting the material, Marvell was quietly devising a solo paradise of his own which in due course would stand comparison with the solo paradise of Adam in VIII. Thus, in V to VII the trees are all fruit-trees and an apple-tree is specifically named; in legend, though not in the Bible, the fruits of the tree of knowledge were apples, of course.

And now the last part, the final stanza, arrives; but only after another interval of time and another change of scene. Paradise is forgotten. Adam was the only gardener there. Here in the sunshine, away from the canopy of trees, a professional artist has laid out the latest seventeenth century garden novelty, a floral sun-dial.

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## 2.3 □ Interpretations

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The Garden' is Marvell's evocation of the green world, of the world, of the attraction of the retreat into solitude in nature, not only "because of the sheer delight in nature ... but because of the way in which the poem problematizes the very pleasures that it celebrates, raising questions about the moral validity of retreat at the same time as it portrays its attractions. Nor is 'the Garden', Marvell's last or only word on the pleasures of gardens. The garden served as a potent and variously significant symbol in seventeenth century literature and art and Marvell's garden poems reflect the variety of meanings and associations of gardens at that time. Garden could represent a sinful presumption of human culture and the garden itself could be seen as a place of sin. Examples of such negative gardens include the so-called power of Bliss in Spenser's *Faerie Queene* and the kind of garden as in Marvell's own poems. "The Mower against gardens' where the mower 'argues that not content with falling from God's grace himself, man next conspired to make all nature fall alongside him; and that the art of gardening represents man's reduction of the innocent plants and flowers of the field,

meadows into sinfulness. "Luxurious man...sold". The moral disapproval of garden and gardening is clear from mower's diction - words such as luxurious, vice, seduce, dead, double (in the sense of duplicitous or false), all reveal a view of garden and gardening a sinful presumption. Marvell actually satirizes the excess of seventeenth century garden-mania.

However, Marvell's *The Garden* gives us a vision of a perfected world. The perfect world here is such a place which offers intense pleasure, insight and enlightenment and which also allows the harmonious exercise or fulfilment of all faculties - sensual, intellectual, and spiritual. It is a world where perfection has been achieved by means of certain exclusions. This world of the garden contains no society, no business, no politics, no sex (and that means certainly no woman), and also attempts to exclude time and history. The poem thus challenges the reader to consider the moral validity of experience attained at the expense of all social commerce and responsibility.

The celebration of the garden takes place at stanza five, the first four stanzas of the poem jibe at the activities of the mundane world beyond this garden. The garden lays bare its riches, resources and reveals the poverty and deficiencies of all pursuits in comparison with the rich rewards of the garden life. Marvell satirises the worldly awarding of laurels for achievements in various fields—military (palm), civic(oak), and literary (bay). On the other hand the rewards offered by the garden are superior to those offered by endeavour in the world beyond. Activity in the world is cast in an unfavourable light by means of words such as 'vainly', suggesting either vanity or feulity, and 'amaze', suggesting a state of perplexity, even madness.

Stanza two further upholds the argument that the pleasures which one obtains in the garden surpass those of the world beyond the garden. 'Quiet' and innocence which men frantically and phrenetically look for are found in the garden. The poet rejects the society in favour of the 'delicious solitude' of the garden. He calls society rude in comparison to the pleasure of the garden.

Rejecting the claims of military, civic and literary endeavour and the world of society and business Marvell boldly proceeds to compare the relative attractions of amorous and sexual pleasures with the pleasures offered by the garden. In stanza three of the poem the poet compares the innocent pleasures of the garden with those of amorous pursuits, sexual activity, and women. The 'White' and 'red' of line 17 stand for the physical attributes, specifically those of sexual allure of women. Against the appeal of the white and the red, Marvell pits the 'Green' of the garden, arguing that green far surpasses the other colours in its beauty and appeal. Marvell vehemently is against the practice of the lovers who carve the names of their mistresses on the bark of the trees and argues that these lovers little realise that how far the beauty of the trees itself exceeds the beauty of any woman.

To reinforce the argument that plant beauty surpasses that of women the speaker has

recourse to classical mythology. Mafvell maintains that Apollo and Pan described Daphne and Syrinx, the two mortal women., not as women, but desired them expressly because they were to become plants - Daphne was transformed into the flower that now bears her name and Syrinx was transformed into a reed.

Stanza five introduces the reader to the garden via the great, but innocent, sensual pleasures it provides. The description of the pleasures moves from the oral pleasure offered by the grapes, to the tactile pleasure of the suggestively rounded nectarines and peaches, to the total abandonment of the poet ensnared, stumbling and falling on the grass. Unlike the original garden, Eden experience which was lost through the transgression and fall of man into sin, the 'fall' described here is harmless, merely a "fall on grass".

In addition to the sensual pleasures provided by the abundant fruits and flowers of the garden, the speaker's mind 'Withdraws into its happiness'. The garden provides the ideal setting for contemplation, for meditation, for those creative or re-creative functions out of poetry itself is produced, indicating the links or affinities between poets and gardens:

Meanwhile the mind, from pleasure less.  
Withdraws into its happiness:  
The mind, that ocean where each kind  
Does straight its own resemblance find,  
Yet it creates, transcending these,  
Far other worlds, and other seas,  
Annihilating all that's made  
To a green thought in a green shade.

MarvelPs >mage of the mind as an ocean is based on the common belief that the creatures found on the land had their counterparts under the sea, a belief which led to names, such as sea-horse, sea-cow, sea-lion being given to marine species. The mind, the poet believes, has its enormous creative powers; not only it can re-create all kinds of life found in the external world, but transcending these, it is also capable of creating 'Far other world's and other seas' hitherto unknown. The intellect/mind moves beyond the known world to uncover or create a transcendent reality which, importantly, has its roots in nature. The reality created by the mind and the act of writing poetry) has the capacity to supersede, even replace, external reality annihilating it.

The garden, as we have already mentioned, offers a vision of a perfect world. Apart from its divers wonders, the garden does provide an occasion and a setting for spiritual reverie:

Here at the fountain's sliding foot,  
Or at some fruit-tree's mossy root,  
Casting the body's vest aside,  
My soul into the boughs does glide:  
There like a bird it sits, and sings,  
Then whets, and combs its silver wings;  
And, till prepared for longer flight,  
Waves in its plumes the various light.

The experience here in these lines quoted above is the experience of the soul leaving the body. The speaker's soul leaves his body and, 'like a bird', glides into the boughs of a tree, preening its wings. This separation of the soul from the body is a rehearsal for the 'Longer flight' that it will take on the death of the body and has been achieved through nature.

The ninth and final stanza poses something of a puzzle for readers of the poem. For many readers, 'the final stanza serves to complete the celebration of the garden as a true retreat from the world outside, complete with its own sense of time (with a pun on herbal thyme), innocent and wholesome, in the form of the floral sundial. For others, however, the sense of time complicates or compromises the celebration of the garden experience, possibly suggesting its own temporality or conditional nature'. But the final perhaps provides a frame in which to view the garden experience presented in and by the poem. Denish Cuthbert points out The attractions of the garden are great. It offers the opportunity for true re-creation—both in the sense of a pleasant way of passing the time and in the sense of an imaginative re-ordering or re-creation of human experience. The garden serves the needs of the body with an innocent sensuality, of the mind as a place for contemplation, and of the soul by offering communion with God's creation through which the speaker experiences a transcendent moment of spirituality, to be surpassed only by the final flight of the soul from the body at death: till prepared for longer flight." As this allusion to the future event of final transcendence suggests, the garden, while coming very close to that experience, does not offer final transcendence itself. It offers a rehearsal, a metaphor, an analogy, an approximation of that longed - for event. It offers also various reminders that as rich and rewarding as its experience may be. there is a world beyond the garden with obligations, and responsibilities that cannot be overlooked—a world of time, of history, a world of society and politics, a world of human commerce. As the speaker himself reluctantly acknowledges, true solitude is 'beyond a mortal's share'. The garden may be entered and enjoyed, but must also be relinquished again. Its experience provides a temporary respite from the rigours of the world, but not a permanent

escape. The garden itself highlights both its wonderful difference from the world outside and also the necessity of returning to that world.

But the poem is not as simple as it looks. There is a major antithesis in the poem and this antithesis depends upon the distinction between the active and contemplative life. The garden of the title is primarily a garden of solitude and contemplation, to which the poet retires from society (and women) to muse. One will find in the poem a depiction of different kinds of gardens. For example, in stanza three, the garden is presented/depicted as a superior substitute for sexual love, in stanza five, we have a picture of a sensual, natural garden.

The first and second stanzas introduce this antithesis. Whereas ambitious men enter into the garden to win a garland as an emblem of their success in the world, the poet retires to nature/garden for solitude and for contemplation. Peace is wrongfully sought in 'the busy companies of the man'. Society is "rude/to (compared to) this delicious solitude, the poet says in stanza two, "thereby reversing the conventional association of civility with society.

This garden of solitude and contemplation excludes not only society in general but women in particular. Eden, the poet says, would be greater without the distracting presence of Eve. But on the other hand, the images of sensual ripeness in stanza five "luscious clusters of the vine", "melons", "ripe apples", and soon, suggest that "the garden may after all be suffused with a kind of feminine presence... perhaps sexual pleasure is not so easily renounced as the poem's explicit argument asserts. Can one finally imagine a garden of Eden without an Eve?

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## 2.4 □ Questions

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### *Long answer type questions :*

1. What values or qualities are evoked by the image of the garden in Marvell's poem?
2. Attempt a critical estimate of Marvell's 'The Garden'.
3. Comment upon Marvell's treatment of nature in 'The Garden'.
4. Examine 'The Garden' as a typical metaphysical poem.
5. What is the meaning of the lines "Mean-while the Mind, from pleasure less/Withdraws into its happiness?"

### *Short and objective answer type questions :*

1. Explain the meaning contained in the line "Society is all but rude"?
2. What is meant by the phrase "delicious solitude"?
3. Who are Apollo, Daphne, Pan and Syrinx?



4. How was Daphne changed into a laurel and why? (Hints for the answer: the legend has it that when pursued by Apollo, Daphne called upon her goddess mother to save her. She was changed into a laurel.)
5. How was syrx transformed into a reed? (Hints: Pursued by pan, the nymph Syrx fled into the river Ladow. where she was changed into a reed.)
6. What is the significance of the bird in stanza VII?
7. Are there any images in the poem which suggest that ‘the garden may after all be suffused (with a kind of feminine presence?’ Hints: the images of sensual ripeness in stanza five.

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## **2.5 □ Suggested Readings**

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1. Ann E. Berthoff: *The Resolved Soul: A Study of Marvell’s Major Poems.* (1970)
2. Kenneth Friedenreich. ed, *Tercentenary Essays in Honour of Andrew Marvell.* (1977)
3. Arthur Pollard, ed. *Andrew Marvell Poems: A Casebook.* (Includes major essays on *The Garden*’ and *‘To His Coy Mistress’.* (1980)
4. Christine Rees, *The Judgement of Marvell.* (1989)
5. Michael Wilding, ed. *Marvell: Modern Judgements* (1969) (Includes essays on *The Garden*’, *To His Coy Mistress* etc.

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## **Unit -3 □ The Pulley: George Herbert**

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### **Structure**

- 3.1 George Herbert (1593-1633)—Life & Works**
- 3.2 Herbert : Religion & Poetry**
- 3.3 The Pulley : Introduction**
  - 3.3.1 Thought of the Poem**
  - 3.3.2 Commentary**
- 3.4 Questions**
- 3.5 Suggested Readings**

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### **3.1 □ George Herbert (1593-1633): Life & Works**

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Herbert was born in Montgomery into an old and prominent family. He was educated at Westminster School and was elected a scholar in Trinity College, Cambridge, when he was named King's Scholar in 1609. George published his first poems (Two sets of memorial verses in Latin) in a volume mourning Prince Henry's death in 1612. George was ordered deacon, probably before the end of 1624, and installed in 1626 as a canon of Lincoln Cathedral and prebendary of Leighton Bromswold in Huntingdonshire.

In his short priesthood he gained a reputation for humility, energy, and chanty. He was also a keen musician and would go twice a week to hear the singing in Salisbury cathedral which was, he said, 'Heaven upon Earth'. He died of consumption. When he realized that he was dying he sent his English poems to his friend Ferrar with instructions to publish them, if he thought 'they might turn to the advantage of any dejected soul, and otherwise to burn them. The Temple, containing nearly all his surviving poems, was published in 1633.

#### **3.2 Q Herbert: Religion Poetry**

Herbert was born and brought up in an age of religious controversies. In the early 17th century, Christianity under the impact of the Renaissance and new scientific knowledge, was no longer a matter of unquestionable faith. The new religious leaders were humanists who had a rational approach to religion. Hence various religious views emerged and competed with each other for popular acceptance. Thus in Christianity, there were at least three branches existing simultaneously - the Roman Catholics (they were Orthodox and demanded adherence

to the medieval church, the puritans (they were progressive and pleaded for liberty of the individual in matters of faith) and the Anglicans (they were moderatists; they chose the middle course, avoiding the excesses of the other two). In fact, the Anglican church was the most popular institution both in the reign of Queen Elizabeth and James I. The Anglican church represented the spirit of the age. It was product of the English mind at a seminal stage of its social and religions history. Its aim was to preserve all that was worthwhile in the past. In short, it was a model for the 'British' church which, as Herbert said, 'Neither too mean nor yet too gay'.

Herbert's religious faith had grown and developed in the Anglican church. He was influenced by it right from his childhood, under the benign guidance of his pious mother. When he came of age, he felt a natural and congenial attraction towards it. His subject matter was Anglicanism which appealed to him because of its moderation and dignified humility. It will be therefore, apt to say that all the time he wanted to be an Anglican poet. He says—

“Give me the pliant mind, whose - gentle measure  
Complies and suits with all estates;  
Which can let loose to a crowne -  
and yet with pleasure  
Take up within a cloisert's gates”.

Herbert's poetry may be called a long Christian song with all the possible melody and sweetness. He writes of the perennial conflict between the spirit and the flesh, virtue and vice, life and death, the mortal and the immortal. He sings of the infinite behind finite, of the light behind darkness. He talks of eternal truths and his anthology, *The Temple* is like Tagore's *Gitanjali*; his cry is the same as Tagore's—

“That I want thee, only thee — let my heart repeat without end. All desires that distract me, day and night, are false and empty to the core”. (*Gitanjali* - xxxviii). But what is most interesting is that in some poems, his theme is the humanist aspect of Christianity. He sees Christ's sacrifices not only as a doctrine of substitution and imputed righteousness, but as a history of human goodness and suffering, of how a man who was also God, gave his life for the erring, ungrateful humanity.

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### 3.3 □ The Pulley: Introduction

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It is said that Herbert's poetry is “the expression of an ardent temperament with a single emotional outlet”. Herbert was a priest of the church of England and alone among Donne's followers, Herbert composed religious verse exclusively. **The Pulley** deals with God's device to lift man up to him. When God created man. He gave him all his choicest blessings except

only one - rest. God withheld next because he thought that when man would feel restless, he would surely turn to God and so the bond between the creation and the created would never be snapped.

### 3.3.1 The Pulley : Thought of the Poem

When God first created man, He thought of best owing on him all his choicest blessings. Thus he gave man strength, beauty, wisdom, honour, pleasure and all other gifts till only rest was left to be endowed on him. At this stage, God pondered for a little. He thought that if man would enjoy rest, he would be so contented that he would forget his creator, and hence both God and man would be losers. Therefore, God decided to keep back rest from man. He wanted that when man would be weary, he would feel restless and this restlessness would make him remember God and pray to him for peace of mind.

### 3.3.2 Commentary

**The Pulley** is a fine example of Herbert's preoccupation with religious themes and his devotion to God. The poet deals with the relationship between man and God and it clearly shows how both man and God would be losers if the link between them is severed. The theme of the poem has not been taken from the story about the creation of man as we find it in the Bible; but Herbert seizes upon the theme by virtue of his own spiritual experiences and treats it in a highly imaginative manner.

Actually, **The Pulley** recreates in Christian terms, the classical story of Pandora, the first mortal woman. Jupiter gave her the box, now proverbially known as Pandora's box, packed with all the blessings of the Gods. The Jewel of the blessings was 'hope' which lay at the bottom. When the box was opened, all the blessings, except 'hope' slipped out and were lost. In Herbert's poem also, God gives man a box, full of all gifts—strength, beauty wisdom, honour and pleasure. But "out of his" glass of blessings standing by. "He does not pour out the Chief blessing 'rest', for he thinks that if man was given that benediction, he would have no incentive to seek Him. In this way, God uses 'restlessness' as the pulley to toss man towards Himself. The deeper implication is that man's profaneness, his defects, darkness and harsh passions cause him repining 'restlessness' which can be transformed into mental peace and serenity by God's grace and adoration.

The poem has a fantastic title like some of Herbert's other poems, **The Quip** for example. Actually, a pulley is a wheel, used for raising weights. The word 'pulley' is not used in the poem directly. However, Herbert makes the pulley signify the device; God used to lift man to Himself. The title is thus an example of metaphysical conceit.

The image of the "glass of blessings" reminds the reader of metaphysical wit. but of course, the image is unlike the far-fetched images of Donne.

Grierson remarks that the poem "is inspired by a philosophical conception of the universe and the role assigned to the human spirit in the great drama of existence". Herbert does not directly say that God withholds peace of soul from man until he turns to him for it - he. - the poet does not openly preach a sermon about the salvation of the soul, but he presents this familiar religious doctrine in a novel manner. The concept of the 'glass of blessings' the punning of the word 'rest' and the portrait of God as a kind, wise benefactor serve to translate Herbert's idea into something vividly dramatic. As one reads the poem, one becomes increasingly aware of that fusion between thought and feeling which constitutes Herbert's belief.

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### 3.4 □ Questions

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#### *Essay type questions*

1. Comment upon the appropriateness of the title of the poem 'The Pulley'.
2. Consider 'The Pulley' as a religious poem.
3. Assess the greatness of Herbert as a poet with special reference to his 'The Pulley'.
4. Comment on the use of the various images in "The Pulley".
5. Is 'The Pulley' related to the myth of Pandora and her box?

#### *Short and objective type questions*

1. What is 'pulley'?
2. What does the 'glass of blessings' contain?
3. Why did not God bestow 'rest' on man?
4. Explain the meaning contained in the line 'And rest in Nature, not the God of Nature'.
5. Sum up the theme of the poem.

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### 3.5 □ Suggested Readings

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1. Charles, Amy **The Life of Gvorge Herbert** (1977)
2. Fish, Stanley, **Self-consuming artifacts** (1972)
3. Harman, Barbara, **Costly Monuments** (1982)
4. Stein, Arnold, George **Herbert's Lyrics** (1968)
5. Vendler, Helen, **The Poetry of George Herbert** (1974)

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## Unit -4 □ John Dryden : Absalom and Achitophel

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### Structure

- 4.1 Objectives
- 4.2 Introduction
- 4.3 John Dryden : Life & Works
- 4.4 Background to Absalom and Achitophel
  - 4.4.1 The Opening of Absalom and Achitophel
  - 4.4.2 Political Theme
  - 4.4.3 Art of Characterization
  - 4.4.4 As a Heroic Poem
- 4.5 Textual Annotation
- 4.6 Conclusion/Summing-up
- 4.7 Questions with Suggested Answers
- 4.8 Suggested Reading

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### 4.1 □ Objectives

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This unit has several objectives:

- (a) It aims to provide detailed background information about the age and outline of life of Dryden.
- (b) It will relate the text *Absalom and Achitophel* to its social background.
- (c) It will discuss the literary qualities of the text.
- (d) It will critically comment on the various themes present in the text

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### 4.2 □ Introduction

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The death of Elizabeth-I led to the accession of Stuart monarchs of Scotland on the throne. James-I believed in the Divine Right of Kings and he passed on this belief to his son and successor Charles I. However, by the seventeenth century conditions had changed in England and absolute monarchy as exercised by the Tudors was no longer possible.

There were frequent clashes between Parliament and the king. Matters were worsened by religious conflicts. The Puritan groups wished to have no truck with Catholicism while the Stuart dynasty was uneasy with their power and was inclined to be more tolerant, particularly since Charles's Queen was a Catholic. In addition many of the more radical elements (like Milton) wished to have a Republic rather than a monarchy, as being more in accordance with God's will. Finally, Charles I did not have the charisma or genius of Elizabeth. Soon the Civil War broke out between the Royalists and Republicans, known as Cavaliers and Roundheads respectively. The Civil War ended with the beheading of Charles I and installation of Oliver Cromwell, the general of the Parliamentary army as the Lord Protector. The royal family fled to France; Charles's eldest son Charles II became the king-in-exile. After Cromwell's death, his son became the Protector but he did not possess his father's ability. People were growing increasingly restive under the restrictive rule of the Puritans. Finally, by popular acclaim Charles II was brought back as the king. Since monarchy was restored, this age is called the Restoration. This period extends from 1660, the year Charles II was restored to the throne, until 1700.

However, restoration of the king did not mean an end to political troubles. The old conflict between Protestant and Catholics still went on, with the Protestant majority always suspicious that the Catholics had nefarious plans. The fact that James, Duke of York, next in line to the throne, was a Catholic did not help matters. The period saw many conflicts and intrigues in the royal court, including the Popish plot and Exclusion Bill crisis. The power of the king was also reduced with proportionate growth of the power of Parliament. The age saw the rise of the two parties. Tories (supporters of the king and conservative policies) and Whigs (supporters of Parliament and Protestant supremacy). Even today the two principal British parties are referred to by that name. But by his charm and cleverness, Charles II managed to keep control.

In literature the tone is markedly different from that of the Renaissance. The Renaissance was marked by imagination and originality, as Marlowe, Shakespeare, Donne, Spenser testify. The Restoration writers preferred classical models. Their writings were characterized by reason, moderation, good taste, control and simplicity. Wit was highly prized, as the mark of the truly sophisticated cultured man. The ideals of scientific experimentation promulgated by the Royal Society of London (established in 1662) influenced the development of clear and simple prose. The great philosophical and political treatises of the time also emphasize rationalism. **Essay Concerning Human Understanding** (1690), by John Locke, insists on strict rationalism and empiricism as the basis of all knowledge. In **Two Treatises on Government** (1690), Locke establishes the theory of Social Contract, which states that the authority of the governor is derived from the governed and is always revocable if the people are dissatisfied with their rulers. These trends influenced eighteenth century as well, so that sometimes the period extending from 1660-1780 is taken as one

cultural unit, divided into three ages only by the names of the three most conspicuous writers of the periods.

Almost inevitably the age saw the organized development of satirical poetry on political topics. Various political parties have become sharply polarized; but they were afraid of another civil war and so contented themselves with literary assaults on each other. London had become more sophisticated and the aristocracy and educated townsmen could enjoy the cut and thrust of satire better. Lastly the development of the strongly knit heroic couplet, which could show off wit and was well adapted for sharp, hard practicalities also stimulated satirical composition.

In literary history, the forty years between the Restoration and the beginning of the eighteenth century is sometimes called “The Age of Dryden”. Dryden, of all great English poets, was the least original; he produced hardly anything new, whether in the realm of ideas or in the realm of new artistic forms. But he assumed leadership of every literary movement and his genius gave new vigour to the currents and passions of his time. The literary world of his time cannot be complete without an estimate of his dominant contribution to it, hence this labelling of an age-by a single writer.

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### 4.3 □ John Dryden : Life & works

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John Dryden was born on 9 August, 1631, in the parsonage house of Aldwinkle. All Saints, near Oundle in Northamptonshire, where his maternal grandfather, Henry Picketing, was rector. His family was connected to the Parliamentary side. Though his family belonged to the gentleman class they were not rich. After early grammar school education, he was admitted as a king’s scholar at Westminster. He went on to Trinity College and got his B.A. His poems gained him both admirers and enemies. In 1668 he was appointed poet laureate and as historiographer royal. When James II became the king, Dryden became a Catholic. After the Protestant Revolution he was deprived of his post. However, after death he was buried in Westminster Abbey.

Dryden began to write poems from his schooldays. His earliest elegy *Upon the Death of Lord Hastings* is clumsy. His next important poem is *Heroic Stanzas on the Death of Oliver Cromwell*, where he expresses admiration and grief for the dead dictator. But when the king returned he wrote *Astrea Redux* in celebration; since the title means. The Return of Justice’ he was obviously hoping for better times. He continued in this vein in *Annas Mirabilis* (The Year of Miracles): here he describes the events of the year 1666 which included a naval battle with the Dutch and the Great Fire of London. All three pieces were written in heroic couplets. They show his mastery over the verseform and are vigorous at places. In his late life he also wrote two long religious poems - *Religio Laid* and *The*



*Hind and the Panther*. But Dryden's true genius lay in satirical poetry. In *The Medal* he made a stinging attack on the Whigs. In *MacFlecknoe* he makes a satirical and personal attack on a rival poet, Thomas Shadwell. Shadwell is represented as the heir of Flecknoe, a very bad poet, and the new ruler of the kingdom of dullness and nonsense in prose and verse. A combination of geniality and witty contempt gives the poem its special flavour. His greatest achievement of course is *Absalom and Achitophel*. Dryden was a popular dramatist as well. His most successful play written in the style of Restoration Comedy of Manners is *Marriage a la Mode*. He also popularized the Heroic Tragedy through plays like *The Conquest of Granada*, *Tyrannic love*, *The Indian Emperor*, *Aureng-zebe*, and *All for Love*, an adaptation of Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, written in blank verse. However, all his tragedies are artificial and cannot satisfy us. Dryden's prose marks the beginning of modern English prose and the birth of proper English literary criticism. His most famous critical work is *Essay of Dramatic Poesy*, It is in the form of a dialogue and discusses the merits of various English dramatists. His prose is conversational, lucid but elegant. It is marked by intimacy and vigour.

Dyden excelled in nearly every variety of verse-forms: lyrical, didactic, satirical, narrative. Above all, he produced the first successful mock-epic. *Absalom and Achitophel* is also a model for all times for political satirists. He established the heroic couplet, making verse more mellifluous and regular. His prose is clear and direct. In both he set up certain trends that endured till the Romantic movement. It is not therefore surprising that the Restoration Age is known as the Age of Dryden. His achievements is summed up as, "the genius of our countrymen...rather to improve an invention than to invent themselves."

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#### **4.4 □ Background to *Absalom and Achitophel***

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Dryden's best known poem *Absalom and Achitophel* is political in its origin and scope. The occasion of its writing is this :

In 1678 there was great uproar over the so-called Popish Plot. One Titus Gates, warned the government that the Roman Catholics were plotting to murder the King and establish their religion with the help of foreign invasion. The magistrate Godfrey before whom he had given testimony was murdered shortly after. This was taken to be proof of Gate's accusations. The men accused by Gates were arrested and many were executed. Later the accusations and the conspiracy were found to be lies but at that time the majority believed in the danger of a Catholic takeover of England.

The Earl of Shaftesbury, the leader of the Whig party, became Gates' patron. Charles II had no legitimate son. Therefore his brother, James, Duke of York, a Catholic, was the legal successor. Shaftesbury decided to force the King to exclude him from succession to the throne. He wanted to make the King's illegitimate son, James, Duke of Monmouth, a

Protestant; the heir instead. In 1680 he introduced the Exclusion Bill for this purpose. Though the House of Commons passed it, it was defeated in the House of Lords. Though the king loved his son he was opposed to overturning the settled order of succession. So he dissolved the Parliament in January 1681. He also signed a secret agreement with Louis XIV by which he obtained a subsidy in return for acquiescing in French foreign policy. This meant that he did not have to ask Parliament to vote him money. A new Parliament met at Oxford, but the king dissolved it. Shaftesbury was arrested on charge of high treason. Dryden wrote this poem then to prejudice the people against Shaftesbury. But Shaftesbury was acquitted by a London jury the same year. However, the king's party ultimately won the day as he had to flee as a fugitive to Holland.

Naturally Shaftesbury's allies felt that such criticism cannot go unanswered and there were many pieces abusing Dryden. This led to the production of *Absalom and Achitophel, Part II*. However, this poem was mostly written by Nahunn Tate, with Dryden lending a hand only occasionally. Consequently this is not as brilliant as the first part. When we speak of Dryden's *Absalom and Achitophel*, we mean *Absalom and Achitophel, Part I*.

The poem is frankly political. However, Dryden's brilliance lies in not explicitly attacking those who opposed the king. Instead he pretended to write about the biblical story of David and Absalom (II Samuel 13-18). David was a shepherd who as a young man killed the giant Goliath and rose high in the service of King Saul of Israel. Saul grew jealous of him and David had to flee and hide. After Saul's death, the people of Israel elected him king. Under David who was favoured by God Israel grew to be a great kingdom. David had a number of wives and children. In his old age, his favourite son Absalom, led astray by Achitophel and others rebelled against him. For a time he was successful but ultimately was defeated and killed. The parallels between the careers of the two monarchs led Dryden to select this story as his vehicle of satire. In the poem the various biblical characters represent actual figures of English politics. Various biblical places mentioned also stand for contemporary countries. The concordance is exact and done most artistically.

#### **4.4.1 The Opening of *Absalom and Achitophel***

The opening of the poem is brilliant, simultaneously censuring the king and deflecting criticism. Charles was a notorious womanizer. The way of the biblical David in this respect was "displeasing to God". So in the opening the two kings merge together to form the single figure of Charles/David. But it cannot be denied that such adultery is wrong. It is the original illegitimate act by the king that ultimately led to this crisis Dryden solved the problem in an audacious manner. He implied that such an abundance of animal spirits is natural and the overflow of a generous nature. The law and priestcraft is seen as a form of denial. Charles's vigorous warmth is seen as a gauge for his vital personality, even though it is not controlled by law. The idea of liberality is sustained by judicious use of words like **variously, wide, ungrateful**. It is even hinted that such prolixity may have divine approval.

If God created man in his own image and ordered them to multiply, then David is only going about His business and scattering God's image on the land. The naturalness of his conduct is further supported by metaphors of agriculture. He is seen as the tiller and the women as the soil which bore harvests. The king's promiscuity is further legitimized by his role as the father of the nation. There is witty juxtaposition of divine creativity and human fertility— God's abundant creation is reflected in Charles/David's prodigality. Just as God is father to mankind, so too Charles is father to his subjects, and in some cases literally. It further emphasizes David as the indulgent father than the head of the state. Dryden confuses three chronologies: the prelapsarian age when men were innocently libertine, the Old Testament age which allowed some freedom but was strict about adultery, and contemporary England which frowned on any kind of sexual immorality. We are presented with a topsy turvy world and good humouredly cajoled into accepting the king's behaviour.

The opening picture is thus mock-heroic, giving cosmic dimensions to a human failing. But it also deals with the overarching theme of law. From the very beginning the poem stresses Monmouth's illegitimacy. The law denied that Monmouth/Absalom was legitimate or that Charles/David could legitimize him. The fact that the queen was barren did not mean that he could attain 'true succession', because his mother being a concubine was like a slave. The king is criticized for allowing such a state of affairs to pass: since the king is sick, the nation is sick. Yet, Charles/David as the legitimate king does stand for the law and divine authority. He has only to speak in his proper role and all disorder would cease. Thus the beginning of the poem implies its end.

The opening of the poem has most of the characteristics that mark *Absalom and Achitophel*:

- (a) Emphasis on law and unlawful nature of rebellion.
- (b) Generalization of human nature.
- (c) The use of biblical and Miltonic allusions and the use of lofty language.
- (d) Refusal to be limited to the time and circumstances of his composition.

#### **4.4.2 Political Theme**

The poem had its genesis in the hysteria of the Popish plot. The country was split between two camps Whigs and Tories—those who wanted the Catholic Duke of York removed from succession and those who supported the king respectively. In between were great many uncommitted people towards whom the poem is directed. Dryden composed the poem to summarize the king's position, show the opposition as dangerous, ludicrous and vindicate the king. But the problem was that he must shed his overt partisanship if he is to persuade the people of the justice of his cause. Therefore, he uses biblical allegory which projects the rebellion onto a neutral set of circumstances. Again this political scenario

would soon be forgotten, if he is to” create an enduring work of art he must identify the archetypal pattern underlying the present troubles. Dryden takes up the stance that he is a spokesman for stability protesting against anarchy—a topical satire becomes universal. Thus there are two political themes underlying the poem—at the surface it is about Restoration politics; but at a deeper level it deals with the Divine right of Kings, the relation between a king and his subjects and the role of the state.

The poem moves between two poles: Biblical narration and contemporary England. Charles, Monmouth, Shaftesbury can never be seen as themselves—they are always Charles/David, Monmouth/Absalom, Shaftesbury/Achitophel. A three dimensional effect is created: it has happened before, is happening now and will happen again. Also the scriptural commentaries had always read the struggle between David and Absalom as a type of the continuous struggle between Christ and Anti-Christ. Therefore, by using this particular story Dryden exalts the satire to the cosmic level.

Dryden relied heavily on Hobbes’ theory of Social contract. In *Leviathan* Hobbes says that the life of man in “state of nature” was brutish, cruel and nasty; to preserve themselves the people banded together; a sovereign contract was signed between the two with the king promising to govern and protect and the people vowing to obey him and his successors. This contract is reaffirmed every time a king takes his’ coronation oath; it is also unbreakable. In Dryden’s eyes the rebels were trying to destroy this contract, shaftesbury argued that power is only lent to the king by people, at need they could revoke it. But the Royalists insisted that even if kingship is based on a social contract the covenant is continuous and cannot be contracted’ out by altering the succession: “They that are subjects to a Monarch cannot without his leave cast off Monarchy”, nor can they choose the heir disrupting “Artificial Eternity of life...which men call the right of Succession”. By law Monmouth/Absalom is not the successor; since law is the fabric of society, ignoring it would only bring anarchy. Hence from the very beginning Dryden stresses that as the king’s illegitimate son Monmouth’s very existence is unlawful. The theory of contract is debated throughout and Dryden points out the penalty for revoking it—”For who can be secure of private right/ If sovereign sway may be dissolved by might?”

Dryden universalizes topical theme by depicting various clashes of interest that are universally present in any inflammatory political situation. Three groups are present here that are found in all political scenarios everywhere at all ages. They are:

I, King and Royalists/State/Establishment n. Rebels/Revolutionaries/Anti-establishments

III. Mob/Masses/Populi/Electorate who oscillate between the status quo and the revolutionaries.

Both groups try to seduce the masses with their rhetoric and win them over. Intergroup

rivalries and relations between the three are fundamental constituents in every political crisis. Here the king, the rebels and the public are the parts that make up the universal scenario. But Dryden is not content by merely using an archetypal pattern; individual figures are turned into easily identifiable archetypal figures. Charles is the typical generous, zestful, kindhearted ruler whose authority derives from law, custom, inheritance and ultimately from God. Monmouth is the attractive charismatic leader of the rebels with mass appeal but no legal right to rule. Shaftesbury is the scheming politician who sets up a figurehead and rules from behind the scenes. In Dryden's hand he also becomes a type of Satan. The theme becomes the age old one of temptation, of Satan tempting man with visions of godlike power, and man succumbing. Politically speaking, the State is like a Noah's ark, which if overturned will drown everyone in a deluge of violence and chaos. The conspiracy is imaged as a weapon of war whereas the State is a bulwark of peace and security. The war machine rumbles forward until it breaks in vain against the solid sustaining body of the State. Yet there is real danger that the authority of the State would collapse. Dryden is not against the desire to renew the 'Prime'. But the question is whether the insurrection heralds restored health and creativity or is the signal for inexorable decline towards dissipation. For him the acid test is the imaginative remembrance of the Lawful Lord who stands behind all images of authority. Without this image the imagination becomes gross and disorted. Hence Dryden "is the spokesman for civilization who wishes to save society from destabilization.

The king is equated with God. His promiscuity is excused wittily. However, there is also a hint of rebuke—the king's frailty has sown the seeds of rebellion since Monmouth is the product of his immorality. The law bars Monmouth's succession because the king has behaved unlawfully; the king himself is the source of disorder. Nevertheless the king we see is the indulgent father; it is only in the last lines that he is revealed in his true light. Perhaps that is why there is no formal portrait of David save what can be gleaned from Absalom's and Achitophel's conversation—there is a loving father and a mild merciful king whose gentleness is interpreted as weakness. In the royal speech, focus shifts from Charles to David the ideal monarch who is blessed by God. He is brought out at the end because once God's Viceroy has spoken, sealed with the traditional peal of thunder, there is nothing more to add. The tone of the speech—more of sorrow than of anger—has an air of calm fulfilment more appropriate to the restoration of law and order. About the conclusion. Dr. Johnson complains, "who can forbear to think of an enchanted castle which vanishes at once into the air when the destined knight blows his horn before it". But that is exactly how Dryden wishes to present the king. The poem ends not only with remembrance of the king's power but with the reinstatement of the Divine Presence that makes the power meaningful. Dryden uses the myth behind all myths.

As a result, the action is carried forward from the mere political wrangling in the

direction of an universal vision. Dryden blended the heroic with the witty thus raising a political satire to the level of high art. Politics become blended with religion and metaphysics. The political theme that Dryden harps on is that the king can do no wrong. As the lawful lord he only has to speak to restore order and rule of law. Dryden presents *Absalom and Achitophel* not as a monarchist poem supporting an immortal king, but a heroi-comical meditation expressing need for discipline and established authority to save civilization from chaos.

### 4.4.3 Art of Characterization

It is in *Absalom and Achitophel* that Dryden's skill in characterization is expressed in full. The poem is made up of a string of portraits held together by a slender narrative. Each individual is transformed into something approaching a composite 'character' of a person. The tradition of such portraiture goes back to Theophrastus who in his characters satirically commented on certain social and domestic types like Ambitious Man, Hypocrite, Sycophant etc. During the Renaissance and after, this tradition was developed in the works of Hall and Overbury from whom Dryden may have received inspiration. Perhaps Dryden also learned something from Chaucer who created a unique picture-gallery in his *Prologue to the Canterbury Tales*. Dryden too creates "a gallery of portraits". His characters fall into two groups—the malcontents and the worthies. The rebels are ruled by restless, uncontrolled misdirected energy while loyalists are marked by their devotion to Law and Order. Nevertheless like Milton's Satan, it is the portraiture of the rebels that is most memorable.

Achitophel is the most powerful figure occupying one-fourth of the poem. He stands for the Earl of Shaftesbury who was attempting to make the Duke of Monmouth the legitimate heir hoping to be the power behind the throne. A politician of great craftiness and energy he was popular with the public. In the poem he is inevitably associated with Achitophel who had led Absalom astray. Dryden makes him even more formidable by associating him with Satan. At no point does satire degenerate into lampoon and readers are obliged to take him seriously. He has great talents and intelligence, high eloquence and ambition all warring within a pygmy body. He had been an excellent judge "unbribed, unsought the wretched to redress". By allowing the villain good qualities Dryden could present himself as unbiased and make the reader realize that this is not a simple melodramatic villain to be easily dismissed. Dryden points out that Achitophel's ambitions do not allow him to rest; he flatters the young prince countering every objection with the typical politician's argument that he is motivated solely by patriotism. He is clearly a Machiavellian statesman, his political appetite unrestrained by virtue or morality. Dryden gives us a marvellous picture of both his powers and defects "a daring pilot in extremity", "turbulent of wit", "In friendship false, implacable in hate". The adjectives accumulate to suggest a volcanic energy which must erupt regardless of ensuring disaster. He would "shake the pillars of public safety" because he could not bear to live in peace. The very verse structure suggests the

hopelessness of one whose nature can find no ease either in personal relationships or public life. All his great energies are directed not towards creation or preservation but destruction, “to ruin or rule the state”. His nature is summed up in one line—”great Wits are sure to madness near allied” and gradually from being a crooked statesman he is transformed into the personification of Anarchy.

Another villain presented with equal vigour but in a more vituperative manner is Zimri, Achitophel’s second-in-command. Zimri represents the Duke of Buckingham another minister of the king. One of the richest and foremost peers of the land he was also the most profligate and wasteful, about whom it had been said “He was true to nothing for he was not true to himself...he had no steadiness nor conduct...he could never fix his thoughts nor govern his estates”. Dryden brings out sharply this fickleness.

A man so various, that he seemed to be  
Not one, but all Mankind’s Epitome.  
Stiff in opinions, always in the wrong;  
Was everything by starts, and nothing long:  
But in the course of one revolving moon,  
Was chemist, fiddler, statesman, and buffoon.

He had no steady opinions of his own, nor a constant interest in any one subject or principle. He is further described as a debauchee, a wild spender, a vicious and intriguing politician. Yet he is not a formidable figure. He is easily fooled and easily parted from his fortune. He is an old hand at forming parties but too irresponsible to be a leader. He is a madman (but not like Achitophel) who is constantly searching for new novelties and whose judgement is so poor and extreme “That every man with him was god or devil”. He is thus reduced to a figure of fun, a harmless man meddling in affairs beyond his skill. In this way Dryden appears to make the rebels of no consequence. But what he shares with Achitophel is lack of self-control. The only portrait that in neoclassic satiric literature can be compared with Zimri is that of Sporus by Pope.

There is no formal portrait of Absalom, who represents the Duke of Monmouth. Contemporaries spoke of his exterior graces, his popularity with women and Charles’ love for him. In this case Dryden was in a quandary. Charles had refused to legitimize his son; nevertheless Monmouth was still his favourite and a reconciliation was possible. Hence Dryden had to avoid blaming the young man too much. Moreover, by mixing praise and blame Dryden appears to be a credible and objective writer. The poet acknowledges Absalom’s charm:

Of all this numerous progeny was none  
So beautiful, so brave, as Absalom:  
Whether, inspir’ed by some diviner lust.

His father got him with a greater gust;  
For that his conscious destiny made way,  
By manly beauty to imperial sway.  
Early in foreign fields he won renown.  
With kings and states allied to Israel's crown:  
In peace the thoughts of war he could remove.  
And seemed as he were only born for love.  
Whate'er he did, was done with so much ease,  
In him alone, 'twas natural to please:  
His motions all accompanied with grace;  
And Paradise was opened in his face.

He is handsome, brave, a successful warrior, graceful in his manner. It is the picture of a son any father would be proud to have and explains why David is so indulgent to him. Yet, in spite of his charismatic leadership he also has faults and also "Ambition ungoverned by reason". This means he is easily manipulated and led astray. The poet constantly excuses his conduct by arguing that ambition is a spark of divine fire, but also makes clear that he is unable to penetrate the lies. Achitophel weaves only because he is unwilling to do so. His folly is great because he cannot see that in giving away David's royal prerogative to rule and choose his successor by law, he is giving away his own as well. He is never condemned directly as Zimri or Achitophel is, but he is allowed to condemn himself. At first he speaks like a dutiful son but soon starts to deceive himself that his rebellion would benefit the state and ultimately David as well. He conveniently ignores whatever disorder and civic turmoil would ensue. Dryden constantly emphasizes that his excesses were due to the same high spirits and generosity that mark his father. He was guilty only because in him the celestial metal was present in too great amount, and it is more the fault of Destiny that he was great but not great enough. Praise and blame are blended so well that a double effect is produced: the impetuous but basically loving youth deceived by wicked counsellors and the specious ambitious deceitful politician.

The character of Charles/David is handled very tactfully. Charles both in his role as king and identification with David occupies the position of God. Yet the poet must also excuse the very real faults of this all too human monarch. Again identification with David, a noted sexual transgressor whose adultery was punished by God, had its own liabilities when Charles also shared the same failings. Dryden solved the problem by audaciously arguing that such abundance of animal spirits is only the overflow of a generous personality. His promiscuity may be condemned but it is the work of a vital personality and besides by having many children Charles is fulfilling God's command to "befruitful and multiply" and spreading his Maker's image through the land. Dryden also tries to excuse this failing by identifying Charles with David who in spite of his "use of concubine and bride" still



remained God's favourite. Moreover, in the opening lines Dryden stresses Charles the father and not the king. Charles is seen as the indulgent father of both the nation and Absalom, forgiving the faults of both and treating them mildly. Just as God rejoiced in creation of man and gave him a helpmate, so too the king rejoiced in his son and gave him a bride. It is only at the end that he assumes his role as God on earth. Absalom has already given a picture of his godlike nature, his mercy, humility and generosity. But Achitophel also presents us with an old weak man, tottering on the brink of senility, easily manipulated by his lust. Both are from their perspectives correct. However at the end, David the king/God appears in the full splendour of his office. He would no more allow people to clamour and rule the state. So far he had shown only mercy; but now he would show the face of Law. He now reasserts his Jehovic qualities of wrath and "the Almighty nodding gives consent". His figure does carry with it the giant-killer dimensions as accused by Dr. Johnson, because he is not a mere human being but a Divine Presence.

The secondary characters consist of remaining rebels and king's supporters. The rebels are mostly commoners and lesser nobles who yearn to see themselves exalted by upsetting the status quo, without understanding its danger. Only a few are singled out for special notice. One is Shimei who is portrayed as a miser and hypocrite. On the outside he led an austere lifestyle, but Dryden imputes it to his parsimony and illiberality. He pretended to be pious but was ready to transgress if there was profit to be gained. As judge he misused his powers: he allowed criminals to go free, he would "pack" the jury with chosen men to acquit his friends charged with any crime, and spent his free time plotting treason. His friends were as wicked as himself. Dryden caps it by saying that he loved his wicked neighbour as himself, parodying Christ's injunction to "love one's neighbour as oneself. This portrait differs from that of Achitophel's which is more balanced. Still another rebel described is Corah. Dryden attacks him brutally, implying he is a fraud and liar, who is sheltering his ambitions and love of evil under the cloak of religious zeal. The other rebels are of no great account: they are conspiring because either they love to riot or because of coin. The king's friends are few in number and consist of worthies. Barzillai is the leader "crowned with honour and years". He had suffered exile with his prince and served him loyally. Warrior and a poet, he is generous to all. His now dead son is eloquently praised and the poet expresses the hope that he would act as a guardian angel to the king. A roll of names follow all of whom share the characteristics of honesty, soberness, frugality and loyalty. The Protestant Churchmen who stood with Charles are also praised for their integrity. Interestingly Dryden stresses that many of these noble supporters of the king were also supporters of the Muses and warns that rebellion and anarchy cannot support the arts. Since Art is held to be a cornerstone of civilized cultured society, once again Dryden demonstrates that Law and Order is the only guarantee of civil society. Such friends are also evidence of the king's moral superiority. These secondary characters do not fit as well into their biblical namesakes as their leaders do, nor are they as exquisitely crafted.

At the background is the mob. The English people are identified with Israelites. Though they are God's chosen people they also have a propensity for moral and political deviation. From a generalized characterization "The Jews a headstrong, moody murmuring race", Dryden moves to specific examples of Jewish political instability—their rejection of Ishobeth and the golden calf. The phrase 'Adamwits' connect their rebellion with the Fall and political disobedience is linked to Satan's temptation and the first disobedience. It is expanded in several places—'giddy Jews', 'stubborn' and reference to regicide which is connected to the crucifixion of Christ. Irony is directed towards religious hypocrisy and political opportunism. They have no positive system to advocate, no sense of responsibility for their conduct, lacks discrimination and is easily gulled: they are tools manipulated by leaders. The liberty they wish was really license and through rebellion they search for novelty. The mob assume's the status of a character: fickle, ruled by 'humour', restless and always dissatisfied. It culminates in the narrator's apostrophe. "Oh foolish Israel! Never warned by ill!" A firm believer in divine Right of kings, Dryden pictures the mob as a composite portrait of all elements of instability and self-interest in society.

Dryden's characterization like Chaucer's is twofold. The various characters have certain specific features—name, title, career, special temperament, physical characteristics and personal idiosyncrasies that mark them out as individuals. But they are also archetypal figures who have always appeared in history to foment crises. It is the villains who are the greatest attraction in this poem on politics and ambition. Absalom is the popular self-seeking leader inspired by bolder spriits yet not totally evil; Zimri is the second-in-command who supports the more able and popular frontrunners of the party; Achitophel is, of course, the talented Machiavellian minister, the Tempter whose talents are allied to a fundamentally unstable disposition. On the other side are good and loyal men, sober, patient and dedicated to Order and safety of the country. Every character is presented in exclusively moral terms. The result is a master-piece of 'history painting'. With Dryden, every hit is calculated, and every stroke goes home; in each character brought on the scene, those features only are selected for exposure or praise which are of direct significance for the purpose in hand.

#### **4.4.4 As a Heroic Poem**

For all Europeans since the Renaissance, epic or heroic poetry has always been esteemed as the greatest work of human nature. It was a great artistic challenge making immense demands on the poet's knowledge, skill and invention to sustain the scope, grandeur and variety of a poem that tends to encompass the world of its day and a large portion of its learning. Moreover it was the form in which the ancients excelled and hence it fired the moderns to rival them. Generations of poets, from Milton to romantics sought to create an epic but hardly anyone succeeded, with the exception of *Paradise Lost*. For Dryden too, the epic was the "most noble, most pleasant way of writing in verse and withal the highest pattern of human life". But what he succeeded in creating was not a true epic

but a mock-epic. Before him Boileau in *Le Lutrin* had mixed the majesty of the heroic, with the venom of satire. Dryden takes up this form in *Absalom and Achitophel*. His main purpose was to lampoon the king's adversaries in the succession quarrel but he also wanted to attain the dignity of the heroic. Hence he applies the biblical story of David and Absalom to his own times giving universal dimension to a topical satire.

The story Dryden chose was particularly appropriate [see 1.3]. The advantages of such identification are many:

(a) Dryden has the freedom to manipulate the story as he chooses and to adapt features of the archetypal figures.

(b) He is able to give the appearance of projecting the theme of rebellion onto a neutral set of circumstances. This note of objectivity, of moral detachment is necessary if the readers are to be persuaded of the justice of the king's cause.

(c) A three dimensional effect is created—it has happened before, is happening now, will happen again.

(d) We are given a bifocal vision: the actual people and the universals. The story of David was a familiar one and the effect of the mock-heroic depends on elements of familiarity.

Typology was a popular scholarly activity in medieval ages. This involved identifying a character of the Bible with another, or with a figure from the real world. Events described in the Bible were seen as types of events that occurs again and again. Dryden uses similar tactics is using the Biblical theme. Contemporary characters, events and places find their echo in the Old Testament story, [see the key in 1.8; point out a few.].

The narration is on an epic scale. One-third of the poem consists of narration, the rest of speeches. It follows the epic style in that it consists of a mixture of styles—we have the serious grand style, the dramatic style, the elegiac style, and the narrative style. Dryden uses the heroic couplets extensively to create sonorous verse, choosing words as much for their music as their meaning in the manner of Virgil. Dryden never allows it to descend to the level of mere abuse or satire—throughout it is always dignified which rises to “long majestic march and energy divine”. The poem is not mock-heroic in the sense *Macflecknoe* or the *Rape of the Lock* is. Though the conspirators are ridiculed Achitophel is taken very seriously; he is presented as a kind of Satan the arch-tempter who can destroy the state. Though Charles is gently ridiculed because of his promiscuity yet he appears as the representative of God and in the end as restorer of Order. The theme itself is serious: the struggle between the State and rebels, father and son, which in their turn reflects the conflict between Jehovah and Lucifer, Saturn and Jupiter. Thus it co-opts myths that go back to the very roots of ‘European culture. At its deeper level Dryden makes this into the eternal conflict between good and evil rendered more dramatic by the fact that with the future

unknown in the real world, there was every chance of evil succeeding in ruining the State and civil society.

Characterization of Charles, Monmouth, Shaftesbury [1.6]. Dryden had no desire to label *Absalom and Achitophel* as mere party propaganda. Rather he presents it as a heroic-comical meditation on political conflict expressing the need for order, discipline and belief in authority. The Biblical story broadens the canvas of the poem—it includes the whole past and future history of mankind, instead of being merely confined to its own time; this gives the poem the majesty of the heroic.

In a heroic open what matters is its scope and the human importance of its subject. The scope of *Absalom and Achitophel* is vast for contemporary characters and events became identified with archetypal ones. Dryden deliberately mingles three chronologies—the prelapsarian age when man was ignorant of sexual guilt; the Old Testament age when man strictly adhered to the Law; and Restoration England which broke laws and was shamelessly libertine. The subject is the same as that of *Paradise Lost*—the rise of evil and its eventual defeat by God. In fact Dryden closely copies *Paradise Lost*. Like Milton's epic, the poem opens in confusion; is followed by a list of all those who conspire against David. Charles-David acts out the role of God<sup>1</sup>—like God he takes' joy in his son who is his own image and his rule is a reflection of God's rule in Eden. Absalom is the false Messiah while Achitophel is Satan. But Absalom is also Adam/Eve misled into rebelling<sup>^</sup> against God. The theme is the eternal one of temptation. Again in Christian theological history, David had always been associated with God and Absalom's rebellion against him had always been interpreted as a type of Lucifer's revolt; by associating Charles with David, Dryden manages to make the rebellion into an analogical re-enactment of the Fall. The poem was written to save civilization from chaos and attains the dignity of an epic.

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## 4.5 □ Textual Annotations

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(a) The following is a key for understanding who is who in the poem and other references:

Aaron's Race: The Clergy (in the Bible, God appointed the descendants of Aaron to be the priests of Jews; here it refers to Christian clerics)

Abbethdin: Lord Chancellor.

Absalom: James Scott, Duke of Monmouth and Buccleugh (1649-1685), the natural son of Charles II and Lucy Walters.

Achitophel: Anthony Ashley Cooper, Earl of Shaftesbury (1621-1683).

Adriel: John Sheffield, Earl of Mulgrave (1648-1721).

Agag: Sir Edmund Berry Godfrey (1621-1678).

Amiel: Edward Seymour (1633-1708).

Annabel: Anne Scott, Countess of Buccleugh. Charles II married her to his son James/Absalom.

Balaam: Theophilus Hastings, Earl of Huntingdon (1650-1701). Barzillai: James Butler, Earl of Ormonde (1610-1688).

Bathsheba: Louise Renee de Keroualle, Duchess of Portsmouth and Aubigny (1649-1734), Charles II's mistress. (In Bible, Bathsheba was David's mistress and later his wife)

Caleb: Forde, Lofd Grey of Werke (Dryden. 1701).

Corah: Titus Dates (1649-1705).

David: Charles II.

Egypt: France. (In Bible, the Jews had been enslaved by Egyptians)

Ethnic Plot: Popish Plot.

Gath: Brussels.

Hebrew Priests: Church of England clergy.

Hebron: Scotland.

Hushai: Laurence Hyde, Earl of Rochester (1641-1711).

Ishbosheth: Richard Cromwell (1626-1712).

Israel: England.

Issachar: Thomas Thynne of Longleat (1648-1682), famous for his wealth.

Jebusites: Roman Catholics.

Jerusalem: London.

Jews: English people. (In the Bible the Jews are described as being chosen by God. Here Dryden cleverly flatters Englishmen by comparing them with the Jews. Since the Jews were notorious for forsaking Jehovah and worshipping gods of other cultures, the comparison with Englishmen who had deposed their lawful king Charles I to have a commonwealth, and even now was agitating against their rightful king to have another heir besides the legal one, is particularly apt).

Jewish Rabbins: Doctors of the Church of England.

Jonas: Sir William Jones (1631-1682).

Jordan: In Bible a river in Israel, here the English seas or the Irish Channel.

Jotham: George Savile, Marquis of Halifax (1633-1695). Levites: Presbyterian ministers displaced by the Act of Uniformity.

Michal: Catherine of Braganza (1638-1705), the childless Queen of Charles II. (The original Michal was the childless Queen of David)

Nadab: William, Lord Howard of Escrick (16267-1694).

Pharaoh: Louis XIV of France.

Sagan of Jerusalem: Bishop of London.

Sanhedrin: Originally a council of Jewish elders. Here it refers to the English Parliament.

Saul: Oliver Cromwell. (In Bible, Saul was David's predecessor and his enemy. David had to hide from him until after his death the Jews made David king. Since Cromwell was the Lord Protector of England while Charles II was in exile and monarchy was restored only after his death, the comparison is particularly apt).

Shimei: Slingsby Bethel (1617-1697).

Sion: London.

Solymean rout: London mob.

Tyre: Holland.

Zadoc: William Sancroft (1617-1693), Archbishop of Canterbury.

Zimri: George Villiers, the second Duke of Buckingham (1628-1687).

(b)

39. Ammon's murder. This may refer to an attack made on Sir John Coventry at Monmouth's instigation after he had criticized the king's affairs.

58. Ishboeth: Oliver Cromwell's son who became Protector for a few months after his death.

66. Golden calf: When Prophet Moses went up the mountain to talk to God, the Jews grew tired of waiting and built a golden calf to worship. Hence the phrase implies turning away from the true God to worship of material things.

231-235. The whole passage is filled with biblical symbols and imagery. In Ishiah, a pillar of cloud and fire are prophesized as signs of God's renewed presence among the Israelities. Absalom is compared with Moses who led the Jews to the Promised Land.

273. Prince of angels: Satan or Lucifer. He was the chief among angels until he rebelled against God and was thrown into Hell. From then on he became Satan, the symbol of evil.

302. Noah's Ark: when the earth was flooded, Noah at the command of God built

an ark where he loaded a pair of every kind of animal to repopulate the world.

334. Dog-Star: Sirius

418. Early Israelites had no king, being supposedly governed by God's law alone. But after some time they clamoured for a ruler. An angry God sent them Saul as their king.

600. Here Dryden wittily turns the biblical injunction of loving one's neighbour as oneself upside down.

624. Towns once burnt refers to London which had burnt down once.

697. Hybla: drops of Hybla honey. Mt Hybla in Sicily was famous for its bees and honey.

955. Samson: Samson the champion of Jews were imprisoned by his enemies the Philistines. They blinded him and cut off his hair which was the source of his magic strength. But in captivity his hair grew. When he was brought out to entertain the Philistines, he pulled down the temple and killed everyone himself included.

1016. Belial and Beelzebub: two prominent devils.

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## 4.6 □ Conclusion/Summing-up

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In this poem Dryden took a contemporary political event whose appeal is limited and which would soon be forgotten in the wider historical canvas, and disguising it as Biblical allegory made it universal. His verse portraits are brilliantly done. By giving the characters Biblical names, Dryden was emphasizing that rebellion against the king and the settled law of succession is as evil as the Biblical revolts against God and Israel. Dryden's main problems were to excuse Charles' faults and respect his love for his son. He did so by constantly presenting Charles/David as God's anointed and deflecting our attention from his faults. The skilful way he does so (for example, by arguing that Charles sexual intrigues are an indication of his generous nature, equating him with sun and making him thus the source of fertility) is a stunning *tour de force*. However, Dryden was not concerned with writing a mere lampoon. Instead we have serious discussions of the relations between subjects and kings, the social contract, the law of succession, the clash between Catholics and Protestants and the poem concludes by upholding absolute monarchy. Charles is presented as a Godlike figure who restores Law and Order. Dryden wrote the poem in heroic couplets. The verse is admirably controlled, variously cadenced, richly rhetorical and vigorous, abounding with epic similes. What Dryden achieved in his satirical poem is to create the mock-heroic style: it mimics the epic style to perfection, maintaining a truly lofty tone throughout. But the judicious use of irony and the conscious lowering of style also produce laughter. Though it is an attack on individuals, yet he always manages to keep control over his passions and never indulged in open invectives. It is this controlled contempt that makes his mockery so

incisive. Above all he could elevate his targets so that he never appears mean-minded. As Lliot once remarked, “Much of Dryden’s unique art consists in his ability to make the small into the great, the prosaic into the poetic, the trivial into the magnificent”. Even as he satirizes, he endows his targets with heroic dimensions. Achitophel is really dangerous, he is the type of intriguers present in every government. Charles/David is truly a heroic, almost divine figure and the conclusion touches epic sublimity. Thus the appeal of the poem becomes universal. Johnson complained that the ending is forced, but in reality the king is a divine figure who only has to command to make his people obey. The poem therefore should be more properly called a comic epic than a mock-epic, with emphasis on the word ‘epic’. In this way Dryden raised the status of satire into an elevated literary form and fixed the direction of English satire for several generations.

“It is in this poem that the satirical possibilities of the heroic conflict are fully revealed for the first time. When Dryden exposes the stinginess of Shingsby Bethel by telling us that.

His Cooks, with long disuse, their Trade forgot;  
Cool was his kitchen, though his Brains were hot...

He writes more grimly of Shaftesbury that he is

For close Designs and Crooked Counsels fit.  
Sagacious, Bold, and Turbulent of wit..

The cadence, the alliteration, the antithesis, and the polysyllabic emphasis of **Sagacious**, **turbulent** and **implacable**, all unite to give the words an air of authority and even of finality. The cumulative effect of a sequence of such couplets is still more devastating...

Finally, Dryden greatly deepened the significance of his poem by finding a biblical parallel for the contemporary situation. When we feel that it has all happened before the present event assumes an increased importance...’Pacsy’, we are told by Bacon ‘is nothing else but feigned history’. By basing his **Absalom and Achitophel** on true history, Dryden served his purpose far more effectively than he could have done if he had invented a fiction of his own. A story, too, that was taken from the Bible had a special sort of prestige, specially for a generation that knew its Bible for better than most of us know our today, and for whom the old Testament was still sacred a book... The biblical parallel gave still greater audacity to the daring wit of the poet who could compare Charles II with King David on the ground that both of them had fathered so many bastards...The contemporary reader had the satisfaction of following Dryden’s ingenious application of ancient history to current events and characters, a satisfaction similar to that which the reader of Pope’s imitations of Horace or Johnson’s imitations of Juvenal obtained from their substitution of modern names for those of ancient Rome.” (James Sutherland, *English Satire*)



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## 4.7 □ Questions with Suggested Answers

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1. Discuss Absalom and Achitophel as a satirical masterpiece, [see 1.3, 1.4, 1.7]
2. Comment on the portraits of characters in the poem that you found specially appealing, [see 1.6]
3. How does Dryden transform contemporary politics into a universal topic? [see 1.4, 1.5, 1.7]
4. What according to you is the secret of success of the poem? Do you think the poem deserves the praise that has been heaped on it? [see 1.5, 1.6, 1.7, 1.9]
5. How does Dryden apply the Bible story to English national affairs in **Absalom and Achitophel**?
6. **Absalom and Achitophel** is a masterpiece of argument in verse. Discuss.

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## 4.8 □ Suggested Readings

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### Biography :

Paul Hammond, *John Dryden: A Literary Life*, 1991. James Anderson Winn, *John Dryden and His World*, 1987.

### Criticism

David Hopkins, *John Dryden*, 1986.

James and Helen Kinsley, *Dryden: The Critical Heritage*, 1971.

Earl Miner, *Dryden's Poetry*, 1967'.

Earl Miner, ed....*John Dryden*, 1972.

John Churton Collins. ed. *The Satires of Dryden*.

H. T. Swedenborg, ed., *Essential Articles for the Study of John Dryden*, 1966.

James A. Winn, ed., *Critical Essays on John Dryden*, 1997.

David Wykes, *A Preface to Dryden*, 1977'.

Steven N. Zwicker, *Dryden's Political Poetry: The Typology of King and Nation*, 1972.

Steven N. Zwicker, *Politics and Language in Dryden's Poetry: The Arts of Disguise*, 1984.

Ian Jack, *Augustan Satire*

*The California Edition of the Works of John Dryden*: Univ. of California Press.

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## **Unit -5 □ Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot: Alexander Pope**

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### **Structure**

- 5.1 Objectives**
- 5.2 General Background**
- 5.3 Alexander Pope : Life & Works**
- 5.4 Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot : Introduction**
  - 5.4.1 Art of Characterization**
  - 5.4.2 Poetic Biography**
  - 5.4.3 Imagery**
  - 5.4.4 Satire**
  - 5.4.5 Style**
- 5.5 Annotations**
- 5.6 Summary**
- 5.7 Questions with Suggested Answers**
- 5.8 Suggested Readings**

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### **5.1 □ Objectives :**

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This unit has several objectives:

- (a) It aims to provide detailed background information about the age and outline of life of Pope.
- (b) It will relate the text *Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot* to the poet's life and discuss it as an autobiographical poem.
- (c) It will critically comment on the various themes present in the text.
- (d) It will discuss the literary qualities of the text and its genre.

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### **5.2 □ General Background**

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The age of Dryden is followed by the age of Pope. It is generally considered to extend from 1700-1744. However one must remember that the Age of Pope comprises only first

half of what is loosely called the Eighteenth century; the second half is termed the Age of Johnson, after Samuel Johnson.

The Restoration of monarchy did not lead to stability as Catholics and Protestants still clashed. The Exclusion Bill crisis was proof that England was neither willing to accept Catholic monarchs nor obey a king blindly. Charles II was followed by his brother James II who was a Catholic. He too believed in the Divine Right of kings and tried to rule arbitrarily. However, he had two popular daughters who were Protestants and were his heirs. The breaking point came when his second wife gave birth to a son who was to be raised as a Catholic. This led to yet another Revolution; but this time: it, was bloodless. The king fled with his son; Parliament officially invited his eldest daughter Mary, married to William of Orange to be the new sovereign. Thus Mary II and William III came to the throne; as price for their support, Parliament promulgated and passed the Bill of Rights which restricted royal power and made the ruling system more democratic. It also ensured that no Catholic can become the monarch—a law that is still in force today. Since this revolution was accomplished without blood and demonstrated the power of the people, it is known as the Glorious Revolution. They had no children and after their death, James' youngest daughter Anne became the Queen. After Anne died issueless, the throne passed on to the House of Hanover, a Protestant German dynasty. Under the rule of its first three kings, George I, George II and George III, England continued to grow more prosperous in spite of unsuccessful insurrections by Jacobins, the supporters of the displaced Stuart dynasty. The power of parliament kept on growing and a centralised bureaucratic government as we see in the modern age developed.

However the Eighteenth Century was more stable and prosperous than the Restoration age. It is generally known as the Augustan age, because of its similarities to the Augustan period of Rome. It is also called the Age of Enlightenment, because of the various intellectual currents of the time that laid the foundations of modern society. A number of scientific discoveries were made which made people visualize the world as an orderly place. Rationalism and decorum came to be valued highly. Two great works during this period is **The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire** (6 volumes, 1776-1788), by Edward Gibbon, which is permeated with distrust of all religious emotions, and **An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding** (1748) by David Hume. Philosophers like Bolingbroke, Shaftesbury, Mandeville. Hume gave varying definitions of virtue and vice, self love and social love. About man more or less the humanists decided that:

1. Human nature is unchanged by time and place and is uniform everywhere.
2. Man is irrational, his nature being fundamentally corrupt and flawed, yet he has a certain dignity.
3. Mind and Imagination are quintessential human attributes.

#### 4. The primary duty of man is moral questioning.

Now that the world was more or less stable and prosperous, the well-to-do did not want any radical changes. Since the enthusiasm of the previous age had led to war and disruption of familial bonds, people now preferred control over passion, harmony and decorum over romantic extravagance. In the religious sphere people preferred a sober view than zeal and we have the rise of Deism which advocated that the natural world is all that is required to know God. Even the language of periodical literature—calm, elegant, urbane .testifies to the new taste. Yet another symptom of this is that most literature of this period is utterly serious and devoted to moral discourse. In the emerging genre of the novel, we see writers trying to preach sober middle-class virtues to the readers. The novelists like Defoe, Richardson, Fielding thought that men are virtuous by nature. They did not deny the existence of physical and moral evils, but they felt that improvement and reform of both the individual and society is possible leading to the re-establishment of the Golden Age. Therefore, the greater part of the Eighteenth Century fiction draws a positive image of man. However, Eighteenth Century poetry has a more dualised vision of man: intellectual yet also an animal; rational yet emotional; fallible yet virtuous and so redeemable.

Another characteristic that marks out the Eighteenth century is how the relation between writers and readers changed. Previously, the arts flourished under private patrons. But by the Eighteenth century a new situation developed. In the first place the readership enlarged with the spread of education. The middle class who insisted on sober virtues and conventional morality now formed the main reading public and it is to them that the writers catered. Politics also played a role. Since politicians were elected, they appointed writers to publicise their views. People of various classes also mingled in the coffee houses leading to increased fraternisation between the two. This in its turn led to patronage of writers and poets by political leaders, but such patronage was due to party politics and personal friendships, rather than literary merit. It also led to the growth of the subclass known as hack-writers or Grub-street writers, who wrote for pay a situation denounced by Pope and his circle as detrimental to culture. However, by the time of George III, the party system had developed in which rewards went to politicians rather than to scholars, so that state patronage disappeared. The coffee houses also broke up, so that opportunities of fraternisation lessened. However, there were already booksellers through whom the author could make money. It is symptomatic of both the changing social system and the decay of the patronage system that Pope became the first writer to successfully make his living by the pen,

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### 5.3 □ Alexander Pope : Life & Works

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Alexander Pope was born in London on May 21, 1688, to a linen merchant. He laboured under serious disadvantages from the start. His family was Roman Catholic: at that

time the English government had placed serious financial and legal disabilities on Catholics which forced Pope's father to move out of London to the countryside. As a Catholic he could not attend an English university; though he received some schooling from Catholic institutions, he was largely self-taught. He was also unfortunate in contracting tuberculosis of spine from his wet nurse. Throughout his life he remained short, physically weak and rather ugly; a normal family life was impossible for him. People, particularly his enemies made cruel fun of him on account of this.

His literary career began with the translation of classical writers. He soon attracted attention from influential men of letters and poems followed in quick succession. His earliest published works is the elegant Pastorals. In *An Essay on Criticism* he discusses the functions of a true critic and how poetry should be written. *Windsor Forest* is a landscape poem combining nature description with politics and a moral vision of Utopian England. Discussions about morality continues in his *Moral Essays* and *Satires*. But his most didactic and mature philosophical poem is *An Essay on Man*. However his two mock-epic poems are the most well known. One is *The Rape of the Lock* a delightfully crafted satire on the theft of a lady's lock of hair treated in the epic style. The other is *The Dunciad*, where he powerfully attacks the bad poets of his day and predicts how the loss of education and culture would lead to the return of chaos. On the other hand he was also capable of composing a love poem in the gothic style as in *Eloisa to Abelard*. He also did a number of translations of classical works. Indeed with translation of Homer, Pope gained financial independence—the first author in English literature to be a commercial success. Today his translation is not read, but to his readers it summed up the very essence of the Augustan age—Pope's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* focus not on glory, but on milder virtues and the characters speak in the tones of Eighteenth Century intellectuals interested in philosophy, politics and ethics. Though Pope did not receive any official honours because he opposed the corrupt government of his day, in the later portion of his career he was considered to be the unofficial laureate of England.

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## 5.4 □ Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot: Introduction

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Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot is addressed apparently to his good friend Arbuthnot. But it is largely an account of his poetic career and his reasons for choosing satire as a medium to correct the evils of society. The great Roman satirists Horace and Juvenal had each defended their actions in verse formally, and this is what Pope does. Arbuthnot while dying made it a last request that “you continue in that noble disdain and abhorrence of vice, which you seem naturally endued with, but still with a due regard to your own safety”. Pope replied back that it would be as he had said. But he defended himself by saying that in times of general vice it is of no use to write general satire. Only if some individuals are pilloried

might others be deterred. He hastily published the poem, in 1735 before Arbuthnot died. It is a compilation of various verses he had written before in the heat of the moment, but now produced as an integrated harmonious whole. In the Advertisement to the first edition of the poem he explains, ‘This paper is a sort of bill of complaint, begun many years since, and drawn up by snatches, as the several occasions offered. I had no thoughts of publishing it, till it pleased some persons of rank and fortune (the authors of Verses to the Imitator of Horace, and of an Epistle to a Doctor of Divinity from a Nobleman at Hampton Court) to attack, in a very extraordinary manner, not only my writings (of which, being public, the Public is judge) but my Person, Morals, and Family, whereof, to those who know me not, a truer information may be requisite. Being divided between the necessity to say some thing of myself, and my own laziness to undertake so awkward a task, I thought it the shortest way to put the last hand to this Epistle. If it have anything pleasing, it will be that by which I am most desirous to please, the Truth and the Sentiment; and if anything offensive, it will be only to those I am least sorry to offend, the vicious or the ungenerous. Many will know th.eir own pictures in it, there being not a circumstance but what is true; but I have, for the most part, spared their Names, and they may escape being laughed at, if they please. I would have some of them know, it was owing to the request of the learned and candid Friend to whom it is inscribed that ‘I make not as free use of theirs as they have done of mine. However, I shall have this advantage, and honour, on my side, that whereas, by their proceeding, any abuse may be directed at any man, no injury can possibly be done by mine, since a nameless character can never be found out, but by its Truth and Likeness’. The attack on him was orchestrated by Lord Hervey and Lady Mary Montague, once his friends but now his bitter enemies.

John Arbuthnot (1667-1735): Scottish author and scientist, court physician (1705-14) to Queen Anne. He is best remembered for his five “John Bull pamphlets” (1712), political satires on the Whig war policy, which introduced the character John Bull, the typical Englishman. He was .deeply admired for both his professional skill and his kindness and loyalty. With his friends, Swift, Pope, and Gay, Arbuthnot was a member of the Scriblerus Club, which was devoted to satirizing pretensions to literary greatness and false tastes. He contributed a great deal to **Memoirs of...Martinus Scriblerus**, first published in the quarto edition of Pope’s works (1741). He was also be author of several progressive medical works. Johnson said of him. “I think Dr. Arbuthnot the first man among them. He was the most universal genius, being an excellent physician, a man of deep learning and a man of much humour. “Thackeray called him “one of the wisest, wittiest, most accomplished” of men.

#### **5.4.1 Art of Characterization:**

Pope was a master of characterization, of both good and bad characters. However, he was careful to insist that his characters are not real individuals but only types. The

Augustan age was a believer in universal quality of man and stressed essential human nature over individual eccentricities. Pope therefore followed a well-trod path in his characterization. Added to this is the fact that he regarded himself as a satirist whose business was to correct the world. When he chose individual targets of his satire, he naturally chose his personal enemies. However, these portraits need not be always true to life. This is not due to any chicanery on Pope's part, but due to the fact that the exigencies of satire demanded that the individuals be transformed into something more. The portraits are not untrue, but they are also public icons—this is what must be remembered when we analyze his characters.

**Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot** contains three detailed portraits—that of Atticus, Bufo and Sporus. Atticus represents the type of literary dictator and coterie leader. In real life he is Joseph Addison. Pope's relationship with him was a complex one. When Pope first appeared on the London literary scene he was warmly welcomed by Addison and the two became friends. However Addison praised Ambrose Philip's **Pastorals** preferring it to Pope's, though Pope's was artistically superior. Moreover, Addison in 1715 had managed to welcome both Pope's **Iliad** and Tickell's rival translation, a hypocrisy that enraged Pope, also Addison had prodded Tickell to do bring out a 'Whig' translation and thus his literary judgment is perverted by political sentiments. It is on these grounds Pope attacks him. Maynard Mack in his biography points out that both were vain, sensitive to criticism, and devious in publicizing themselves. However, they were also opposites in many ways. In the literary portrait itself however it would be more useful to regard Atticus as Dustin Griffins does—that Atticus is a kind of anti-self to Pope: a real or imagined other against whom he could thrust and assert himself.

Pope actually begins with praise of Atticus. He has true genius, is charming to all, and is easy and polished in his writing and conversation. Yet all these graces are marred by vanity and concomitant insecurity. He could not brook any rival to his fame. Nevertheless he did not have the courage to attack a rival openly. So he would pretend to be a friend and stab others behind their back. He would "Damn with faint praise, assent with civil leer, And without sneering, teach the rest to sneer". His praise of a rival's work was so faint that people would realize he is being courteous and though he never traduced anyone, he influenced others by his behaviour to mock. He neither blamed nor commended—the former for fear of anyone censuring him, the latter for fear of raising up a rival. Indeed he was so insecure that he feared even fools and constantly surrounded himself with flatterers. Though he pretended to please all, he never actually obliged anyone. Atticus with his coterie is compared with Cato: "Like Cato, give his little senate laws, And sit attentive to his own applause". It was a double hit—it paints Atticus as a politician who gets laws passed by a pliant/senate; it also pointedly refers to Addison's play *Cato*. He pronounces literary judgements without considering their artistic or moral merit and is applauded by his hand-picked sycophants. Thus Atticus/Addison becomes the archetype of civilized treachery, the man of culture who lacks moral courage. He betrays his obligations as a critic. The

perversion is made even worse by the fact that he does possess true genius. This is what makes honest men watching his antics laugh and weep at the same time: Atticus' cowardice and attempts to 'do in' rivals is comic; but his squandering of his god-given gifts is tragic.

Bufo in real life is the earl of Halifax, a statesman who was known as a patron of poets. Though he had offered Pope a pension Pope had refused it. In the poem he is the symbol of the undiscerning patron and a bad poet. The mass of the world cannot tell the true poet from those pretending to be one. Bufo is one of them, but being rich and having literary pretensions, he wishes to patronize poets and so spreads his largesse without discrimination. Since his liberality is dictated not by critical judgement but his personal preferences, it is inevitable that talented poets would be neglected by him. Bufo is described as being as proud as Apollo, the god of poetry. As ancient poets dedicated poems to Apollo, so too modern scribblers dedicated poems to him hoping for his patronage. But of course this human Apollo has nothing to be proud of. He filled his library with books and statues of dead poets, but since he appreciated only undistinguished wits, it is doubtful whether he actually read any of the books. The point is further stressed in his having a 'headless' bust of Pindar. As Pope is besieged by favour seekers, so too Bufo is surrounded by hacks who praised him and his possessions; but unlike Pope who is conscious of the importance of good literature, Bufo patronized them all. But he could be frugal as well, thus adding the sin of niggardliness to his other flaws. That his judgement cannot be trusted is proved by the fact that he ignored Dryden. Yet though he would not help Dryden in his poverty he donated generously for a magnificent funeral to demonstrate he appreciated poets. This is because people like Bufo are more interested in poets who could cater to their whims—defend a politician, attack someone, flatter him. Thus Bufo is the typical patron who is devoid of critical taste, miserly yet foolishly extravagant, encouraging flattery and bad poetry. Pope makes it a point that seeing patrons like these he has decided not to accept patronage.

The most venomous picture is that of Sporus. He is based on Lord Hervey, a powerful politician who had once been Pope's ally but now was a personal enemy. Sporus was the name of one of Nero's eunuchs, whom he later married. In calling Hervey by this name Pope is pointing out his bisexuality and his position in the court as the Queen's favourite. Arbuthnot tries to restrain him from attacking Sporus because he is not worth the effort.—it would be like torturing a butterfly on a wheel: just as the butterfly would not be able to feel pain, so too Sporus is so destitute of sensibility that he could not even feel the sting of satire. But this only provokes Pope the more..The insect imagery connects Sporus with the swarm of scribblers who plagued Pope. This insect may appear to be prettier than others, but it is only gilded, not golden. Its paint cannot conceal the dirt underneath. Like a gadfly he can irritate better people than him but lacks ability to appreciate either beauty or wit. He is like a cringing spaniel who does what he had trained to do. A pet spaniel does not dare to bite game, so too though Sporus drools he does not dare to do anything.



He is compared with a shallow river that ripples gently but has no depth. Throughout the •emphasis is on Sporus' impotence contrasted with pope's 'manly ways'—an attack on Sporus' sexuality. Now Pope attacks his speech. Hervey was Walpole's spokesman in the House of Commons. He is painted as a ventriloquist's dummy and then as a toad in the ear of Queen Caroline. The latter picture is drawn directly from the image of Milton's Satan as a toad tempting Eve into evil. He is ready always with lies and blasphemies and poetry—whatever profits him the most. His intelligence is unsteady and he himself is “one vile antithesis”. Satan had been painted with an angel's face and a reptile's body—that is how Sporus must be regarded. He has a beauty of its own, but is untrustworthy. He has neither wit nor pride, but is vicious and deceitful.

The portrait of Sporus is savage in its denunciation, comparable only with Dryden's attacks on Zimri and Corah. Whereas the portrait of Atticus is civil, and Bufo's is expressed in comparatively polite language, here Pope lets go of all discretion to indulge in personal feelings. But precisely because the feeling is so intense here that the portrait is so vivid. Sporus is both deceived and a deceiver, a fool and a betrayer, and as such deserves no mercy. He acts different parts like Zimri—only he is not mad, but calculating. He is false in every breath. His bisexuality is indicated as an inability to commit himself to any cause: even Nature had made him rootless. Throughout animal imagery is used: from butterfly to bug, to dog, to load, to serpent—it is comparable with Milton's degradation of Satan was plain: as Satan took the shape of a toad to tempt Eve so too Hervey misguides the Queen. He is the antithesis of everything that is good and decent: his heart is corrupted; his creeping wit and “pride that licks the dust” is plainly a reference to Satan who took the shape of a serpent. Thus Sporus becomes the archetype of fawning courtier and sycophantic hanger-on. He is directly contrasted with the satirist who is nobody's tool and has no vanity. The satirist consciously serves a cause greater than himself, whereas Sporus' connection is with filth.

However, it must be understood that though personal animus dictated the portraits, they are not confined to the topical. All three are antitypes of Pope. Atticus is a talented writer like Pope. But he is desperate for praise and envious of rivals unlike Pope. So he had given up his identity, too concerned with what others think of him. Bufo is an empty headed vain patron who has no identity left. Sporus is more dangerous than the others. While they are passive, he is mobile; Bufo feeds on others; Sporus is a satirist turned scandal monger: Pope is none of them. Instead he is the self-dependent poet and moral teacher.

At the background is the vast mob of nameless faceless scribblers. The poem begins with their description. They pursue the poet eagerly hoping to have him help them. The poet regards them as madmen who rave and roam the land. No matter where the poet tries to hide, they seek him out: land, water, road, church, walls, nothing can hinder them. The poet

regards them as a plague, as a swarm of insects. Pope gives a brief sketch of various types of would-be poets, some wish the poet to edit their works, some for a loan, some offer a bride, even previous enemies apologize and shamelessly ask for favours. Pope compares a scribbler with a spider spinning his cobweb. Pope's disdain for grub street hucksters come out plainly here. However there is a long description of how lesser poets fawn on him embarrassing him. by comparing him with great classical geniuses.

What is amazing in Pope's characterization is how compressed his pictures are. He brilliantly uses allusions, epithets and similes to make his point. In the process we are given pictures of enduring types. Though based on real people, they have wider implications. Pope manages to make them individuals as well. However he is not primarily a poet of characterization as Browning is. His aim in satire is to create characters that are recognizable in all times and all places.

#### **5.4.2 Poetic Biography/Idealized Portrait of Himself**

**Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot** is a brilliant piece of satire. But it is also something more. It is an autobiography of himself in verse. Just as in a later age. Wordsworth wrote **The Prelude or Growth of a Poet's Mind**, so too this poem's subtitle can easily be Growth of a Satirist. It is poetic biography in a special sense, imitating Horace and Dryden's style. However, like all autobiographers. Pope is perhaps anxious to leave behind a favourable account of himself. So what we have here is an idealized portrait of himself as the virtuous satirist.

The Epistle falls into three sections. From line 1-124 he expresses his disgust at the scribblers and fawners who make his life miserable. The poem begins highly dramatically with Pope calling on his servant to shut the door in an effort to gain privacy. He is angry; the repeated caesuras used in the lines expresses his indignation. Even the boundaries of his property fail to protect him from the madmen. The would-be poets relentlessly pursue him. Nothing can shame them or deter them. In desperation he asks Arbuthnot for medicine to make them disappear but it is in vain. The verses are packed with interjection, thrust and counterthrust. We recognize in the scribblers the modern equivalent of celebrity hunters and tabloid journalists! However their very presence is significant: they consolidate his own pre-eminent position.

The poet regards himself as an injured innocent; he had not hurt anyone by his poetry and starts naming people in higher reaches of society who are so thick-skinned that they are unaffected by his jibes. Arbuthnot attempts to restrain him as he had done in his letter but such restraints only fan his ire higher. Flattery of fools is like the saliva of a mad dog which is venomous. Such attacks forces Pope to publicly defend himself. This is the crux of the poem: he is not giving an account of his career out of vain-glorious motive, but to clear himself of malicious accusations and protect his friends and family a noble motive is

thus attributed to the poem.

From line 125 we have an autobiographical account clearly idealized. He begins by wondering why he became a poet. It was something instinctive, for even as a child he 'lisp'd in numbers'. He defends himself.

I left no calling for this idle trade,  
No duty broke, no father disobey'd.  
The Muse but served to ease some friend, not wife,  
To help me through this long disease, my life,

He had not quarreled with his family in order to become a poet or even written poetry to court a beloved. At most it brought some consolation in his wretched life. Again and again he stresses that his writing of poetry is motivated not by love of exterior gain, but by an inner compulsion. Similarly he published his poems not for self-aggrandizement but because men of letters praised them.

He protests that his first poems attacked no one, yet he was attacked by less gifted and more malicious critics and poets. Pope's view of his career as Leslie Stephen points out suggests a problem—why is so inoffensive a man the butt of such hatred? Pope answers it himself: this is because dull people hate men of genius. He insists that he does not attack someone for personal reasons but because the target is the representative of vice. From line 147-192, he vigorously defends himself against charges brought against him and strives to show he loves a quiet modest life, and is a foe only to liars. Critics like Denis and Gildon attacked him without reason but he kept his patience. He excused them on the grounds that they needed to earn a living or were not in their right minds. When a sober critic correctly pointed out his faults, Pope accepted his criticism. Yet this becomes Pope's launching pad for attacking all those he regarded as bad critics and poets. A bad critic is one who is more concerned with textual details and emendation than with the spirit of the works. He specifically names Bentley and Theobald as guilty of this, because both had criticized his work. Such critics may append their names to the edition of great writers like Shakespeare and Milton, but that is akin to finding impurities like hair or insects embedded in amber. The other poets who had abused him is dismissed on the grounds that they have no objective standards to judge literature: they either strain themselves to produce barren verse, or produce nonsense or writes poetry that reads like prose.

Having deposed of lesser mortals Pope now moves in to attack three persons who had injured him and the public the most—Atticus, Bufo, Sporus. [see the analysis of-characters of the three in 1.4].

As a contrast to them Pope paints a picture of himself as virtuous and sober. His only desire is to be his own man, "Oh let me live my own, and die so too!". He is independent doing only what pleases him. Unlike Atticus he does not strive to please anyone else. In

a hit at Bufo he declares that he has no need for any patrons. He is not a man for intrigues either. He believed in leading a simple life, paying all his debts, reciting his prayers like a devout man and sleeping peacefully without worrying about his critics or his next composition. For him life has other joys and he is scornful of detractors and admirers alike who pigeonhole him. Now he moves on to explain the nature of satire and distinguish it from slander. A poet who tells lies about others, or insults good people without cause, who defends no friend is a liar. By implication Pope stresses that he is not such a poet. His lash is meant only to correct and will not be dreaded by an honest man. This ties him to what he has written earlier about his attitude to critics—if the critic is correct then he accepted criticism without demur. Thus again he emphasizes that he is a man without vanity or malice—two things of which satirists, and himself, personally have been accused of.

From line 134, the tone changes, as Pope launches on to another magnificent description of himself, who is also the ideal virtuous man. He never worshipped fortune nor hungered for money, he never flattered anyone. The purpose of writing poetry was to preach morality. It was not fame that he wanted, but to be virtue's champion. He endured all calumnies, all threats, all libels against his name, all abuses on people he loved—yet he has no regrets because his life is dedicated to virtue. This portion is the most moral and moving, because Pope was desperately trying not only to project his idealized image, but perhaps also trying to persuade himself that this is what he is. In the final portion of the poem Pope sets up his father as the virtuous ideal as against the corrupt scribblers and mercenary peers. His father was not arrogant, he was not a fanatic whether in politics or religion, never lied, knew no sophistry, was always honest and sober, wise, healthy and he died a tranquil painless death. It is such a life that Pope wishes to lead, for it will be a happier life than that of kings. The poem ends on an exquisitely tender note as Pope wishes to take care of his mother and begging heaven to spare Arbuthnot.

One characteristic that distinguishes this poem from other autobiographical poems is that this is public poetry. Unlike Romantics this is not confessional. Instead Pope deliberately sets out to project a particular vision of himself. He is the first poet perhaps who set up his own Public Relation department and deliberately managed his own image through literary media. There seems to be two overriding reasons for this. One is the caricature his enemies produced of him. They lampooned him as an asp, an ape, a spider, a hunchbacked monster. The second is money—he was marketing not only his goods but also his image to persuade customers to buy his books. This image by necessity would extend to posterity also, a mark left on the world by a man who is unable to leave any other physical evidence.

In his previous poems, Pope had given a certain vision of man as a generous creature. He constantly rails against the wealthy who squander their money or spend it selfishly. Timon is the picture of profligacy. Burlington on the other hand builds not for his own glory but to strengthen the nation. Pope is pragmatic enough to understand through his own

circumstances that money alone allowed one to be independent of social ties leading to effective disinterested public works. That is the mould in which Pope cast himself—the independent enlightened philanthropist. Avarice of all kinds are rejected in a series of denials, from lines 334-59. Coming immediately after the picture of the vile fawning Sporus, it creates a noble dignified Pope. This Pope has worked hard, kept his integrity, did not aspire to greatness—yet he had become prosperous, built up sufficient social status, and is highly moral throughout his life. Above all he emphasizes his moral and financial independence—to him they two are necessarily linked. His fundamental loyalty was to virtue alone and so he denies any party loyalty in the age of bitter partisanship. He is aloof from all this. He is th'e embodiment of propriety, had been generous and censorious according to context, and constantly loyal to his principles—he has nothing to reproach himself with.

We must however contrast this picture with the reality. As a Roman Catholic the Pope family was subject to greater taxation, denied any government post and more financially deprived. In his letters Pope is always anxious about investments and often asks his friends to help buy him an annuity. Far from regarding money-matters as something distasteful, he played the stock market. He also used the subscription method cleverly and grew wealthy. During his translation of *Odyssey*, he had not told anyone that two others had collaborated in it-; this cast doubts about his integrity. Pope is actually money conscious, but he felt he ought not to be—this creates a tension between reality and the public image. This tension is manifested in his insistence simultaneously on the filthy nature of money and its necessity. Nor were his interactions with literary critics as innocent as he claimed. He had first criticized Dennis—though justifiably—which had led to a lasting quarrel between them. Bentley and Theoblad were good scholars who do not deserve such attacks merely because they criticized certain aspects of Pope's works. Pope was sensitive to criticism in spite of his pretence and he was capable of—as his pen-portraits of people who had offended him show—of venomous enmity. However in the poem he projects himself as the calm, temperate, reasonable, man—the ideal Augustan gentleman. He did the same with his private letters: before publishing them he re-edited them to present himself as a man of dignity.

Critics have called this poem Pope's apologia. But the reader must take some pains if he is to comprehend it. In the first place, some knowledge of the important events and people in the poet's life must be known. Secondly, it tells us not what Pope actually was but how he wanted others to think of him. Nevertheless, the discrepancy does not take away the poem's greatness—either as a satire, or as the portrait of what a virtuous man should be like. The poem ends where it begins in home, but this time not in flight but with assurance that it is in the home alone where true virtues exist. The Epistle is both personal and universal, turning ephemeral events into enduring monuments.

### 5.4.3 Imagery

One of the chief devices used by Pope to make the Epistle vigorous and united is his imagery. Various kinds of imagery run throughout the poem; each one is a unit by itself, yet together they create an organic whole.

The most memorable imagery is that of animals. The first striking imagery is that of the scribbler as a spider. A spider spins a cobweb which is thin and dirty; if it is broken he spins it a new. Similarly the hack writers produce their works that are equally flimsy and dirty, in the sense of being devoid of all artistic merit. If their work is condemned, they happily produce yet more works consisting of lies and sophistry. Thus the favour-seekers who through around Pope are nothing more than a swarm of irritating insects; probably the implied comparison was partly suggested by the fact that most of these hack writers lived and worked in the place named Grubstreet. A flatterer is compared with a mad dog; just as the saliva of a rabid dog is dangerous, so too the flattery of fools is more dangerous to the poet's peace of mind than outright condemnation.

The most brilliant use of imagery occurs in the description of Sporus. Arbuthnot calls him a colourless thing made from ass milk—his whiteness indicates he is of no consequence. Then Arbuthnot compares him with a butterfly. This image has a double purpose. A butterfly looks very beautiful and painted on the outside, but is very frail. Similarly, Lord Hervey is very pretty, almost feminine in his looks, but has no sensibility. Pope does not even call him a butterfly; instead he sneers at him as a bug with filded wings, as a painted child of dirt. Both 'gilded' and 'painted' refer to the Hervey/Sporus' use of cosmetics. Just as in spite of its beauty the insect is still born of filth and feeds on dirt, so too Sporus in spite of all his looks and graceful manners remains a corrupt creature at heart. The insect imagery connects Sporus with the swarm of scribblers who plagued Pope. This insect may appear to be prettier than others, but it is only gilded, not golden. Its paint cannot conceal the dirt underneath. Like a gadfly he can irritate better people than him but lacks ability to appreciate either beauty or wit. He is like a cringing spaniel who does what he had trained to do, but has not the courage for anything else. A pet spaniel does not dare to bite game, so too though Sporus drools he does not dare to do anything. He is compared with a shallow river that ripples gently but has no depth. Throughout the emphasis is on Sporus' impotence contrasted with Pope's 'manly ways'—an attack on Sporus' sexuality. Finally he is compared with a toad whispering blandishments at Queen Caroline's ears. The latter picture is drawn directly from the image of Milton's Satan as a toad tempting Eve into evil. Satan had been painted with an angel's face and a reptile's body—that is how Sporus must be regarded. From butterfly to bug, to dog, to toad, to serpent, to Satan—thus Sporus is degraded and his viciousness immortalized.

Representation of Atticus and Bufo. [sec 1.4]

There is also a brief passage where Pope mocks his flatterers who try to compare him with other literary greats. They eagerly tell him that his cough is like Horace's, that his deformed body resembles Alexander's, his nose is like Ovid's. Such comparisons are meant to flatter him, but all it does is to make him conscious about his defects. So he sarcastically says that when he would be ill they should tell him that this was how Virgil suffered, after his death they would say that Homer also died in the same manner. Here the comparisons are taken to their extremes to show how ridiculous they are. The images are concrete and vivid.

But Pope is also capable of producing equally forceful portraits of people he loves. His parents' portraits are examples. They had been born in gentle families but not so noble as to be meaninglessly proud of their lineage or quarrelling with other families over material wealth and status. His father did not marry a noble wife to enhance his status and thereby bring discord into the family. He was not a fanatic about any Cause though it was an age of bitter partisanship. He never sued anyone, always kept his promise, never lied, knew no sophistry, was honest by nature and died peacefully. Pope speaks more movingly of his mother as being sick. He prays that he would be allowed 'To rock the cradle of reposing age'; the image inverts the common picture of a mother rocking the cradle of her child and so is unexpectedly poignant. He would cheer his mother and pray that she would not die. Both portraits by their very nature lack the sharp sting of attacks on Pope's enemies, yet we can visualize both clearly.

Though concrete images convey maximum intensity, Pope can soar aloft with his abstract images as well. From line 334-359, we have a splendid description of what the virtuous poet should be like, as embodied in himself. It begins with a series of negations:

Not fortune's worshipper, nor fashion's fool,  
Not lucre's madman, nor ambition's tool,  
Not proud, nor servile;

In short he is the antithesis of everything Atticus, Bufo or Sporus is and by negating he is asserting his own virtues. He did not care what other people thought of him. He was not greedy for money, nor for political power. He was not proud or servile: he had struck the nice balance of modesty and sense of self-worth. He pleased by behaving as a proper man should—again the term 'manly' is a hit against the effeminate Sporus. He never flattered, never lied. Then followed a list of tribulations he had withstood. The enemy, the false friend, the coxcomb, the harsh critic, the lampooners, those who attributed to him trashy poems not his, "the dull, the proud, the wicked and the mad",—he kept his patience and served Virtue alone.

The whole poem, both a personal attack and a didactic discourse, succeeds mostly because of Pope's skilful handling of imagery. Though the reader might not be aware of

it, it is the images that unify the poem and impress the theme upon our minds. Byron points out about Sporus' portrait, "there is hardly a line from which a painting might not be made".

#### **5.4.4 Satire**

The poem belongs to the long tradition of defence of satire. Horace and Juvenal had formally written in their verse about their profession. This poem, too, was intended to be a defence of Pope's personal character and it explains why he had become a satirist. In his advertisement to the poem he emphasizes the composite nature of the collection. He is publishing it only because some persons of rank and fortune, i.e. Lord Hervey and Lady Mary Montague attacked him personally. He pretends there is no personal enmity here and gives an idealized image of himself. It must be remembered that to Pope satire was simply not a chance to abuse his enemies. Pope saw satire as a corrective. He wrote in a letter that his satires will have more morality than wit and grow graver. In the process a topical satire becomes universal.

The Epistle opens with the poet seeking refuge from scribblers and fawners who make his life miserable. The poem begins highly dramatically with Pope calling on his servant to shut the door in an effort to gain privacy. It is an informal dialogue and the reader immediately participates in his anger and disgust. He is angry, with the repeated caesuras used in the lines expressing his indignation. Even the boundaries of his property fail to protect him from the madmen. The would-be poets relentlessly pursue him. Nothing can shame them or deter them. In desperation he asks Arbuthnot for medicine to make them disappear, but it is in vain. The verses are packed with interjection, thrust and counter-thrust. Bedlam and Parnassus are wittily juxtaposed—pretenders to reason and pretenders to poetry are one. They are compared with spiders spinning dirty cobwebs. However their very presence is significant: they consolidate his own pre-eminent position and provide a contrast.

#### **Portraits of Atticus, Bufo, Sporus. [see 1.4]**

Contrasted to these miserable creatures are the portrait of himself and his father as the ideal virtuous men. Since Pope regarded satire as a corrective, it would not do to merely chasten others, a model must be provided to follow as well, [see 1.6]

The satire is both general and particular. On one level the besieged poet is certainly the actual poet. But he is only one of the poem's voices. Another is Arbuthnot himself, another is the idealized poet, still another is the classical satirist. This is in the mould of Horace and Juvenal. Horace is urbane and witty, always good humoured, trying to cajole men into laughing at vices and correcting themselves. Juvenal is angry and violent, more inclined to denounce than cajole the readers. Epistle to Dr Arbuthnot seems to be a combination of the two, though Pope saw it as an imitation of Horace.

#### **5.4.5 Style**

Pope is considered to be one of the most polished craftsmen in English literature.



Many denounce him because he is nothing like the Romantic% and think that lacking passion he is only as Arnold commented a classic of prose. Yet we must remember also Johnson's enthusiasm, "If Pope be not a poet, where is poetry to be found?" Pope's greatness lies in his style, which is far more sophisticated than Dryden's. His medium and material seem to be perfectly suited to one another. What marks out Pope's poetry is his wit. Similarly **Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot** demands 'judgement' and appreciation of the way language is manipulated.

The poem was originally a composite collection of snatches of verses written at various limes. For example, he had written his verses on Atticus/Addison a long time ago and since then had been on civil terms with him: when the poem was published his mother had already passed away. Yet after Pope had finished his polishing, it gains a central theme and unity which is all the more potent for not being overly stated. The theme is that of personal integrity. Pope is defending his own moral character as much as he is attacking others, they are there for contrast. He explains that he is forced to become a satirist because of honour and not malice. The poem is organic in the sense it shows the development of a satirist. The poet shows how he was attracted to poetry, how he was praised, how he was traduced and how he never swerved from Virtue. Earlier poems were more static defining the nature of a thing, as in *Essay on Criticism*, but this one deals with the process of becoming.

Pope uses a number of literary devices like ambiguity, literary allusions, and figures of speech. Some of his lines are plainly sarcastic, as the hanger-on who is "happy to catch me just at dinner time". But several of his statements do not express his feelings unequivocally as in the witty juxtaposition of Bedlam and Parnassus, or about the would be poet who was "obliged by hunger" to write poems, or whether he is entirely serious when he says, he "can sleep without a poem in my head". Another potent weapon are the allusions. Bufo' for example means toad which connects him with the later image of Sporus and makes him ridiculous. Sporus was an eunuch whom Nero married—a palpable hit at Hervey's ambiguous sexuality. The Dog-Star was supposed to bring down lunacy. Atticus is compared with Cato, playing on the fact that Addison had written a tragedy called **Cato**. Even a pun brings out the poet's wit as in "much bemused in beer"—ordinarily bemused means confounded, but muses are also goddesses of poetry and so bemused is a witty way of implying that the poem is so nonsensical that it must have been written while drunk. The whole poem is filled with allusions of this kind. Of course to get the full impact the reader needs to understand the references. Yet while detailed knowledge increases appreciation it is necessary to enjoy the comedy. Again figures of speech like irony, chiasmus and antithesis are used with great effect. For example, lines like: Not fortune's worshipper, nor fashion's fool,/Not lucre's madman, nor ambition's tool/Not proud, nor servile..." assert the poet's positive qualities through a series of negations and thereby makes it more forceful. The heroic couplet is here brought to perfection.

The poem has the unity and style proper to its kind, as a Horatian Epistle. It is written in the form of both an Epistle and a dialogue, mingling the qualities of both. It is urbane and witty, vividly personifying actual people under other names, yet turning personal concerns into universal and eternal topics. The poem begins dramatically, gathers tempo, rises to a climax and then descends, finally ending in a picture of peace focusing on Pope's parents. The readers journey from exasperation to disgust to composure—from denunciation of the corrupt reality to the ideal.

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## 5.5 □ Annotations

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Introduction: Neque sermionibus vulgi..."...you will not any longer attend to the vulgar mob's gossip nor put your trust in human rewards for your deeds: virtue, through her own charms, should lead you to true glory. Let what others say about you be their concern; whatever it is, they will say it anyway" (Cicero, *De Republica*, VI, 23).

1: good John: Pope's servant John Serle.

2: Dog-star: Sirius. It is associated with madness with the August rehearsals of poetry in Juvenal's Rome.

4: Bedlam: an insane asylum in London; Parnassus: mountain sacred to the Muses (goddesses of arts and sciences) and Apollo (the god of poetry)

13: the Mint: a sanctuary for insolvent debtors (so called because Henry VIII's mint had been there). On Sundays the debtors were allowed to come out without being arrested.

21: Twit'nam: Pope's home at Twickenham.

23: Arthur: Arthur Moore (16667-1730) was a politician, whose son James Moore Smythe (1702-1734), a writer, had used some of Pope's verses in a play, *The Rival Ladies* (1727). Later, he collaborated in a poem attacking Pope. Smythe is also said to have been a leader of English freemasonry (cf. line 98).

25: Comus: from Latin cornu, a horn. Thus it refers to any cuckold. It can refer to Sir Robert Walpole, whose wife left him in 1734.

40: Keep...nine years: This was Horace's advice in his **Ars Poetica**.

41: high in Drury lane: living in a garret in Drury lane. Drury Lane was a place of bad reputation where actors, prostitutes and shady types lived.

43: before Term ends: the end of the summer law court terms, which coincided with the close of the London publishing season.

49: Pitholeon: According to Pope the name taken from a foolish poet at Rhodes, who pretended to be a Greek scholar..

53: Curll: Edmund Curll (1675-1747), a publisher accused of spreading sedition and pornography. He and Pope were enemies.

62: Lintot: Barnaby Bernard Lintot (1675-1736), a bookseller, who published most of Pope's earlier works.

66: go snacks: "to divide profits"

69: Midas: legendary king of Phrygia. He was given the golden touch until he renounced it. Apollo gave him ass's ears for having awarded the prize in a musical contest between Apollo and Pan to Pan. Various his minister, his barber or his Queen revealed the secret.

85: Codrus: a traditional name for a bad poet, borrowed from Juvenal. 97: Colley: Colley Cibber a moralizing critic who wrote against the theatre.

98: Henley: John Henley (1692-1756), a preacher, who delivered a sermon celebrating the trade of the butcher.

99: Bavius: a Roman poet who Horace and Virgil, and so was attacked by them.

100. Philips: Ambrose Philips (1675-1749), a pastoral poet, Philip's Pastorals had been attacked by Pope.

101: Sappho:-Greek lesbian poetess of the seventh century B. C. The name is applied to Lady Mary Wortley Montagu.

113: my Letters: Curll had published without permission some of Pope's letters to his friends. 114.

117: Ammon's great son: Alexander the Great. 122: Maro: Virgil.

135-141: Granville: George Granville, Baron Lansdowne (1667-1735), who had encouraged Pope in his early years. Garth: Sir Samuel Garth (1661-1719), poet and physician to George I. His *Dispensary* (1699) is one of the earliest example of mock-heroic in English. Talbot: Charles Talbot, Duke of Shrewsbury (1660-1718), Somers: John Somers, Baron Somers (1651-1716) Whig statesman, who encouraged Pope in writing of the Pastorals. Sheffield: John Sheffield, third Earl of Mulgrave. Rochester: Francis Atterbury, Bishop of Rochester (1662-1732), a Jacobite sympathizer, who was banished in 1732. He was a close friend of Pope and a member of the Scriblerus Club. St. John: Henry St. John (1678-1751), 1<sup>st</sup> Viscount of Bolingbroke, politician and philosopher who had profound influence on Pope.

146: Burnets: Thomas Burnet (1694-1753), a follower of Addison, who had attacked Pope. Oldmixons: John Oldmixon (1673-1742), a miscellaneous Whig writer. Cooke: Thomas Cooke (1703-1756), poet, pamphleteer, and translator. He attacked. Pope.

149: Fanny: Lord Hervey.

151: Gildon: Charles Gildon (1665-1724), a critic who had attacked some of Pope's earlier works.

153: Dennis: John Dennis (1657-1734). a critic and dramatist who had been offended by an comment on him in line 585 of the **Essay of Criticism**. Dennis's reply began a long period of hostility between himself and Pope.

164: Bentley: Richard Bentley (1662-1742), famous English classical scholar. Tibbalds: Louis Theobald (1688-1744), scholar and dramatist who edited Shakespeare (1734). He attacked Pope's edition of Shakespeare in 1726 and Pope retaliated by making him king of the Dunces in the earlier version of the

180: a Persian tale. According to Pope Ambrose Philips translated a book called the Persian Tales." Philips received a half a crown for each section of this book.

190: Tate: Nahum Tate (1652-1715), a poet who is famous chiefly for producing a **King Lear** with a happy ending.

209: Cato: a famous Roman senator who could sway others with his eloquence. Here the reference is more to Addison's tragedy **Cato** (1713) for which Pope had written the prologue.

214: Atticus: the name of Cicero's cultivated friend, chosen both to suggest Addison and indicate some of his qualities.

222: birthday song: refers to the practice of poet-laureate writing odes on the king's birthday. The George is George I who had contempt for poetry.

230: Bufo: meaning a toad. Castalian state. Castalia is the name of a spring on Mount Parnassus; hence this refers to the poetic state.

231: forked hill: Parnassus, sacred to Apollo and the Muses.

256: Gay: John Gay (1685-1732), poet and dramatist, member of Scriblerus Club, a close personal friend of Pope's loved by all who knew him for his character. He was the author of **The Beggar's Opera**.

276: Balbus: George Hay, seventh Earl of Kinnoull

280: Sir Will: Sir William Yonge, Whig politician, widely held to represent "everything pitiful, corrupt and contemptible." Bubo: George Bubb Dodington, Baron Melcombe (1691-1762), another minor Whig politician noted for his ostentation and lack of taste. Bubo < Latin owl, with suggestion of booby.

299-300: Pope's enemies had charged that in **Epistle to the Earl of Burlington** (Moral Essay IV, 141-50). Timon's Villa was the Duke of Chandos' estate. Cannons (line

300). The “dean” and “silver bel” are both mentioned in the description.

305: Sporus: a homosexual favourite of the Emperor Nero. Pope applies the name to Lord Hervey, Vice-chamberlain, advisor to Queen Caroline, friend of Lady Montague.

306: ass’s milk: Hervey used to drink this.

363: Japhet: Japhet Crook (1662-1734), a forger

365: Knight of the Post: one who got his living by giving false evidence

375: Welsted’s lie: apparently he had said that Pope’s poetry had led to the death of a lady and that Pope had libelled his benefactor Duke of Chandos.

378: Budget: another person who reviled Pope.

380: the two Curlls: the publisher and Lord Herve, both whom had abused Pope’s family.

391: Bestia: a Roman consul who accepted a bribe to sign a dishonourable peace. Probably refers to the Duke of Marlborough.

417: Arbuthnot, being a Tory, lost his place as court-physician on Queen Anne’s death.

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## 5.7 □ Summary

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The poetry of Pope is sophisticated and complex, being products of the neoclassical age. He was primarily a poet of society, upholding civilized values. The vehicle he chose to do this was satire and didactic poetry. **Epistle to Dr Arbuthnot** is regarded as the most interesting of his satires because it is also an autobiography. Here he defends his satires-as being harmless and useful as a corrective. In his characterization he is more interested in giving us types than specific individuals. Though much of the energy comes from the fact that his targets were people who had insulted him, yet they become something more. As a satirist he lacked the majesty of Dryden, but in its place brought clarity of thought and lucidity of language and moral discourse that is not tedious. All in all, **Epistle to Dr Arbuthnot** is resounding success both as satire and poetry.

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## 5.8 □ Questions with Suggested Answers

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1. Comment on the imagery in **Epistle to Dr Arbuthnot** [see 1.6]
2. Analyze **Epistle to Dr Arbuthnot** as a satire [see 1.7]
3. How far can **Epistle to Dr Arbuthnot** be regarded as autobiographical? What view of himself is Pope trying to propagate? Do you think that Pope is trying to create an idealized version of himself which is removed from reality? [see 1.5]

4. How does Pope treat the objects of his scorn in this poem? [see 1.4J]
5. What picture does Pope create of the ideal virtuous person? [see 1.4, 1.6]
6. Comment on the artistic success of the poem, [see 1.8. 1.10]

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## **5.8 □ Suggested Readings**

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### **Biography :**

Maynard Mack, *Alexander Pope: A Life*.

### **Select Criticism**

Basil Wiley, **The Eighteenth Century Background**

Ian Jack, **Augustan Satire**

Ian Girdon, **A Preface to Pope**

Geoffrey Tillotson, **On the Poetry of Pope**

Peter Dixon, **The World of Pope's Satires**

R. W. Rogers, **The Major Satires of Alexander Pope**

G. Wilson Knight, **Laureate of Peace: On the Genius of Alexander Pope**

R. Boower, **The Poetry of Allusion**

M. Mock ed. **Essential Articles for the Study of Pope**

### **Text**

**Selected Poems of Alexander Pope:** ed. John Heath-Stubbs, Heinemann.

**The Twickenham Edition of the Poems of Alexander Pope,** ed. John Butt, Yale Univ. Press.

Pope, *Horatian Satires and Epistles* ed. H. H. Erskine Hill, O.U.P.