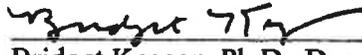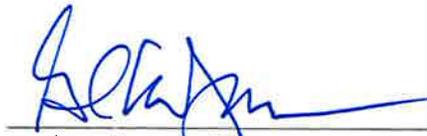# THESIS/DISSERTATION APPROVED BY

Date   5/12/2017

Bridget Keegan, Ph.D., Dean

Lydia Cooper, Ph.D.

Trey Moody, Ph.D.

Gail M. Jensen, Ph.D., Dean

"*NAMELESS GRACES* WHICH NO METHODS TEACH": ALEXANDER POPE'S
EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY METAPOETIC TRIPLET

_____

By
RACHEL NOZICKA

_____

A THESIS

Submitted to the faculty of the Graduate School of the Creighton University in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the Department of
English

_____

Omaha, NE

May 13, 2017

Abstract

Alexander Pope's calculated use of the triplet in his early poetry lays the foundation for educating the public about how to maintain high quality literature and how to once again form a community in their divided nation. Pope's triplets in *An Essay on Criticism* and his translation of *The Iliad* act as a balance between classical and neoclassical ideas about poetry. The sense of tension between these ideologies, carefully crafted to catch readers' attention, disallows audiences from slipping into easy assumptions about how poetry should be written. Instead, Pope underscores the contrasts between classical and neoclassical ideals. In doing so, he draws attention to the defining features of the eighteenth century, ultimately establishing a uniquely eighteenth-century triplet.

Pope adds a further metapoetic layer to his triplet in *An Essay on Criticism* when he demonstrates the third line's role in his establishment of poetry rules that allow for variation, but only when it is necessary or enhances the beauty of the work. The extraction and analysis of triplets reveals their self-contained narrative of the increasing complexity of art as it transitions from sketching to poetry, music, and drama, eventually returning to poetry. Via this discussion of art, Pope moves his readers through the act of artistic creation to underscore the work of the mind in the design and function of his poem. Such guidance of his audience allows Pope to shape the poetic atmosphere of the eighteenth century and to progress a form of poetry which he had positioned himself to popularize.

Pope promotes resolution and a united community through the structure and content of his revised *Rape of the Lock* (1714). While he removed the triplets that would formally uphold the idea of unification, his poem's form, added machinery, and depictions of Belinda's locks of hair suggest that he is enacting a metapoetics of the triplet structure to demonstrate how a triplet can enact unification in the eighteenth century. In *The Rape of the Lock*, the structure and content of the poem imitate the unification offered by the triplet form, thereby confirming its functional presence as a form writ large.

Acknowledgements

Table of Contents

Chapter 1

The Eighteenth-Century Triplet: Alexander Pope's English Aesthetic

Expression is the dress of thought.
An Essay on Criticism (line 318)

The triplet verse form, tightly caught between the couplet and its multiple, the quatrain, has long been overlooked as a form with its own voice. The often-silenced unit, however, provides crucial information about the development of poetry over the centuries. The poetic heritage of the triplet extends from the umbrella category of the "tercet," separating itself from its close cousin, the *terza rima*, a form that Dante first popularized.[1] While the Italian *terza rima* was popular in English poetry because of its versatility and its powerful momentum—as the rhyme only completes itself at the end of each three-line stanza, creating a fast tempo for the poem—the triplet did not reach such heights of popularity (Pivetti 99). Robert Beum and Karl Shapiro remark that "[t]riplets are very rare in English" and that, of those, very few stand out to the authors (114). However, the triplets that do exist provide an important narrative for the development of the form in English. According to Conrad A. Balliet, their first use in 1557 marks their development before the eighteenth century at less than 150 years (528).[2] While the triplet form was certainly taking shape over this short span of time, the eighteenth century in England proved to be a key turning point for it because rules were developed for its use. Written by Alexander Pope, these rules were crucial to advancing the form and its

---

[1] Robert Beum and Karl Shapiro explain in *The Prosody Handbook* that "[t]hree lines rhyming consecutively, or three-line stanzas of interlocking rhyme, are called TERCETS. When the three lines rhyme consecutively, the stanza is traditionally called a TRIPLET; in the other case *terza rima*" (113).

[2] The earliest triplet recognized by Balliet is the earliest he has identified. Other, earlier triplets may still await discovery.

theory beyond the frequent accusation of being simply an uncontrolled couplet. The addition of rules raised the triplet closer to the classical, many-ruled couplet, granting Pope a poetic authority closer to that of the ancients.

Briefly tracing the history of the tercet, Charles Mahoney argues that "the tercet invigorates through its suggestion of something getting out of hand, of a measure and form perplexing the possibilities of poetry we too often otherwise take for granted or stratify according to received patterns of couplets and quatrains, sexains and octets" (48). Mahoney's "Temptations of Tercets" provides an important foundation for developing a theory of tercets. However, his approach begins very broadly and then introduces two Romantic poets' work, Leigh Hunt and Percy Bysshe Shelley, in order to "demonstrate both the versatility of this unorthodox form and its appeal for Romantic poets bent on redefining the rules of genre and creating the taste according to which their works might be read" (49). Mahoney's approach, however, does not take into account the role that tercets played in establishing the formal rules that Romantic poets later sought to break. While the attractive aspects and "unorthodox" utility of tercets are certainly important for the study of the form, the umbrella category of "tercet" needs to be broken down to examine how each aspect, the triplet and *terza rima*, contributes to the overall utility and role of the "tercet" form. While understanding the tercet's role in the development of Romantic and, by extension, post-Romantic poetry is key to understanding how it functions in modern poetry, the era's introduction of a significantly different poetic aim, one more exploratory of emotion and receptive of unbridled expression, affected the formal characteristics defined in the eighteenth century. A study of the eighteenth-century tercet will elucidate how the form reached its final stages before the Romantic era

permanently shifted poetic and artistic expression. This project focuses on the triplet, one aspect of the tercet, to examine how the three-lined unit acts independently from the couplet.

Examining John Dryden's poetic form, Kyle Pivetti reads the form as bringing memory alongside historical events in order to offer a sense of restoration for the poet. He echoes a sentiment similar to Mahoney's in that the final line of the triplet offers a sense of unification. While Pivetti argues that the form of poetry in itself offers a sense of restoration because it is not beholden to the political binary that characterized the Restoration, his notion of the triplet's ability to offer a sense of resolution provides an important backdrop for an examination of Pope's distinctly eighteenth-century triplet.

While Mahoney and Pivetti offer critical insights into the late sixteenth and early nineteenth century poetic employment of triplets, they do not shed any light on the eighteenth century use of triplets. As Mahoney mentions, the entrée of the Romantic era changed how poetry functioned. Thus, a study of the eighteenth century is vital to understanding the rules that Romantic poets chose to reformulate or disregard altogether. However, such a study, in its own right, also gives further insight into the poetic thought of the period, perhaps offering an explanation as to why the triplet has never become as pervasive as the couplet. I contend that Alexander Pope shaped a specifically eighteenth-century triplet that combined classical and neoclassical thought in a culmination of past and present principles of verse form and reason. His distinctly English aesthetic would shape the foundation of poetry for nearly a century.

The history of the pre-Romantic triplet is very brief. The triplet was utilized by English poets ranging from John Donne to John Dryden and Alexander Pope. Conrad A.

Balliet notes that the earliest triplet he has been able to identify appears in a poem entitled "A funerall song, upon the deceas of Annes his moother" by the poet Nicholas Grimald (528). Appearing a few years after Grimald is the metaphysical poet John Donne. Donne takes up the triplet form and uses it in three different ways: as a standalone stanza,[3] as the final lines of a stanza with a larger rhyme scheme,[4] or as the three lines before the final couplet in a stanza with a larger rhyme scheme.[5] Only "Satire V," "The Triple Foole," and "The Woman's Constancy," out of 190 poems, contain triplets that do not appear to be part of a larger rhyme scheme nor do they reoccur. In fact, each poem has only one triplet, thereby eschewing a pattern in the triplet's use within each poem itself.

Donne's poetry, for the most part, uses the triplet as an element in a larger rhyme scheme. The triplet does not act independently, but, instead, serves only as a part of the overall structure of the poem. As such, the triplet's function in the majority of Donne's work does not lend as much to the triplet's historical narrative because its service to a larger pattern overshadows its individual virtuosity. However, the three poems in which Donne uses the triplet without regard to a larger pattern indicate that the poets who were experimenting with the form were beginning to consider its potential utility. In fact, Donne does employ the triplet as an independent stanza on four different occasions.

---

[3] This includes poems such as "Raderus" (comprised of one stanza), "To Mr. Rowland Woodward," "To Mr. T.W.," and "To Sir Henry Wotton II." These are not considered in this study because they do not engage the couplet structure. As a beginning investigation into the nature of Pope's triplets, it is necessary to examine them in conversation with couplets to establish their different functions before moving to their use as individual stanzas.

[4] Poems include "Air and Angels," "Go Catch a Falling Star," "The Apparition," "The Curse," "The Flea," "The Primrose," "The Relic," "The Soule," "The Will," and "Witchcraft by a Picture."

[5] Such poems include "The Canonization," "The Indifferent," and "Valediction to His Book."

Joseph Malof describes the triplet form as including three rhymed lines in an independent

stanza (*A Manual* 185). While his definition is more specific than Beum and Shapiro's, it

also becomes somewhat limiting because it considers only the stanza. Donne's use of

three rhymed lines in a poem comprised of rhyming couplets can also be considered a

triplet; significantly, though, its use alters the structure of the poem in ways that three-

line stanzas cannot because they are not incorporated with a different verse form. Instead

of composing three-lined stanzas, authors who followed Donne chose to continue to

grapple with the triplet as an element that interacted with other, more standard poetic

forms, such as the heroic couplet.

John Dryden, for example, eagerly began to craft triplets and employ them in his

poetry. Balliet remarks that Dryden uses them in *The Hind and the Panther*, *The Medal*,

and *Britannia Rediviva* (530, footnote 8). In fact, he uses eighteen in his 1681 *Absalom*

and Achitophel alone. Dryden's poems, often quite long, employ multiple triplets at a

time, at varying distances from one another. The triplets interrupt the heroic couplet

structure but do not perform a role in an obvious larger pattern. The relatively frequent

use of triplets and their seemingly random appearance reflects Dryden's views of triplets.

In a letter discussing his approach to poetry, Dryden writes: "'When I mentioned the

Pindaric line, I should have added, that I take another licence in my verses: for I

frequently make sure of triplet rhymes, […] for, besides the majesty which it gives, it

confines the sense within the barriers of three lines, which would languish if it were

lengthened into four'" (Balliet 529). Dryden's triplets, then, are employed because they

allow the poet to add both "majesty" and another sense of control to his poem. He adds

that "'Spenser is my example for both these privileges of English verses…I regard them

now as the *Magna Charta* of heroic poetry, and am too much an Englishman to lose what my ancestors have gained for me. Let the French and Italians value themselves on their regularity; strength and elevation are our standard'" (Balliet 529). For the poet, triplets (along with Pindarics) allow him to take artistic "licence" in his work.

According to the online *Oxford English Dictionary*, the term "licence" carried the definitional sense of "[d]eviation from recognized form or rule, indulged in by a writer or artist for the sake of effect" from 1530 to 1899 ("licence, n., 4"). By framing the form as a "licence," Dryden immediately indicates that the structure is not one that usually appears in poetry, nor is it one that he is systematically integrating into the poetic tradition. In fact, the *OED* definition offered for this sense of "licence" gives an example of a 1697 quote from Dryden.[6] However, while Dryden's usage of this sense of the term is reaffirmed in the example given, there is a second sense that must be acknowledged. A "licence" can also refer to "[a] formal, usually a printed or written permission from a constituted authority to do something, *e.g.* to marry, to print or publish a book, […] etc." ("licence, n., 2a"). The notion that a "licence" could also be a form of written permission to do something, particularly publish a book, offers a second interpretation of Dryden's words. Looking to Spenser as his model for crafting triplets, Dryden places the writer as a poetic authority who somehow authorizes the use of triplets. In a roundabout way, Dryden frames his triplets both as artistic exercises that allow him freedom in his verse and as a verse structure approved by Spenser. In using the term "licence," Dryden also gives himself the authority to use the triplet, thereby placing himself within the lineage of

---

[6] The example is taken from the "Dedication" in Dryden's translation of *AEneis*: "I generally join these two Licences together" ("licence, n., 4").

English authors, especially with those who employed the triplet. This self-positioning

reveals how the triplet was beginning to be oriented within the lineage of English poetry

and how its distinctly English identity was being shaped.

Dryden's final comment about leaving the French and Italians to "value

themselves on their regularity" while the English uphold "strength and elevation" as their

"standard" offers yet another nationalist distinction of the form (Balliet 529). By

suggesting that English poets strengthen their poetry through variation in order to convey

loftier ideals, Dryden gives specific characteristics to the triplet, helping develop what

would become its distinctive eighteenth-century English identity. The lineage of the

heroic couplet, Spenser, and the other "ancestors" whose poetic achievements Dryden is

"too much of an Englishman to lose" offers a distinct lineage to poetry. Listing these

personages teases out an English bloodline that allows Dryden the "privileges" of English

verse. Thus, not only are the English separate from the French and Italians, but they have

been ideologically developing in a way that privileges their poetic mode and authorizes

variations within it because what they achieve—"strength and elevation"—is more

important than leaving the boundaries of meter and rhyme unquestioned. Thus, what

makes Dryden and his poetic lineage distinctly English is precisely the variation it

permits.

As a writer who laid out several rules for writing and criticizing poetry, Pope

seemed an unlikely poet to follow in Dryden's "licenced" footsteps. When it came to

triplets, Pope was very explicit about his opinions of their function. In a letter to William

Walsh in 1706, Pope writes out rules that, when writing couplets, he believed to be

important. For his fourth rule, he writes, "'I would also object to the Irruption of

Alexandrine Verses of twelve syllables, which I think should never be allow'd but when some remarkable Beauty or Propriety in them attones for the Liberty: Mr. *Dryden* has been too free of these, especially in his latter Works. I am of the same opinion as to *Triple Rhymes*'" (qtd. in Balliet 532). Pope thus expresses open dislike for poetic variations used frivolously.[7] However, he would soon employ them in his poetry, beginning with his second major publication, the 1712 *Essay on Criticism*. For a writer who appears so dedicated to proper poetic form, why would Pope employ triplets at all?

Ironically, Pope's tone in his letter to Walsh suggests a dedication to form that Dryden might have accused of being reminiscent of French or Italian poetry. Yet, Pope manages to navigate around such a criticism by breaking the very rule he establishes. In fact, of the seven rules he sets out in his letter, he breaks four of them throughout his poetic oeuvre (Jones 41). By breaking his own rules, which Jones says proves Pope's rules "too strict," Pope orients himself into the distinctly English tradition.

An avid admirer of Dryden, Pope still criticizes the older author's use of triplets. This initial criticism provides Pope with the opportunity to present his own vision of triplets, to demonstrate how triplets could be used effectively without being used too freely. The rule Pope establishes gives a very pragmatic approach to poetry. Each of the seven rules follows a rational line of thought, listing what should be avoided because of a respective problem each error caused in the poetry. By carefully analyzing poetry and

---

[7] Pope and Jonathan Swift both comment upon the use of alexandrines. While this discussion remains outside the scope of this paper, it offers a productive avenue for further investigation. Critics such as Claude Rawson, in "Poets of the first half of the eighteenth century," have made valuable contributions to the examination of alexandrines.

establishing rules to prevent it from being disrupted or ruined altogether, Pope reflects the influence of the Enlightenment and neoclassical thought.

Discussing narrative's reliance on repetition, especially during the time of the Enlightenment, Leo Damrosch remarks that, "[i]n the eighteenth century the *philosophes* of the Enlightenment claimed to be committed to change and 'progress,' but even so, they remained wedded to reiteration and replicability. […] So the historiography of the *philosophes*, as Horkheimer and Adorno said, ended up explaining 'every event as repetition' " (50). By repeating the traditional rules and expectations of poetry, Pope continues the cycle of repetition. His allusions to the ancient poets and Milton allow him to "[position] himself as the heir of both Virgil and Milton, the only English poet who rated as an honorary classic, and who was appropriated with Homer and Virgil" (Rawson 335). Pope continues the cycle by keeping alive the ideas and styles of these classic (and "honorary classic") poets. However, via internally breaking some of the rules established by tradition, especially those regarding the use of the couplet, Pope shifts the cycle, making himself a part of the "new" poetic tradition. By incorporating himself into the altered tradition, Pope also incorporates his triplet variation into it.

Such folding of triplets into the poetic tradition, however, is carefully upheld with appeals to reason. In *An Essay on Criticism*, Pope allows for triplets, and other variations, provided that they are necessary to the poem:

If, where the rules not far enough extend,

(Since rules were made but to promote their end)

Some lucky Licence answers to the full

Th' intent propos'd, that Licence is a rule. (lines 146-149)

"Licence" becomes a rule when the other rules do not extend far enough to determine how the poet's innovation should be handled. While Dryden's "licence" offers a self-established authority to use the triplet, Pope makes his authority to innovate, and to determine the propriety of others' innovations, quite clear. In addition, by modifying "Licence" with "lucky," Pope mandates that rule breaking can only occur when the innovation is appropriate to the poem, a situation reliant upon good fortune. Pope, then, even incorporates luck into his poetic system. In doing so, he exerts control over every aspect of poetry, both the intended and the unexpected, thereby placing himself as the ultimate poetic authority of his time.

In *An Essay on Criticism*, Pope invokes common sense as one of the guiding faculties that allows readers and critics to determine good poetry. He remarks that "In search of wit these [fools] lose their common sense, / And then turn Critics in their own defence" (*An Essay on Criticism* 28-29). Criticizing those who pursue wit to the detriment of their common sense, Pope not only admonishes critics, but also stresses the importance of maintaining one's common sense. Thus, he places common sense before wit, invoking the Enlightenment and appealing to the entire population. Remarking upon the development of the notion of common sense as a corrective principle in eighteenth-century discourse, Christoph Henke explains:

> [P]ronouncements of common sense have a broad transitive appeal: they
> overtly or covertly *demand* the consent and approval of *everyone* to whom
> they are addressed. That a common-sense verdict should appeal to all
> people does not mean that all human beings necessarily share the same
> discriminating powers of reason and understanding, but it does mean that

even people with a lesser understanding shall have to give in to the

judgment of common sense once they are confronted with it. (4)

Common sense's implicit demand that all agree, then, requires all people to belong to the

"discourse of common sense," as Henke terms it (1). Even those who may not agree or

who may understand to a lesser degree the subject at hand are forced to agree with the

communal authority of what is deemed *common* sense. By subsuming those who

disagree or who do not possess a deeper understanding of the subject, the notion of

common sense dictates how a society interprets everything. By invoking common sense,

Pope makes explicit his demand that his audience use their common sense. In addition,

however, Pope also orients himself as the authority of common sense. Labeling those

who pursue wit in place of common sense as "fools" and "Critics," Pope gives himself

the authority to determine what constitutes common sense, who does and does not have

common sense, and how common sense must be properly applied. The rules of writing

and criticizing poetry carefully laid out by the *Essay on Criticism* were, according to

Joseph Addison, the " 'most known and most received observations on the subject of

literature and criticism' " (qtd. in Lipking and Noggle 2496). In addition to repeating

well-established rules and using them to reinforce the reasonableness of his innovations,

Pope selects what he deems to be common sense rules and then appeals to his audiences

by using the widely accepted rules to frame his work as a collection of common sense

rules about writing and criticizing poetry. By collecting such well-known ideas, Pope

demonstrates his knowledge of the subject and his own common sense, because, as he

puts it, only those who do not have common sense are fools, who label themselves as

critics. No author who hoped to establish his own authority would label himself a fool,

so it must be concluded that Pope was not criticizing the rules of poetry nor pursuing

solely wit. To reach this conclusion, common sense is necessary. Pope's reliance upon

common sense, then, is part and parcel to his demand for it. Thus, the fools and critics

(who are, in fact, the same) are those who do not understand or agree with the rules laid

out in the poem. In a rather sinister way, disagreement with Pope's selection of rules, the

rules themselves, or the application of the rules alienates one from the reading

community, which is supposed to have common sense. Thus, Pope demands a certain

audience and then carefully crafts it by framing as fools those who disagree with him.

The application of the rules in the poem cannot be questioned because only the foolish

would choose to question it. Pope's establishment of the authority of the classics, and the

authority of the popular rules and sentiments of his own time, lends strength to the poet's

claim to authority. By invoking such authorities, Pope appears to act as a mouthpiece for

tradition. While he shapes this role to meet his own necessities, he would not have been

able to do so if the classical authors and authors such as Milton had not held considerable

weight in eighteenth-century society. Therefore, he is also reliant upon their authority in

order to establish his own.

Pope's appeal to common sense is both historically situated and ahistorical.

Discussing the neoclassicism of the Augustan era, Henke remarks that the "aesthetic

preference for timeless classicism in Augustan literature accords closely with eighteenth-

century concepts of common sense, which are essentially universal and ahistorical" (8).

Thus, while the eighteenth-century concerns focused on the ahistorical concepts of

common sense and timelessness, the period defined itself by its deep concern with these

concepts. The eighteenth century, therefore, could not entirely escape its moment in

time, but it could uphold the poetic patterns and forms of those who came before the age.

As systems of organization and poetic form have developed, different styles are

emphasized. Eighteenth-century neoclassicism continued to use the heroic couplet,

echoing Donne, Chaucer, and the formal mastery of the ancients. However, the addition

of the triplet, while slightly before the beginning of the eighteenth century, shifted how

poetry of the period was read. The couplet provided a form of stability for readers, a

reliable structure that carried them through the poem and its ideas with little interruption.

While poets sometimes varied line length for effect or out of necessity, variations in the

couplet form did not often extend to a variation in its line count, especially a variation

that was not simply a multiple of the couplet—such as quatrains, sestinas, and octaves

(Beum and Shapiro 114, 119, 121). At its basis, the couplet can help fulfill a desire for

resolution. Joseph Malof defines "resolution" as it appears in poetry, remarking that, in

addition to the resolution that can be reached through syllabic variation, there is also the

resolution that derives from "the completion of an expected pattern in a stanza" (207). In

a two-line stanza, the resolution is anticipated to come from the second rhyming word. In

every stanza form, some type of resolution is anticipated because such resolution

suggests that the idea being expressed is complete in some way. In a poem comprised of

heroic couplets, the couplet helps resolve the poem's tension through the rhyme in its

second line.

Beum and Shapiro comment on readers' desire for resolution, noting that, in

rhyme, "[a] pattern of parallels in sound color is set up, and as we move through the

poem, whether in reading or in listening, our expectation is continually being raised and

then satisfied. Ideally, rhyme helps pull us through and pull us in deeper, as we

anticipate the scheme" (96). The authors gesture toward both the innate ability to identify and anticipate patterns and the desire for resolution of such patterns. In their introduction to *Rhetorics of Order/ Ordering Rhetoric in English Neoclassical Literature*, J. Douglas Canfield and J. Paul Hunter write that the Enlightenment tension between reason and religion manifested itself in a "desire to find, or assert, or make order [that] was a powerful motive to creativity" (13). In addition to this desire to create, there also came the desire for organization. In fact, many "intellectual historians," as Canfield and Hunter remark, believed the age was focused upon order, "[becoming] prized for its calm and confident forms and structures, which imitated 'the eighteenth-century mind.' Literature was seen to reflect an ordered universe in highly ordered forms, often variations on classical genres that both embody and inculcate social order" (13). In light of the structural shift in poetry to uphold the heroic couplet form and the Enlightenment's emphasis on the use of reason, the notion that the Enlightenment era was characterized by extreme organization certainly has some foundation. However, when examining poets like Pope whose poetry characterizes the period, the disruption of organization in the poetry is also significant because it both reveals more about the " 'eighteenth-century mind' " as well as the poet him or herself. Geoffrey Tillotson remarks that Dryden and Pope placed humankind at the center of their poetry. In doing so, they shaped the nature outside of themselves to reflect their human subject. While "[a] metre of contrasts and concision was unfitted for rendering the large freedom of landscape," it could be used in couplets, but "its powerfulness shrank, because of the very 'correctness' of their versification" (*Augustan Studies* 14). Thus, for Tillotson, variation impedes the power of poetry, specifically the couplet, to adequately convey a sense of freedom. For Augustan

authors, the structure of couplets provided an anchor that grounded them to the classics while also permitting them to examine their own time.

In *The Doctrine of Correctness in English Usage, 1700-1800*, Sterling Andrus Leonard remarks that the keen focus on Latin and Greek language and writing permeated the rules of eighteenth-century writing (50). "As a natural result," Leonard continues, "no English construction is accepted save as it represents, or departs only slightly from, a classical prototype" (50). Thus, the patterns of Greek and Latin writing and language were reinvigorated in the eighteenth century in order to revive the classical past. The incorporation of the past into the eighteenth-century present created a layering effect that acted much like a couplet: The past provided the pattern for the "stanza" by setting the time and providing the first rhyme, and then the eighteenth-century present offered the corresponding rhyme. Following this pattern, there is a neat division between past and present that highlights the content differences and the formal similarities, culminating in a fine, "correct" resolution. However, the triplet serves to complicate this clean division. By adding another line, Pope disrupts the resolution of the Enlightenment. No longer do past rules fit neatly with the present situation. By invoking common sense, Pope gains the agreement of his audiences with the rules he is laying out, rules that appear familiar. However, by internally altering those rules via adding triplets throughout his poetry, and by using beauty and propriety as the foundation for doing so, Pope shocks his audience out of the reverie of stability. The past and present, while aligned in many ways, are not fully compatible with each other because the rules of the past, the rules of the established heroic couplet specifically, could not account for the needs of the eighteenth-century poet.

By establishing "licence" as a rule as well, the poet accommodates the unexpected

tumult of his time. While poets and writers from all centuries had endured war and

controversy, Pope lived during a time of great expectation and great national division,

even while the British empire was expanding. As a Catholic, the poet felt much of the

brunt of Protestant dislike.[8] When William assumed power in the Glorious Revolution,

he put in place legislation that was "periodically reactivated" and "[required] papists to

remove themselves from the cities of London and Westminster by a distance of not less

than ten miles" (Mack, *Alexander Pope: A Life* 40). In addition, Mack notes, "[t]he new

government also remitted the oaths of supremacy and allegiance […] so far as to allow

Protestant dissenters to serve in either house of Parliament, while substituting other oaths

specifically to exclude papists" (*AP: A Life* 40). Such divisions sowed notions of

mistrust and alienation within English citizens. Such a separation did not produce

complementary rhymes or resolve as neatly as a couplet. As Pivetti argues that Dryden's

triplets offer a sense of restoration that the couplet does not. Considering Pope's triplets,

crafted in a period still suffering from the tensions between Catholics and Protestants, his

triplets may also offer a sense of restoration in their third line. However, considering

Pope's use of triplets in his *Essay on Criticism* and in *The Iliad*, the resolution would

appear to involve a greater emphasis on the resolution between critics, poets, and

audiences.

In October of 1713, Pope sent out proposals to publishers for his translation of

Homer's *Iliad*. The translation, quite in tune with the neoclassicism of the era, was

accepted for publication by Bernard Lintott. The first four books were published on 6

---

[8] Pope's experiences with religion and his poetic response will be discussed in Chapter 3.

June 1715. 1716 saw the publication of the second volume, 1717 the third, 1718 the

fourth, and 1720 the fifth and sixth (Mack, *The Iliad of Homer* xxv-xxvi). Pope

maintains his use of triplets all throughout the translation. Significantly, his work gained

him enough financial capital to sustain himself for the rest of his life, alleviating him of

the need for a patron, especially one whose views may have clashed with his own. In the

introduction to the first nine books of *The Iliad*, Mack notes that Pope borrowed the

learning of many others and combined it with his own (often failing to cite his sources)

(xli). However, Pope's attention to detail and his dedication to his work demonstrated

"his remarkably sensitive and sensible control of his borrowed information, and his

determination, to which almost every surviving leave of the *Iliad* manuscripts quietly

witnesses, that his translation should incorporate the best insights of his day" (Mack, *The*

Iliad, Books I-IX xli). Significantly, by imbuing his works with "the best insights of the

day," Pope weaves neoclassicism and his modern era together. Adding in

characteristically eighteenth-century insights allowed Pope to offer his readers a broader

understanding of neoclassicism, one that asked readers to consider how neoclassicism

function in their era. However, Pamela Poynter Schwandt is careful to note that the poet

does not change the sense of Homer's original work (388). Instead, she says that

> [i]f Pope were to present a version of Homer acceptable to his audience, it
>
> would have to be Homer entire and unmutilated, but it would also have to
>
> be Homer corrected. And that is what Pope created. He transformed the
>
> Greek *Iliad* into and English Augustan *Iliad* that could withstand
>
> comparison with the *Aeneid*, using many of the same techniques by which
>
> Virgil had adapted Homer's epics for the *Aeneid* […] The narrative style,

the heroes, and the gods all became more Virgilian than Homeric. But in

making them so, Pope omitted essentially nothing from the original

Iliad—no character, action, speech, or description. (Schwandt 388).

By modifying the *Iliad* to make it more relevant to the times, Pope forms a sort of

translational triplet: He has the original version, the literal translation whose sense is

preserved in his translation, and the modifications he makes to allow his translation to fit

into the Augustan age. The final element of this translational triplet offers a both a

compromise and an increased sense of tension because it updates Homer to situate him in

the present time while also preserving his original characters, speeches and so forth, but it

does so in a way that also addresses the distinct differences between the times, the

differences that Homer's era could not complement or "rhyme" with. The layout of the

original publication echoes the discussion that Pope hoped would occur between the

original and his translation. The original was printed on the left page, while the

translation was printed on the right. Invoking notions of conversation, of discussion

between two persons, Pope uses physical signals to bring his audience's attention to his

formal innovations, suggesting that the two pages offer a conversation with the reader,

the third element in this form of translational triplet.

The first triplet to appear in *The Iliad* comes in the first book. Reflecting the

forward motion and rushed nature of hunting and running, the third line increases the

necessary tension: "Strongest of Men, they pierc'd the Mountain Boar, / Rang'd the wild

Desarts red with Monsters Gore, / And from their Hills the shaggy *Centaurs* tore" (*The

Iliad* 1.355-357). The third line enacts the "ranging" of monster gore across the deserts.

The couplet spills into the triplet, representing the overflow of blood being spilled and the

rushing of centaurs down from their hills. In this scene, the triplet serves to emphasize

the action occurring in the poem, physically reflecting the meaning of the lines.

Examining the spatialization of Pope's poetry, Cynthia Wall argues that Pope used a form

of spatializing and describing that was lost after the entrance of the Romantic era (49).

However, she explains that carefully examining how Pope engages with space, both

within his poem and in the printing and punctuation of his poetry, opens up new ways to

appreciate his work (49). While there is only a brief mention of triplets, Wall's analysis

draws further attention to the imagery in the first triplet of *The Iliad*. The image of the

blood being spread across a desert, which itself becomes red, offers a gruesome parallel

to the first triplet in *An Essay on Criticism*, which reads: "But as the slightest Sketch, if

justly trac'd, / Is by ill *Colouring* but the more disgrac'd, / So by *false Learning* is *good

Sense* defac'd" (23-25). Instead of having good sense, the men in *The Iliad* have

strength. They color the land with the blood of monsters, ruining the natural, dry

condition of the desert. Thus, the desert loses its nature (even if only until it dries out

again), much like good sense can be ruined when confronted by a faulty or overinflated

sense of one's education. The triplet emphasizes this, showing with the extra line the

overflow of blood and the overflow of false learning (specifically learning concerned

overly concerned with form and, therefore, inattentive to the meaning).

A couplet, that is slowed and made soft by the repetition of the "s" sound, follows

the gory triplet. It reads: "Yet these with soft, persuasive Arts I sway'd,/ When *Nestor*

spoke, they listen'd and obey'd" (*The Iliad, Books I-IX* 2.558-559). Order is restored

through "persuasive Arts," a soothing tongue, and a voice of reason. In an earlier

footnote, Pope writes that Nestor is "the wisest and most aged *Greek*" (*The Iliad, I-IX*

footnote 33.). Thus, the voice of wisdom and aged authority brings the men away from their irrationality, much as good learning can help one keep his or her sense, or help a person return to it. The triplet, then, identifies irony (discovered through reason), wisdom, and how good learning can help develop wisdom.

The balance between the two aforementioned triplets may not have been intended by Pope, but they provide an intriguing entry into identifying the eighteenth-century triplet. While Pope stresses the importance of good learning in *An Essay on Criticism*, he is reviled by many—including Protestants; John Dennis, who ruthlessly called him a traitorous, " 'hunch-back'd Toad' "; and even fellow Catholics, who labeled the work as "heretical" (Goldsmith 70, 71; Chapin 421). The poet's frustration at his audience's failure to grasp his encomium in the *Essay on Criticism* to read carefully evolved into translations and mock epics. The shift suggests that Pope is attempting a different strategy to convince his audience. Using *The Iliad* as a way to further discuss modern ideas, Pope makes even more explicit both the influence of the classical writers—he elected to translate Homer, the epitome of ancient poets—and the neoclassical appeals to employ reason—he translates but adds his own inflections to signify the time period. On a very formal level, Pope's couplets and his triplet innovations mark his poetry as belonging to the eighteenth century because his form contrasts with Homer's, as he used "the formulaic phrase, [which occur] two or three to a hexameter line, and each of his lines usually ends with some natural break in thought" (Schwandt 415). The heroic couplet, composed of five iambic feet per line and two end-rhymed lines, designates the end of the thought. While poets often enjamb couplets, allowing the thought to flow into the subsequent couplet, the second rhyme relieves the tension offered by the first, thereby

offering a sense of relief similar to the satisfaction derived from the completion of a thought.

The first triplet in the second book of *The Iliad* cries, "Oh Women of *Achaia!* Men no more! / Hence let us fly, and let him waste his Store / In Loves and Pleasures on the *Phrygian* Shore" (ll. 293-295). The line, spoken by Thersites, a soldier most regard as foolish, holds truth, but, because Thersites has lost the respect of his fellow men, they disregard him. While Thersites recognizes the corruption of their General, he cannot convince the others to follow Achilles with him because his endorsement of the leader, as Pope mentions, dissuades the men from wanting to follow Achilles (*The Iliad* footnote 275). Indeed, Pope comments that "there is nothing in this Speech but what might become the Mouth of *Nestor* himself" (*The Iliad* footnote 275). However, Thersites' previously demonstrated faults and unreasonableness condemn him to be ignored. The second triplet in *An Essay on Criticism* reads: "Convinc'd, amaz'd, he checks the bold Design, / And Rules as strict his labour'd Work confine, / As if the *Stagyrite* o'erlooked each Line" (ll. 136-138). The triplet suggests the greater design at work in poetry and, more locally, in the poem itself. The design appears, as though Aristotle, the Stagyrite, were ensuring that the poem followed the rules laid out in his *Poetics*. Ironically, the "Rules as strict his labour'd Work confine" fail to confine the young Virgil's poetry to the heroic couplets commanding the poem; the sentiment overflows into a third line. Thersites' position as the fool speaking wisdom akin to Nestor's holds undeniable irony. The balance between ancient form and the appeal to employ one's reason—in appreciating the irony of the situations as well as in recognizing the truth of Thersites' words and of poetry's ability to incorporate triplets in a way that still conforms to the

poetic rules set out in the careful design of *An Essay on Criticism*—offers again a distinctly eighteenth-century triplet.

Pope's triplet acts as a balance between classical ideas about poetry and the neoclassical notions about poetry. By employing both sets of ideals, Pope engages his readers in a balancing act that leaves a sense of tension. The sense of tension, carefully crafted to catch readers' attention, disallows them to slip into easy patterns and assumptions. Instead, Pope uses the neoclassical tendencies of his time to contrast the classical ideals that were so popularly upheld by the neoclassical movement. In doing so, he questioned his audiences about their learning, encouraging them to pursue what was proper in classicism, and not simply follow it because the movement of the day encouraged them to do so, and to use their reason to determine what in classicism should be replaced.

By carefully balancing his triplet, Pope identified the eighteenth century. Not only was it a time of tension, of the expansion of empire and the alteration of readerly and critical habits, it was also a time of intellectual progress. Pope's triplet served to educate his audiences about the English lineage of poetry. The eighteenth-century triplet narrates the development of the pre-Romantic English aesthetic, setting the stage with the rules and ideals that the Romantics would break and continue to alter all throughout the Romantic period and into the post-Romantic, modern period. The eighteenth-century triplet provides a history of England, a history of ideas, and a history of poetry. It provides an insight into Pope and the concerns he wished to address in the nation that he wanted to continue to improve.

Chapter 2

"*Nameless Graces* which no Methods teach": The Metapoetic Triplet in *An Essay on*

Criticism

> *Artful heightening can coexist comfortably with an ideal of familiarity and ready accessibility. The tension is even a healthy one: couplet poems are seldom as simple as they may seem; their aim is not transparency but (as in conversation) a surface ease that requires close reading, contemplation, and analytic replaying to come to a full understanding.*
> (Hunter, *ECP* 25)

Of the 746 lines in *An Essay on Criticism*, Alexander Pope's second independent publication, only eight triplets deviate from the heroic couplet form that populates the rest of the poem. Yet, in a 1706 letter to William Walsh, as Pope explains his rules for the composition of quality poetry, he states specifically, "I would also object to the Irruption of *Alexandrine* Verses of twelve syllables, which I think should never be allow'd but when some remarkable Beauty or Propriety in them attones for the Liberty: Mr. *Dryden* has been too free of these, especially in his latter Works. I am of the same opinion as to *Triple Rhymes*' " (qtd. in Balliett 532). The presence of triplets in his debut poem, then, is particularly striking, as it suggests Pope intentionally broke his rule. John A. Jones, in his examination of the evolution of Pope's couplet structures, notes that Pope broke this triplet rule, and three more of his seven rules, on several different occasions throughout his poetry (41). The employment of triplets in *An Essay on Criticism* would therefore seem to suggest that Pope believed they either added beauty or were otherwise proper to the poem itself. It is my contention that Pope's *Essay on Criticism* self-consciously engages the triplet form to enhance the metapoetic commentary of the work, using the triplet to demonstrate how it can be used to explain its use in a poem without simply

being an ornament or variation in the verse. His triplets justify themselves by demonstrating how their deviation from the heroic couplet form enhances the guiding design of the work. By extracting the triplets and analyzing them as a self-contained narrative, Pope's discussion of the increasing complexity of art becomes evident as the work transitions from sketching to poetry, music, drama, and eventually returns to poetry. Via this discussion of art, Pope moves his readers through the act of artistic creation, extending and reframing the human experience to underscore the work of the mind in the design and function of an artwork. Such guidance of his audience allowed Pope to shape the poetic atmosphere of the eighteenth century and to progress a form of poetry which he had positioned himself to popularize. Following Horace and Dryden, Pope taught his audiences to read a poetic form that was complex and demanding, and uniquely his own.

While *An Essay on Criticism* is written in imitation of Horace's *Ars Poetica*, Pope's authorial lineage extended more immediately from John Dryden and his poetic form. Writing in the shadow of Dryden and the long poetic tradition stretching from ancient Greece to eighteenth-century England, Pope draws upon many different poetic techniques to show himself worthy of inclusion in such company. However, Pope does not simply imitate the writers before him. Instead, he aims to reshape and arguably improve what he perceived as the decaying literary and critical atmosphere in his contemporary England. In his article, "The History and Rhetoric of the Triplet," Conrad A. Balliett traces the short life of the triplet in English poetry. While he finds English triplets as far back as 1557, Balliett argues that the form did not really take root until the heroic couplet became more restrictive and disallowed much variation, which, he claims, began with Dryden and essentially ended with Pope—triplets did appear after Pope, but

with far less frequency and in a vastly different, Romantic and post-Romantic form (528).

In Dryden's work, triplets offered a way to extend readers' attention to a given idea;

Dryden employed them when he wanted to expand a couplet but believed that a

quadruplet was excessive. He explains his use of triplets and alexandrines, saying:

> When I mentioned the Pindaric line, I should have added, that I take
>
> another licence in my verses: for I frequently make sure of triplet rhymes,
>
> and for the same reason, because they bound the sense. And therefore I
>
> generally join these two licences together, and make the last verse of the
>
> triplet a Pindaric: for, besides the majesty which it gives, it confines the
>
> sense within the barriers of three lines, which would languish if it were
>
> lengthened into four. Spenser is my example for both these privileges of
>
> English verses…I regard them now as the *Magna Charta* of heroic poetry,
>
> and am too much an Englishman to lose what my ancestors have gained
>
> for me. Let the French and Italians value themselves on their regularity;
>
> strength and elevation are our standard. (qtd. in Balliett 529)

Dryden characterizes the use of triplets as a "privilege" which he inherited from his

ancestors, predecessors who include the notably English Spenser and other ancestors

whose achievements Dryden feels compelled to uphold. In fact, in Dryden's words,

triplets become equated with the *Magna Carta*, which granted "a much fuller statement

of rights and privileges […] [the document's] sixty-three clauses embraced the full

spectrum of baronial grievances, mapping the limits of royal authority more precisely

than ever before" (Hollister 180). The foundational document set limits upon the power

of the king, while also becoming one of the most influential texts in English history.

Dryden's reference here suggests an English lineage to the triplet, a form that

circumscribed the dominating power of the heroic couplet in a way that helped form the

English poetic identity of this period. In some ways, the couplet can be interpreted as the

dominating power for Dryden, a power he enjoyed the "licence" to control and reshape

using the *Magna Carta* of his triplets. Thus, his triplets offered a foundational example

for the ways that triplets could be used, much as the *Magna Carta* offered one of the most

influential documents in English history as a guide for future generations.

Before Dryden's triplet *Magna Carta*, the heroic couplet had dominated poetic

form in England. In response to an article written by a Professor Tatlock, E.C. Knowlton

pushed back the estimation of the time period in which the heroic couplet became a

dominant form of writing, noting that the influence of the "Ovidian couplet, or elegiac

distich" was actually being engaged by poets as early as Christopher Marlowe and Joseph

Hall (134). He suggests that "To Marlowe and to Hall, therefore, as well as to Heywood

and Drayton, we should look for the first good examples in English of sustained classic

heroic couplet" (Knowlton 134). As Marlowe and Hall were writing in the late sixteenth

and early seventeenth centuries, there were several decades of couplet development

before Dryden and Pope took up the form. However, along with the development of the

classic heroic couplet, the triplet also made an appearance. Knowlton remarks that "[t]he

occasional triplet later found in Dryden appears in Hall, as well as the usual verse-pauses

and the antitheses and balance" (134). Hall was writing at the very end of the sixteenth

century when the classic heroic couplet was becoming an established form in English

poetry, with the occasional triplet, several years before Pope and Dryden. Such an

established lineage, as drawn upon by Dryden himself, gives a historic foundation for

both Dryden and Pope's use of the couplet and triplet form, ensconcing them in the tradition and marking them as part of the specifically English poetic line.

While the heroic couplet is a form of classical origin, the triplet appears to be a distinctly English occurrence. Balliet suggests that "The pentameter couplet was clearly influenced by French and Latin poetry" (528). George Pope Shannon remarks that the "form and characteristics" of the classic couplet belonged "chiefly to the Latin elegiac distich," leaving readers to accede to Shannon's conclusion that, as Balliett frames it, "there is nothing in Latin equivalent to the triplet" (qtd. in Balliet 528, 528). The story is much the same with "the French hexameter couplet, which influenced a number of English poets: no significant writer of French heroic verse would have considered using triplets—it would have been too sharp a variation from the rules. The triplet is an English phenomenon" (Balliet 528). A brief survey of French and Latin poetry from the eighteenth century and before suggests that Balliet and Dryden, who also stresses the very structured form of French and Latin poetry, are accurate in their assessment of the triplet as a native English form.

For English writers, the triplet allows for greater flexibility and economy of rhymes, but also emphasizes certain ideas through its shift in rhyme pattern and third line. While it demands a third rhyming word, it simultaneously takes advantage of yet another word that rhymes with the couplet rhyme already present, thereby requiring one fewer "new" rhyme in the overall poem. In his chapter "Dryden's Triplets," Christopher Ricks traces the poet's development of the triplet form, suggesting that Dryden's use of them reflected the "triplicity" of his poetic subject—that is, the three different meanings or components of his subject (94). Ricks adds that "[i]t is not by caprice (as the instances

from *Absalom and Achitophel* show) that Dryden inserted a triplet, and 'inserted' is coercive too. Moreoever, Dryden does not limit himself to adducing, he educes a triplet, and most educative the process is" (103). Dryden utilized the triplet to further elucidate latent images or meanings in his work. The third lines are not simply variations, but instead carefully considered and significant. Dryden's employ of the triplet is educative, especially for Pope, one of his avid admirers.

The history of the development of the triplet, as traced by Balliet, places Dryden as one of the most significant contributors to the form. Dryden's triplet *Magna Carta* did not last long, however. His successor, Pope is considered by Balliet as the last poet to prominently use the triplet form (533). The short span of the triplet's popularity calls readers to wonder what influence Pope had on the structure. Even though Pope criticized the triplet form, he employed it in his work. His *Essay on Criticism* presents his first use of the triplet form, and thereby provides an important starting point for an examination of his development of the structure.[9]

Noting how Dryden's use of the form differed from Pope's, Balliett remarks that Dryden used the triplet more frequently in the latter part of his career and tended not to use his triplets in more serious forms of poetry (530).[10] Pope, however, uses triplets in the second poem he ever publishes. While he initially publishes it anonymously, the

---

[9] Of his major works, Pope also uses triplets in *The Iliad*, and in his first version of *The Rape of the Locke.*

[10] Significantly, Pope initially puts triplets into his first version of *Rape of the Locke*. However, he takes them out for the dramatically extended 1714 version for which he is best known. Taking into account Balliett's remark that Dryden used the triplet in his less serious poems, Pope seems to be doing much the opposite. For a more detailed discussion of the changes Pope makes between the first two versions of the poem, see Bruno Puetzer, Jr.'s "The *Rape*'s Progress, 1711-36: A Study of Pope's Revisions." *Thoth*, vol. 11, no. 1, 1970, pp. 3-15.

poem offers a compilation of, as Addison wrote, the " 'most known and most received observations on the subject of literature and criticism' " (qtd. in Lipking and Noggle 2496). By presenting a collection of critical wisdom early on, and by breaking the rule of the heroic couplet within the poem itself, Pope both places himself within the poetic and critical traditions and carves his own place as a poet qualified to change the rules.

While Pope was careful to control the content and form of his poem, he was even more careful about approaching such a risky venture with a public whose tastes were not always aligned with his own. By concealing his name from the first publication of the poem, Pope was able to monitor how readers were receiving it. If his couplet alterations were met with disapproval, Pope had the chance to anonymously abandon his work and write something better fitting with public taste. Pope concealed his authorship even from his friend John Caryll, saying that "he did not expect the poem to run a second edition. Not that he doubted the value of his work; he rather thought it a treatise 'which not one gentleman in three score even of a liberal education can understand' " (qtd. in Audra and Williams 203). In testing the waters, Pope found his poem very well received, at which point claiming authorship benefited him immensely. As a Catholic author in Protestant England, Pope was incredibly reliant upon the public's financial support – especially as he hoped to avoid the controls of patronage. Thus, while he sought to forge his name as a prominent poet, on par with both classical and reputable English authors, he had to be careful about how he approached such opportunities. After finding his work widely accepted and giving his name as the author of *An Essay on Criticism*, Pope situates himself in the British poetic tradition as a poet who was helping reshape the tradition.

By altering the triplet, Pope grants himself the opportunity both to utilize the heroic couplet form and to demonstrate his virtuosity as a poet who possesses a deeper understanding of poetry and who can, therefore, alter the rules. In his book *On the Poetry of Pope*, Geoffrey Tillotson examines Pope's poetic exploration of Nature (human nature) and poetic design. Tillotson suggests that Pope's desire for correctness in his poetry developed from the ideas of Aristotle: "Correctness freshened the inevitable homage to Aristotle, gave the poet's orthodoxy the self-respect of an original contribution, the zest of not being entirely like his predecessors" (*On the Poetry of Pope* 2). By laying out what he regards as the rules of proper criticism, Pope demonstrates the extent of his education and knowledge (which, he claims, came largely through his own reading), while also calculatingly using his rhetoric to promote his own alterations as correct.

While the poem itself, having demonstrated some success with the public, allowed Pope to prove himself qualified enough to defy the rules, Maynard Mack suggests that Pope's performance extended beyond just *An Essay on Criticism*. He writes, "it becomes very clear that [Pope's] way of presenting himself is a continuity of poetic self-presentations that stretches in one direction from Milton's austere bard […] toward the introspections of Wordsworth's *Prelude*, and, in another direction, toward the demystifying casual poet of our day" ("Alexander Pope" 103). For example, he was known to have taken great care in writing his letters to others. In fact, when he compiled his letters together to be published (for a profit), he was said to have edited them so that they would portray him in a better light (Mack, *Collected in Himself* 349). His poetic

performances, then, serve as elaborate, and much more public, forms of careful self-authorship meant to gain Pope financial stability without risking his reputation.

Pope's work is characterized by a meticulous authorial self-fashioning which transferred into his *Essay on Criticism* as he took up the medium of art and how audiences interact with it. He becomes an artist who develops the audience's understanding of how art is capable of engaging and extending the consideration of an idea. David Fairer, in *The Poetry of Alexander Pope*, mentions that Dryden, followed by Pope, did not wholly accept " 'the Rules' " of poetry as they had been laid out (33). He adds that, while these " 'Rules' " "might occasionally be suspended [in *Essay on Criticism*], they were still there, and continued to exert a powerful influence on English criticism […] until the mid-eighteenth century and beyond" (33). While Pope's use of the heroic couplet in addition to his discussion of the need to uphold the critical and literary tradition certainly suggest his desire to follow the rules, his triplets suggest that there is yet another layer of meaning to those rules. Describing the composite meaning within Pope's work, Tillotson says, "Pope writes on the assumption that his reader finds it exciting to discover layer below layer. He writes on the assumption that the reader is intelligent as well as sensitive, that he does not shrink from working if work provides him with wages" (Tillotson, *On the Poetry of Pope* 141). If Pope writes to encourage his readers to work to understand his poetry, then the triplet must engage readers in a way that does more than just add variation to the poem.

Balliett remarks that the triplet has been used by English poets "to vary the couplet form," but, more specifically, they were used to demonstrate

a progression in the meaning of the three rhyming words; a shift of the

caesura within the triplet; an expansion of the third pentameter to an

Alexandrine; the placing of triplets at the end of poems, or parts of poems,

or speeches (in plays) to emphasize the conclusion; the use of an epigram

in the last line; and increase of the intensity and emphasis of the triplet by

a more extensive use of such rhetorical devices as alliteration, balance,

antithesis, turns, onomatopoeia, colloquial speech, repetition, and

chiasmus. (Balliett 528)

While Pope may have used the triplet to perform any number of these functions, the way

he goes about doing so is meant to demonstrate for readers how the rules could be

effectively broken, and to encourage them to expect high quality writing when those rules

were broken. By engaging images of different art forms, Pope invokes the idea of

correctness and necessity for his audience, providing justification for his use of triplets.

As Fairer suggests, the couplet structure is ever present in Pope's work (33). The

pervasive rule would initially imply that a triplet simply breaks that rule; however, what

if the rule were reemployed through the triplet form to account for a different layer of

meaning? In this case, the triplet would become necessary to the poem. Pope's triplets

effectively argue for themselves by showing how they can be used constructively in a

poem. Such an argument adds another layer of meaning for audiences to interpret, giving

Pope the opportunity to actively shape his audience to his own standard.

Thematically, Pope's triplets discuss art, but, on a deeper level, they exemplify

how the complexity and subtlety of art engages an idea and requires extended

examination to grasp its different levels of its meaning. Acting as an artistic technique

and exploring different mediums and aspects of art compounds the function of the triplets, exemplifying their deep engagement with the metapoetic commentary of the poem and further highlighting how Pope utilized triplets to show how the rules of poetry could be fruitfully refashioned.

Pope's metapoetic labors transition from an exploration of sketching to a final, more complicated, examination of poetry. The first couplet found in the *Essay on Criticism* describes sketching, arguably the most basic and fundamental step in the production of an image. Pope writes: "But as the slightest Sketch, if justly trac'd, / Is by ill *Colouring* but the more disgrac'd, / So by *false Learning* is *good Sense* defac'd;"[11] (ll. 23-25). The structure provided by a sketch, even if the sketch is well executed ("justly trac'd"), can be ruined, not by its "[slightness]," but by the coloration that is applied to it. Much like how the couplet structure is vulnerable to the overuse of triplet rhymes, if improper ornament is added to the sketch, it can be ruined (l. 23).[12] The structure is more colorful with the triplet—and, therefore, more English—provided that it is used judiciously. When the triplet is used properly and cleverly, its triplet rhyme can be more than just an ornament. The last line of the triplet warns that improper education can ruin a person's judgment, thereby affecting his or her ability to properly judge good poetry. By positioning himself in the tradition of Dryden and in the larger lineage of writers such

---

[11] The end punctuation of the triplet is given here because the significance of the end punctuation of the triplets will be discussed later.

[12] While the poet cautions against over-ornamentation here, he uses it to deeply ironic effect in *Rape of the Lock*. For a collection of commentary on ornamentation and "things" in Pope's heroi-comical poem, see Nichol's tercentenary collection, especially Benedict (131-149), Scarth (150-166), Muri (167-217), and Nichol (218-248).

as Homer, Milton, and Horace, Pope demonstrates his educational breadth and facility, giving further credibility to his use of triplets.

In this first triplet Pope introduces a framework and a guide, good learning. This structure brings together art and the human mind to suggest that the two elements, when combined, enhance the meaning of a work of art. The second triplet explicitly draws out the notion of the underlying design that must be present in order for the coloration or enhancement of the sketch framework to succeed in creating an image or conveying a message (or, for Pope, both). The second triplet reads: "Convinc'd, amaz'd, he checks the bold Design, / And Rules as strict his labour'd Work confine, / As if the *Stagyrite* o'erlooked each Line" (ll. 136-138). In these lines, Virgil, as a young poet, recognizes the organization of poetry and of the rules that guide it. Just before this triplet, the young Virgil comes to understand that "*Nature* and *Homer* were […] the *same*" (l. 135). According to Tillotson, Aristotle's doctrine taught that a poet's "art must help nature to realize the perfection, the grand simplicity, which she is aiming at but is always being accidentally prevented from being realized […] [The poet] must allow nature freedom to become Nature. He will do this by removing all the accidentals" (*On the Poetry of Pope* 2). Interestingly, the removal of accidentals in nature will reveal the true Nature of the poem. However, when considering Pope's triplets, it would seem that either he is asking his readers to remove the third line (the "accidental") to further emphasize the process of distilling Nature, or he is using the triplet to challenge the notion that it is an "accidental" that must be removed in order for the perfection of Nature to be achieved. Writing of Pope and Dryden's engagement with external nature, Tillotson claims that "the humanity which Dryden and Pope project on to nature is more intellectual and sophisticated, more

like the humanity they valued in themselves […] They are interested in nature as it is controlled by man" (*Augustan Studies* 17). David S. Durant, in an examination of the reversal of the function of nature in Pope's *Pastorals*, remarks that, by the final installment "Winter," "Nature is but functional—only a subservient element in the expression of human emotions and situations" (481). If "nature" for Pope is a tool by which to express human emotion and to examine humanity and the intellect, then the perfection of these ends would seem to culminate in the expression of "Nature." For Pope's readers, "Nature" was only perceptible when they recognized the careful design of Pope's poetry and the undeniable connection between the intellect and art. Triplets provided a concentrated example of this recognition process.

An important aspect of the triplet is its internal design—that of its meter. In tracing the use of meter, Aristotle states that "As soon, however, as a spoken part came in [with the Tragedy], nature herself found the appropriate metre. The iambic, we know, is the most speakable of metres, as is shown by the fact that we very often fall into it in conversation" (228). Aristotle's classification of the meter as fitting with everyday speech patterns is upheld by Pope, centuries later. Fairer notes that, "When as a young man he composed his *Pastorals* he declared in his preface 'On Pastoral Poetry' that 'As for the numbers themselves [i.e. the metre], tho' they are properly of the heroic measure, they should be the smoothest, the most easy and flowing imaginable' " (Fairer 17). Pope's dedication to readable poetry that follows "the heroic measure" shows the importance he places on making his poetry accessible and organic, yet also metrical. However, Tillotson, examining *The Temple of Fame* specifically, suggests that Pope varies the meter to accommodate the rhyme (*Augustan Studies* 120). Thus, Pope

acknowledges and upholds the rule of iambic pentameter and can manipulate the meter to flow smoothly, but he is not beholden to the meter. The lines that follow the second triplet instruct readers: "Learn hence for Ancient *Rules* a just Esteem; / To copy *Nature* is to copy *Them*" (ll. 139-140). These lines, in perfect iambic pentameter,[13] stress that following the ancients like Homer and Aristotle is analogous to following Nature itself. The call for proper esteem of the ancients underscores the notion that "good Sense" was not being applied in contemporary poetry and criticism—thereby justifying the need for a work like *An Essay on Criticism* (l. 25). By calling for "just Esteem," Pope asks his audience to properly appreciate the "Ancient *Rules*" (l. 139). In doing so, he underlines the imperfection of humans, and poets more specifically, who fail to imitate Nature and also ignore the example of the ancients. In this way, Pope uses the triplet to reflect a truth about human nature itself: It is imperfect but can be guided by art and the use of reason toward a better appreciation of design and Nature.

David Alvarez, in "Alexander Pope's *An Essay on Criticism* and a Poetics for 1688," discusses how the poem's theme of wholeness "rejects bad forms of unity" and how "Reason cannot determine poetic success in advance" (102). He ultimately ties his explanation to "England's rejection of political absolutism" in the Glorious Revolution of 1688 (Alvarez 111). Alvarez specifies that " 'where the *Rules* not far enough extend,' the poem acknowledges and opens itself to the creative, productive power of language, a potentiality that always exceeds the rationality of the rules that govern art and criticism in the public sphere (146)" (102). The flexibility and creativity of language allows for

---

[13]   U   / | U / | U   / | U / | U / | U / | U   / | U   / | U / | U   /
"Learn hence for Ancient *Rules* a just Esteem; / To copy *Nature* is to copy *Them*"

poetry to extend its meaning from simply denotation to include connotation. Even while

following the rules of Aristotle, Homer, and so many others, Pope's poetry incorporates

abstract connotations and the structural alterations of triplet rhymes to add to the process

of normalizing his interventions. By offering his audiences poetry that takes part in the

contemporary meanings and implications of the time, Pope demonstrates how the

flexibility of language allows for poets to follow the ancient rules in fresh and revealing

ways relevant to eighteenth-century audiences. Conveniently, Pope's revelations can be

packaged into couplets, which reflect the traditional method for adapting the ancient

rules, and triplets, which offer a new way to understand the rules and to appreciate Pope's

innovations.

The third triplet further examines the flexibility in poetry and how such flexibility

extends to music. The triplet reads: "*Musick* resembles *Poetry*, in each / Are *nameless*

Graces which no Methods teach, / And which a *Master-Hand* alone can reach." (ll. 143-

145). Audra and Williams footnote the phrase "*nameless Graces*," saying that "[h]ere

again Pope touches upon the *je ne sais quoi*" (256). Poetry and music share in a grace

that can be guided by rules, as the second triplet implies, but cannot succeed solely by

following the rules. Both require the ingenuity of a creator, an inexpressible

characteristic unique to the mind of the individual artist. Audra and Williams add a note

from Rapin's 1674 *Reflections*, where he suggests something similar: " 'Yet is there in

Poetry, as in other Arts, certain things that *cannot be expressed*, which are (as it were)

mysteries. There are no precepts, to teach the hidden *graces*, the insensible *charms*, and

all that secret *power* of *Poetry* which passes to the heart' " (qtd. in Audra and Williams

256). Taking into account Pope's emphasis on design and the meticulous composition of

his poetry to reveal both its design and the action of the human mind as it reveals itself, the third triplet adds another layer of meaning, that which is indefinable.

In addition to music, the way that a poem engages its audience is similar to the Christian notion of Grace, in that it is unseen and often unnamed, but made evident through revelation. According to Pope, only a poet with a "*Master-hand*" effectively conjure revelations that illuminate hidden aspects of human nature (l. 145). Of course, one underlying meaning of "*Master-hand*," taking into account the idea of Grace, can also imply the hand of God. Pope does not engage in an overtly religious argument in this poem, or in very few of his other works (l. 145).[14] However, the signification is present, especially when taking into account the Biblical creation narrative as it parallels artistic creation. The suggestion of an influential "*Master-Hand,*" an outside force, could imply a lack of control or a design humans are not privy to (l. 145). By no means is the Biblical creation without design, but the implications for human beings, who are not all-knowing, is that there are mysterious aspects and layers of meaning that they can only imaginatively access, layers beyond what human reason can grasp.[15] The invocation of a Master or Creator suggests that humanity's good sense is still under the design of a greater Being. As such, all human beings have the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of Nature and of the Creator via art.

The fourth triplet offers a view similar to that of a Master (if one will accept such an extension of the parallel) in its description of the art of landcape painting: "In

---

[14] *Eloisa to Abelard* and *The Rape of the Lock* are probably his two most well-known works that involve religion more directly.

[15] Pope later develops a similar argument in *An Essay on Man*: "Take Nature's Path, and mad Opinions leave / All States can reach it, and all heads conceive" (Epistle IV, ll. 29)

Prospects, thus, some *Objects* please your Eyes, / Which *out* of Nature's *common Order* rise, / The shapeless *Rock*, or hanging *Precipice*." (ll. 158-160). Roger de Piles writes in his *Art of Painting* that " '[a] Painter has [genius] from Nature only, and does not know that he has it, nor in what degree, nor how he communicates it to his Works. It surprises the Spectator, who feels the effect without penetrating into the true Cause of it; but this Grace does not touch him otherwise, than according to the Disposition wherein he finds it' " (qtd. in Audra and Williams 258). For de Piles, painters have a genius that they access without knowing how and paint without specific principles controlling them. In a way, then, deviation from the rules makes a work unique and sometimes a masterpiece.

In a chapter arguing that an examination of artistic depictions of the common lands in England reveals an alternate history of the process of enclosure, Ian Waites comments that "At this time, the English landscape was generally seen in Arcadian terms, but its indigenous features were emphasised as it took on a national context, thus confirming a purely English social and cultural order, and reinforcing the notion that the power and status conferred by landownership was, in itself, 'natural' " (Waites 14). Landscape painting preferenced different aspects of the landscape over others (as all art must encapsulate and emphasize its subject), and, according to Waites, this meant that those aspects that were particularly English were more often highlighted in order to feed into the larger political discussion of English nationhood and identity. Pope's triplet describes this preferential treatment of objects: "In *Prospects*, thus, some *Objects* please your Eyes." While Pope does not specifically comment that these pleasing objects are identifiably English characteristics, his triplet construction and his careful self-placement within the poetic lineage of England suggest that such distinctly English objects would

have been easily identifiable for him. Pointing out the significance of some objects over others, Pope calls his readers to examine art, namely prospect paintings, more carefully, to identify what is emphasized and what is de-emphasized. The rock, for example, is "shapeless," and thus inferred to be less distinctive. The precipice, however, is "hanging." The specific placement of the precipice and the placelessness of the rock draw attention to the precipice. It is "hanging," as though in a position immediately noticeable by the reader/viewer. Even the vocabulary distinguishes these two formations: "rock," a simple, single-syllable word lacks detail, while "precipice" offers a more complex object simply by its greater length and the greater sophistication needed when employing it in metered verse.

Audra and Williams go on to comment on the disorder present in the order of the prospect painting. They explain that the "approval of the wilder and more irregular aspects of nature suggest the influence of Longinus" (Audra and Williams 258). Longinus wrote that variation in landscape was pleasing to the eye (Audra and Williams 258). Pope enacts this variation through the triplet, once again initially appearing to suggest that one of the ways the triplet can be used is for variation. He quickly modifies this artistic claim, however, adding that "if you must offend / Against the *Precept*, ne'er transgress its *End*, / Let it be *seldom*, and *compell'd by Need*" (ll. 163-165). His use of the triplet would seem to be a compulsion, a need to break the rules as an artist, but a compulsion that he determines must be restricted to "*Need*" alone to prevent its overuse. The "shapeless *Rock*, or hanging *Precipice*" are selected for their variation, the unique aspects of nature that stand out or disrupt the flow of "Nature's *common Order*." Such a "*common Order*" can have several meanings here, not the least of which include the

landscape of the painting and the "common land" that Waites discusses. Whether Waites' term was used in this period is less relevant than the recognition that "common" was used well before and after this time period to mean "A common land or estate; the undivided land belonging to the members of a local community as a whole. Hence, often, the patch of unenclosed or 'waste' land which remains to represent that" ("Common, n.1"). Therefore, "common" can imply both the overall landscape depicted in the painting and the land that was accessible to all members of a community. In this case, the landscape in the painting is made available to all viewers. By referencing this commonality, Pope draws his audience together and focuses their attention on specific aspects of the artwork. By cautioning artists from transgressing the precept, Pope points out that variations away from the "*common Order*" must occur seldomly and out of necessity. Therefore, the variation that audiences notice, if inserted by Pope's idealized artist, are intentional and necessary for the work to succeed. By pointing this out, Pope draws specific attention to his triplet (via a triplet) to suggest the needed deviation from the "*common Order*" of the couplet. In addition to underscoring the metapoetic commentary of the triplets, the introduction of need further sets off the larger notion of design. By satisfying the artistic need for variation, the artist also strategically helps prevent the reader from falling into the lull of expectation, just as the wildness of nature that Longinus mentions suggests disruption of order. The satisfaction of the artist's need usually provides some form of pleasure, even if only the pleasure of relief. If an artist satisfies such a need in an artwork, the audience too must experience some form of pleasure, especially when the variation is not overused. Drawing the couplet out into a triplet helps further vary the artistic moment of the poem by disrupting the "common"

couplet order and eliciting pleasure. While the intellectual design of the poem is being

emphasized, the sweetness of the satisfaction of the need for variation adds a further

emotive dimension to the triplet, thereby further drawing the audience's attention to how

the artwork is engaging them. In addition, the desire for harmony is satisfied. The triplet

and the couplet demonstrate their ability to interact well within the confines of the poem,

thereby satisfying the formal tension of the triplet's deviation from the couplet.

The fifth triplet seems to magnify the fourth triplet's message of correctness and

moderation in expression. The couplet, which provides a crucial turning point in the

poem, reads: "But true *Expression*, like th' unchanging *Sun*, / *Clears*, and *improves*

whate'er it shines upon, / It *gilds* all Objects, but it *alters* none." (ll. 315-317). Thus, if a

subject is well expressed, its expression enhances its object, but does not affect the object

itself. Triplets, as a form, do not change the meaning of the poem itself. Instead, they

"[*gild*]" the poem. Just as the gilding light of the sun illuminates everything, true

expression illuminates the design and the layers of meaning in a well-written poem.

Triplets, as part of the form of the *Essay*, comprise a structure that shapes the poem. As

structure is also a part of design, and, as Pope writes what he judges to be "true

Expression," the triplets thus become essential to the gilding that enhances the poem. To

take them out would be to damage the structure of the poem because it would affect the

capacity for "true *Expression*" within the poem.

Pope's comfort with, and continued desire for, correct expression was fashioned

into natural-sounding couplets. In a discussion of the interconnectedness of eighteenth-

century poetry and its contemporary culture of conversation, J. Paul Hunter remarks that

couplets never try to deny that they are artful, calculated, rhetorical, and 'artificial' even when they strive to be smooth, accessible colloquial, and conversational. […] The tension [between 'artful heightening' and 'familiarity and ready accessibility'] is even a healthy one: couplet poems are seldom as simple as they may seem; their aim is not transparency but (as in conversation) a surface ease that requires close reading, contemplation, and analytic replaying to come to a full understanding. (Hunter, *ECP* 25)

By crafting the couplet to emulate conversation, poets could use the form to create a sense of familiarity that would invite in audiences while also alerting them to the analysis and consideration Hunter suggests is required in conversation. Pope's conversational couplets were extended to conversational triplets to maintain the request for analysis and contemplation. The conversational expression is "true" in the sense that it replicates the way that conversation flows and functions. However, while poetry also requires contemplation as conversation does, it often asks audiences to consider the images by which abstract ideas are brought up. These images "[*gild*]" the expression, helping to draw out the ideas the poem discusses.

In a much later line, Pope writes that "The sound must seem an echo to the sense" (l. 367). Clear, conversational, and "true" "*Expression*" is "[gilded]" by the sound that reflects its meaning. In direct contrast to Pope's line, John Shoptaw argues in "Lyric Cryptography" that "poetic sound doesn't just echo or underscore or undercut or otherwise pattern the sense but actually helps produce poetic meaning, so that the sense seems an afterthought to the sound" (223). He takes specific issue with Pope's notion

that the sense should be reflected in the sound of the poem, saying that "Pope's […]

dictum of sound poetics […] implies that sound can do no more. To attend to sound

before or separately from meaning is, it seems, a hazardous enterprise" (Shoptaw 222).

Shoptaw goes on to explain his theory of cryptography, which offers what he terms

"productive reading," a method which notices latent words and ideas that, while not

necessarily intentional on the author's part, offer deeper insight into the poem as a "joint

production of its poet and its generations of readers, and the forces—linguistic, personal,

cultural, social, historical, and so on—at work on them both" (223). Shoptaw examines

different poems, searching for what may lie just below the surface. While Shoptaw may

disagree with Pope's direct line about sound only echoing sense, Pope's fifth triplet offers

many religious undertones that, when drawn to the surface, offer new insights. In the

first part of the triplet—"But true *Expression*, like th' unchanging *Sun*"—the word "*Sun*"

is easily read as a "religious pun on 'son' " (Shoptaw 241)[16]. While Shoptaw uses this

explanation to describe the implications of "sun" in one of Emily Dickinson's poems, the

wordplay reveals another layer to the triplet's expression.   The Douay-Rheims

translation of the Bible, contemporary to Pope's writing of the *Essay on Criticism*,

describes Jesus' words about his resurrection and the about the Second Coming: "I am

come a light into the world; that whosoever believeth in me, may not remain in darkness.

And if any man hear my words, and keep them not, I do not judge him: for I came not to

---

[16] Shoptaw is careful to delineate the differences between "puns" and "cryptwords." He writes that "[s]ome crypt words expand their textual influence into riddles; others contract theirs into puns or wordplays, which is how readers, when they notice them, tend to identify them. In fact, the difference between cryptography and punning is often a matter of degree. Punning word pairs tends to be more closely related than cryptographic pairs […] Puns are also typically more pointed—more concentrated and foregrounded—than crypt words" (Shoptaw 244).

judge the world, but to save the world" (John 12: 46-47). The "light" that enters into the

world is a metaphor for Christ. The "*Sun*," read productively, can also be read to mean

"Son," thereby paralleling the dual meaning of "light" in the Bible passage. Just as

Christ says that those who believe in him will "not remain in darkness," the "*Sun*"

"*Clears*, and *improves* whate'er it shines upon," removing what is unclear, obscured, or

dark.

Christ's words suggest that he will not judge those who do not choose to follow

him. His mission is to save believers. In this way, Christ does not alter himself to force

people to believe. He simply offers the light of Truth for people to consider. Thus,

invoking the last part of the fifth triplet, the light only "*gilds* all Objects" with revelation,

"but it *alters* none." Christ continues on to say that "the word that I have spoken, the

same shall judge him in the last day. For I have not spoken of myself; but the Father who

sent me, he gave me commandment what I should say, and what I should speak. And I

know that his commandment is life everlasting. The things therefore that I speak, even as

the Father said unto me, so do I speak" (John 12: 48-50). Christ himself admits that he

has not altered what God asked him to say. Thus, Christ also passes on the light without

changing it, "[*altering*] none." In addition to the light of revelation, the triplet mentions

"true *Expression*," a phrase that phonemically[17] suggests "resurrection." Christ's

resurrection will include the same words that he used when he first came to earth. The

message will remain the same, suggesting that it is, in fact, "true *Expression*." The word

"true" has a much deeper implication because, when considering the crypt word, the truth

---

[17] Shoptaw explains that "[t]he cryptography may be *phonemic*; the crypt word or phrase
may, for instance, rhyme with or otherwise resonate in its marker [the word it echoes]"
(224-225).

is not simply reflected when a poet accurately conveys some idea or emotion. Instead, "true" suggests Truth, the unchanging standard that constantly sheds its light on everything, but cannot alter itself to illuminate what elects to remain in darkness. Indeed, the Truth, which equates to God, commands "life everlasting," which is only achievable for those who alter themselves to better follow it. By not changing, the "true *Expression*" emphasizes its eternalness and its perpetual relevance to audiences.

The fifth triplet does not only engage in religious examinations, however. In his article "Pope Surveys His Kingdom: An Essay on Criticism," Ripley Hotch discusses how Pope's poem describes the "state of poetry" as it mirrors, on a miniature scale, the politics and social structure of a kingdom (474). He describes poetic talent and the craft of the critic, stating that "[t]he equivalence of poetic talent and rules and nature's laws is shown in the way a poet's inspiration can go beyond its own laws to create new laws which are after all only extensions of the old ones" (Hotch 476). Thus, the old laws are never entirely erased, but, instead, they are refashioned to better accommodate the current poetic and critical atmosphere. When examining Pope's triplets, the metric structure of the triplet aligns with that of the couplet, as does the rhyme. However, the added line extends the rule of iambic pentameter and couplet rhyme, reminding readers of the rules themselves, but also showing that the couplet structure can be extended for a further poetic effect: Extending the line count shows how poetic variation stresses the dominant element of the poetic rules (the third line reminds us that the poem has largely held couplets). By simultaneously breaking the rules of expectation and referencing them, Pope breaks the monotony of the poem and creates a further sense of harmony.

Hotch continues on to suggest that *An Essay on Criticism* is "based on the notions that creation must be limited or it becomes cancerous, and that law must be tempered or it is sterile" (478). The triplet, then, also embodies an aspect of balance and necessary variation, an enacted metapoetic. The poem must be varied so as to prevent its message from being lost amidst expectation and the lull of predictability. However, the message cannot extend into a quadruplet, because, as Dryden once noted, the sense of the idea "would languish if it were lengthened into four [lines]," becoming excessive and possibly injurious to the overall message of the poem (qtd. in Balliett 529). This rule for rules adds the next layer of meaning to Pope's triplets, reiterating that critics and readers must be aware of themselves and their knowledge and limitations as they approach the poem. Pope calls for a metareader:

> Be sure *your self* and your own *Reach* to know,
>
> How far your *Genius, Taste,* and *Learning* go;
>
> Launch not beyond your Depth, but be discreet,
>
> And mark *that Point* where Sense and Dulness *meet.* (ll. 47-50)

By cautioning his audience not to be overconfident in their reading, Pope encourages self-reflection and further examination of the craft of poetry. Pope himself, however, carefully positions himself as both a humble and a genius poet. Hotch perceptively indicates that "Pope as poet is 'the one who knows,' whose knowledge and skill show his worth and his right to talk to others as a superior. In order to prove this he must impress two qualities of himself on the reader: his humility (his knowledge of his limits) and his creative ability (his knowledge of his worth)" (479). Pope's use of the triplet, then, demonstrates that he is aware of his limitations, but his limitations extend farther than his

audience's. Even in his initial remark to Caryll about *An Essay on Criticism*—it was a poem " 'which not one gentleman in three score even of a liberal education can understand' "—Pope appears humble, but also subtly suggests that his learning and understanding are superior enough that they evade even the reach of liberally educated men (qtd. in Audra and Williams 203). Pope, however, does provide comic relief from his serious discussion of self-understanding, a form of relief quite similar to the tension that the triplet can break in couplet-dominated poetry.

The sixth triplet provides a brief step back from the development of the serious examination of art and its different forms by discussing a humorous moment in drama: "Unlucky, as *Fungoso* in the Play, / These Sparks with aukward Vanity display / What the Fine Gentleman wore *Yesterday*!" (ll. 328-330). In the *Twickenham Edition* footnote, Audra and Williams comment that *Fungoso* alludes to "*Every Man out of his Humour*" by Ben Jonson (276). They go on to remark that "Pope's information, as EC notes, may have been confined to Dryden's allusion in the Dedic. to *The Assignation*: '…he is only like *Fungoso* in the Play, who follows the Fashion at a distance.' It is surprising that the correction was not made in the later editions" (Audra and Williams 276). While there is some disparity between sources for the allusion, the sentiment of the drama and its comment on the futility of vanity still hold. In the lines that follow the triplet, the poet writes: "And but so mimick ancient Wits at best, / As Apes our Grandsires in their *Doublets drest*" (ll. 331-332). Mimicry, the poet cautions, only "Apes"[18] poetic ancestry, glancing at it from afar. The "early modern obsessions with wealth and self-display" are

---

[18] For a more in-depth discussion of how apes, and other animals, were depicted and conceived of in the eighteenth century, see Laura Brown's *Homeless Dogs and Melancholy Apes* (Cornell University Press, 2010).

facets of the eighteenth-century play that have been drawn out by critics such as Helen

Ostovich ("Description"). Pope critiques all notions of self-display when they lead to the

revelation that the display is unoriginal and merely imitative. In fact, when "Sparks"[19]

attempt to display themselves, their vanity is "aukward" because it derives from an

outdated source, "What the Fine Gentleman wore *Yesterday*!" In other words, the

fineness of the gentlemen of yesterday is outdated in the present. By engaging such

vanity, those who are vain imitate a time to which they do not belong, and become

comical like Fungoso. The mention of doublets in the subsequent couplet further

reiterates the quixotic humorousness of the imitation, suggesting that it imitates

something no longer in fashion.

In the beginning of his play *Every Man Out of His Humour*, Benjamin Jonson

writes of Fungoso's character: "FUNGOSO, the son of Sordido, and a student; one that

has revelled in his time, and follows the fashion afar off, like a spy. He makes it the

whole bent of his endeavours to wring sufficient means from his wretched father, to put

him in courtier's cut; at which he earnestly aims, but so unluckily, that he still lights short

a suit" (n.p.). Despite his desire to become a courtier, Fungoso cannot succeed. Instead,

he is relegated to imitating from a distance. However, the play, "[b]y means of various

episodes," functions so that "each character is eventually driven 'out of his humour' "

("Every Man out of His Humour"). If each character is cured of his ailment, then, by

referencing Fungoso, Pope seems to imply that those who simply imitate, who "so

mimick ancient Wits at best," can be redeemed. However, a certain element of self-

---

[19] "spark": "A young man of an elegant or foppish character; one who affects smartness of display in dress and manners. Chiefly in more or less depreciatory use" ("spark, n. 2.2").

reflection and a consideration of art's function is necessary. Thus, Pope's insistence that

rules must be followed, unless a person's poetic brilliance or necessity allows for them to

be changed, is slightly modified to suggest that copying of the ancients is not truly art.

While this message appears to free general audiences to insert their own interpretive

modifications into art, Pope's previous caution to them to recognize their limitations

serves to further underscore the notion that only those who know how to properly balance

imitation and individualism in art can be successful.

The seventh triplet alludes to the critique of imitation in the sixth, showing how

meaningful reference can fall upon deaf ears: "Who haunt *Parnassus* but to please their

Ear, / Not mend their Minds; as some to *Church* repair, / Not for the *Doctrine*, but the

Musick there." (ll. 341-343). Those who follow the ancients in a self-gratifying way,

because they believe that following the rules as closely as possible, even to the point of

sacrificing style and individuality, is "[pleasing]," must reconsider their investment in

poetry. Pope disturbs the readers' ears by adding in his triplet because the triplet helps to

"mend their Minds." The triplet reveals the illusory glory in "[haunting] *Parnassus*"

because, like a ghost, the ancients cannot be properly embodied in the later poets' works.

In addition, the triplet disturbs the ears of those who simply listen to the couplet "music"

of the poem, and do not focus on other aspects of the poem's art or content.[20] Just as

---

[20] Ironically, Jonathan Swift expended much effort in trying to get rid of the triplet, and believed he had been successful (Balliet 532). To Thomas Beach, he criticized Dryden, saying "he […] brought in the Alexandrine verse at the end of the triplets. I was so angry at these corruptions, that above twenty-four years ago I banished them all by one triplet, with the Alexandrine, upon a very ridiculous subject. I absolutely did prevail with Mr. Pope […] to reject them. Mr. Pope never used them til he translated Homer, which was too long a work to be so very exact in; and I think in one or two of his last poems he hath, out of laziness, done the same thing, though very seldom" (qtd. in Balliet 532).

blasphemous as those who attend church for the music instead of the teachings, Pope's

triplet proclaims the danger of simple imitation, as it produces only insubstantial ghosts

of the originals. Tillotson remarks that Pope imitated other poets quite often; however,

his imitations sought to produce better, more meaningful versions of statements,

passages, or images in others' works: "often Pope gives the reader the finer pleasure of

seeing a tame or good thing in another poet lifted and made far more incisive. He

provides a phrase with its culmination" (Tillotson, *On the Poetry of Pope* 152-153).

Pope's use of imitation takes the imitative quality of his work a step further and uses it to

refine the first poet's work, in a way that sought to outperform the original poet in artistic

talent. This competitive showmanship further displayed Pope's abilities, placing him

within the poetic lineage, but as the poet superior to those who had written before him.

Thus, the triplet reminds readers that a skilled poet follows good sense and propriety,

while also adding an original contribution to the poetic tradition.

The final triplet brings to a close Pope's discussion of the rules of poetry and

criticism via triplets, reiterating the process by which imitation must take place and the

good sense it necessitates. It reads: "Distrustful *Sense* with modest Caution speaks; / It

still *looks home*, and *short Excursions* makes; / But *rattling Nonsense* in full *Vollies*

breaks;" (ll. 626-628). Referencing the earlier caution to "Be sure *your self* and your own

Reach to know," the poet warns that audiences must recognize their position and

limitations when reading and criticizing poetry (l. 47). When a poet's sense is checked

by caution, it can issue forth a good form of sense, a form that both references the rules

established by the ancients – "*home*" – and appreciates moderated artistic originality –

"*short Excursions*" (l. 627). This good sense's careful navigation can lead to even better

sense and deeper revelation of Nature and the grand design which guides the human mind and poetic verse. The caution against the loud, unconsidered state of "*rattling Nonsense*" is punctuated by a semi-colon, the only one of the eight triplets to fail to provide a full stop in its ideological development (l. 628). The mark seems to suggest that, while good sense has helped contain the idea within the confines of the triplet before it spread dangerously into a "[languishing]" quadruplet, the possibility still presses the form just below the surface of the poem's structures (Dryden qtd. in Balliett 529).

Pope's triplet rhymes in *An Essay on Criticism* engage in a metapoetics that illustrates how the triplet can be used effectively in poetry. The triplets perform their functionality, using different artistic media to help uncover the careful design that good artists engage in when creating. By revealing this careful design, Pope shows his audiences how art can function on a deeply involved level. By requiring his audiences to see how far art can reach, Pope increases their awareness of what good art—at least, art that follows his guidelines—looks like. By making artistic standards apparent, Pope develops his audience's ability to criticize by offering them examples to compare with other contemporary art. Art that failed to follow Pope's quality of work would therefore be rejected, as Pope hoped it would be. If audiences ignored art that failed to fit the critical rules provided in *An Essay on Criticism*, then the literary atmosphere would, for Pope, be improved and proper tradition would be preserved. By building an audience awareness of the same rules, Pope developed a critical community that would find itself a part of the English poetic tradition and thereby feel responsible to maintain the poetic tradition.

Chapter 3

The Absent Triplet in *The Rape of the Lock* (1714)

A Man may correct his Verses till he takes away the true Spirit of
them; especially if he submits to the correction of some who pass
for great Critics, by mechanical Rules, and never enter into the true
Design and Genius of an Author -Pope's letter to William Walsh,
29 September 1706[21]

Pope employs eight triplets in the 746 lines of *An Essay on Criticism*. However,

in his first *Rape of the Locke*, published anonymously in 1712, Pope uses only two

triplets in 334 lines. Roughly, the poet employs 75% fewer triplets in half the number of

lines. When he revises his poem for its second publication, he removes the two triplets

altogether. Bruno Puetzer, Jr. remarks that the poet extracts the "unnecessary triplets" in

the 1714 version, now 794 lines long (15, 4). While such an evaluation of the triplets'

necessity is subjective, Pope does reframe the triplets into couplets for the second

version. An avid reviser, Pope constantly reworked his poetry. That he would remove

two triplets and replace them with couplets containing the same information is not

surprising. Writing to William Walsh in 1706, Pope explained that triplets must be

beautiful or otherwise proper in some way to be acceptable (Balliett 532). In his

reevaluation, Pope appears to have determined that *The Rape of the Locke* triplets did not

meet either of his requirements. The transformations that appear in the newly renamed

1714 version, *The Rape of the Lock*, however, suggest that Pope's concern with the

appropriateness of his initial triplets extended to a larger concern with the effectiveness

of the poem.

---

[21]"Letter to William Walsh, 29 September 1706." *Eighteenth-Century Collections Online*,
p. 69.

The removal of the triplets and the significant alterations Pope makes in the

1714[22] revision suggest a reformation in the function of poem itself. Replacing the

triplets produces a formally regular poem of heroic couplets, a predictable line structure

that does not vary from expectation. Pope also adds three more cantos and "machinery"

to his work, further shifting audience attention from his line structure. Charles

Mahoney's notion that triplets have been used to "mix and join two (lovers) in a more

sophisticated (tripartite) and compelling way [than] the couplet could manage," proposes

that "[t]he more liberal way of the triplet is to exceed the partial unity of the couplet and

figure unification in threes: one, one another, and all" (46). The dearth of triplets in the

revised *Rape of the Lock* denies this idea of the "all" in the poem's structure. In his

article "Coupling Past and Future: Dryden's Rhymes as History," Kyle Pivetti examines

John Dryden's poetic form and argues that the form draws together history and memory.

Pivetti asserts that "[i]n rhyme Dryden can envision a new history in which the poet's

past is incorporated into a narrative and a restoration. […] That artistic form looks to the

rubble of memory in order to separate itself, to declare itself awake—moving toward a

future that accords with historical narrative" (107). Thus, Pivetti ultimately argues that

Dryden's rhymes offer a cohesion of history and memory that offers a restoration of the

historical narrative, a restoration that rectifies the differences in the political and religious

conflicts plaguing England in the wake of the Glorious Revolution. Pivetti's suggestion

of unification from division offers a parallel of sorts to Ricks' contention that the triplet

can model ideas of "one, one another, and all" (46). Pope, following Dryden's footsteps,

---

[22] Pope's 1715 revision of the poem does not have significant structural changes like the 1714 version, and, therefore, does not have a direct triplet influence. Thus, it lies outside the scope of this project.

seems to be promoting a similar idea of resolution and a united community in the structure of his revised *Rape of the Lock*. While Pope removed the triplets that would formally uphold the idea of unification, his poem's form, added machinery, and depictions of Belinda's locks of hair suggest that he is enacting a metapoetics of the triplet structure to demonstrate how a triplet can enact unification in the eighteenth century. In *The Rape of the Lock* (1714), the structure and content of the poem imitate the unification offered by the triplet form, thereby confirming its functional presence and underscoring its formal absence.

As the previous two chapters have argued that Pope's triplets are specifically eighteenth century and metapoetic, this chapter seeks to demonstrate how the eighteenth-century metapoetic triplet manifests itself at the beginning of Pope's satirical work. While the poet moves away from triplets as he begins to engage satire, the triplet is not entirely abandoned. Instead, Pope's specific innovations and additions in *The Rape of the Lock* energize the eighteenth-century metapoetic triplet form as it is writ large.[23]

Encouraged by Pope's Catholic friend John Caryll, the poem was originally intended to help heal the rift between two Catholic families, divided after Lord Petre cut off a lock of Arabella Fermor's hair (Nichol xvi). However, Pope's first attempt in 1712 had not been met with much success. In the epigraph to the 1714 revision, Pope remarks that Arabella Fermor "had the good-nature for my sake to consent to the publication of [a poem] more correct: This I was forc'd to, before I had executed half my design, for the

---

[23] Pope's later satirical work and his most mature poetry offer fruitful grounds for further investigation of the enactment of triplets in poetic content. This project seeks to address Pope's earlier poems to examine how the triplet was first conceived in his work; it is left to a later project or to other scholars to continue to trace the triplet enactment to the end of Pope's work.

Machinery was entirely wanting to compleat it" (Lipking and Noggle 2514). Thus, Pope

implies that his changes better convey his message and draw his work together in a more

satisfactory way. He specifically employs the term "design" in the inscription. While the

term can certainly signify the plans that Pope had to continue to expand the poem, it is

reminiscent of the "Design" mentioned in the second triplet of *An Essay on Criticism*,

which reads: "Convinc'd, amaz'd, he checks the bold Design, / And Rules as strict his

labour'd Work confine, / As if the *Stagyrite* o'erlooked each Line" (ll. 136-138). As

discussed in the previous chapter, Pope is gesturing toward the larger design of the poem,

employing the triplet to underscore the guiding design that the young Virgil is seeing. By

employing the term "design" again, Pope conveniently situates himself as capable of

understanding the deep, inner workings of poetry, thereby placing himself in company

with Virgil as an epicist genius enough to emulate Homer. By gesturing back to the

triplets and their metapoetic function in *An Essay on Criticism*, whether intentionally or

not, Pope foreshadows the metapoetic nature of *The Rape of the Lock*.

Furthermore, in the epigraph, Pope describes the goal of the poem, explaining that

it "was intended only to divert a few young ladies, who have good sense and good humor

enough to laugh not only at their sex's little unguarded follies, but at their own" (qtd. in

Lipking and Noggle 2514). The desire for good humor in his audience thus extends from

the "few young ladies" to their entire sex. While, admittedly, the poem is also intended

to ease the tension between two upper class, Catholic families, Pope's use of the term

"sex's" gestures toward yet another group's inclusion. According to the online *Oxford

English Dictionary*, the term "sex" can refer to "[e]ither of the two main categories (male

and female) into which humans and many other living things are divided on the basis of

their reproductive functions; (hence) the members of these categories viewed as a group"

("sex, n.1"). This categorization by gender is not atypical of Pope's time. However, this

easy definition, while appropriate to the address, also has an additional, more obscure

definition. The *OED* mentions that "sex" can also be defined as "sect, n."

Etymologically, the term is a "[v]ariant of sect n., arising from confusion with sex"

("sect, n. 2"). While it is possible that Pope was not aware of this more obscure use of

the word—however, this usage has been found as early as 1583 and the variation of

"sects" to "sex" has been found as early as Chaucer—the poet's facility with layering

multiple meanings is undeniable ("sex, n.2"; "sect, n. 1").

Employing John Shoptaw's theory of linguistic cryptography to the term "sex"

and its variant "sects" reveals that the term may imply religious denominations.[24] As

religious organizations can be considered "sects," Pope's reference at least implies that

his audience includes not only young women, but also Catholics—as is known from the

poem's original inspiration—*and* Protestants, who comprise the other dominant religious

organization in England at this time. Thus, Pope invokes an audience comprised of the

majority of England to listen to his words and to laugh at their "sects' " "unguarded

follies" and at themselves. The subtle request for a larger, reflective audience also draws

up the idea that, in learning to acknowledge their own mistakes and shortcomings, the

audience will learn to better cooperate with one another. The implied unification, here,

---

[24] In "Linguistic Cryptography," Shoptaw employs "productive reading," a method which examines latent ideas and words that come through the text, whether intentionally on the author's part or not, and offer deeper insight into the poem as a "joint production of its poet and its generations of readers, and the forces—linguistic, personal, cultural, social, historical, and so on—at work on them both" (223).

reflects the unification the third line of the triplet can offer, much as Ricks and to some

extent Pivetti have argued.

In order to clarify his poem's message for his audience, Pope explains that he had

employed "machinery" that "was entirely wanting to help complete [the poem]" (qtd. in

Lipking and Noggle 2514). The removal of the triplets confirms that they are excluded

from the "machinery." Instead, the poem is entirely comprised of couplets. Joseph

Malof, in his article "Meter as Organic Form," discusses how meter helps offset

regularity: "But since an awareness of variety depends on an awareness of a standard to

be deviated from, the varied rhythms in the poem are created through contrast to some

fixed point of reference. So meter validates not only the ideas in the poem, but also the

'individuality' of the poet's rhythms" (15). Pope's metrical variations continually

contrast the standardized, iambic pentameter of the heroic couplet, thus continually

drawing focus to the structure. In addition, meter "validates" the poem's ideas. Malof

continues on to say that "[t]he ambivalent relationship [between meter and content] is

quite inescapable, since, if the poem is to hang together, the more unconventional the

content becomes, the more must it depend on the normalcy of the meter to make it

acceptable to the poem" ("Meter" 16). Thus, the regularity of the couplet is crucial for

the machinery in the poem to be effective. It serves a dual purpose by both drawing

audience attention with its variation of iambic pentameter while also shifting audience

attention away from itself by not varying its line count.

Commenting upon the relationship between Pope's decision to use only couplets

and the eighteenth-century fascination with miniaturization, Cynthia Wall remarks that

"[b]oth the simple act of looking through the microscope and its larger implications for

use in research showed that to be miniaturized […] was not to be reduced. On the contrary, the miniature became magnified" (26). She continues on to say that "[t]he metrical form of the poem employs similar strategies of opening up meanings while simultaneously appearing to close things down," eventually asserting that knowledge and mastery of the seemingly rigid rules paradoxically lends a flexible energy to the form (27). Considering the fate of *The Rape of the Locke*'s two triplets, Pope appears to have been working on miniaturization in order to emphasize the shift in focus that Wall mentions. By creating a regular, formal framework, Pope closes down the possibility of variation in line count, but opens up the notion that the content of the poem is deploying complex ideas that must be scrutinized.

Writing about truth and imagination, David Fairer remarks that, "[f]or Pope (here as in other ways the heir of the Miltonic-humanist tradition) the truth could not be affirmed until the imaginative faculty had submitted its findings to the rational faculty, which acted upon received images by applying to them the judgment of the reason" (*Pope's Imagination* 55). Examining Pope's form from the perspective of the balance of imagination and truth, the couplet structure would seem most easily recognizable as the voice of reason in the poem. Its consistency and lineage extend from a long tradition of heroic couplets, which are the components of the highly revered epic.

As discussed earlier, the triplet form offers the expansion of meaning and can effect unification of two, opposing sides. For Fairer, imagination and reason must be joined together to reach truth. If we overlay this search for truth onto *The Rape of the Lock*'s structure, the reason that the couplet symbolizes through its regularity and its role in the English poetic tradition is not yet balanced by the imagination.

The mock epic form maintains the consistent use of couplets, but it alters the contents of the epic. In *An Essay on Criticism*, Pope carefully constructed an authorial image that placed him as an authority figure who was both qualified to convey the rules of criticism and to break such critical rules. In *The Rape of the Lock*, Pope shifts his authority to change the genre of the epic, fashioning what he calls "a heroi-comical poem." By inventing this term, Pope establishes a Johnsonian authority. While Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary of the English Language* would not come out until 1755, the author's attempt to stabilize the language while also adding his own personal touch to the definitions—as well as some of his own words—is preceded by Pope's establishment of his own rules and by his classification of the "heroi-comical poem" ("1755-Jonson's Dictionary").

According to Ulrich Broich, many of Pope's contemporaries considered Pope's term and work to be entirely original (109). However, Broich goes on to disagree with this classification, remarking that, in fact, "Pope himself […] was not concerned with originality. Paradoxically, the very works which are nowadays regarded as his best and most original were quite consciously, and very extensively, moulded by existing literary models" (109-110). Broich goes on to say that "[t]he special qualities of *The Rape of the Lock* can only be grasped by examining the extent to which it preserves and yet at the same time transmutes the form that originated with Boileau's *Le Lutrin* and was anglicised by Garth's *Dispensary*" (110). While Broich classifies Pope's work as modeling pre-existing literary forms, he notes that Pope "transmutes" Boileau and Garth's form. Even if Pope is building from literary models, he is still advancing and reshaping the form established by Boileau and Garth. Thus, while Broich's observation

is an important one to remember in examinations of the genre and structure of the poem, it is important to balance such observations with Pope's innovations as a poet.

In his 1713 chapter "A Receipt to make an Epic Poem," Pope writes that "[a]n Epic Poem, the Critics agree, is the greatest work human nature is capable of. They have already laid down many mechanical rules for compositions of this sort, but at the same time they cut off almost all undertakers from the possibility of ever performing them; for the first qualification they unanimously require in a Poet, is a *Genius*" (175). Thus, the year before he approaches his 1714 *Rape of the Lock* revision Pope acknowledges that the rules for the composition of an epic had already been laid out. Pope's confidence in his abilities as a poet was certainly not wanting—as displayed in his establishment of poetic authority to recite and to alter the rules for writing in *An Essay on Criticism*—however, his choice to write a work that is controversially classified by modern critics as a mock epic, suggests that he was not intending to write "the greatest work human nature is capable of." Indeed, the epic form was very attractive in the neoclassical movement of Pope's era. Broich also writes that "[s]ince one of Pope's main aims was to obey neoclassical 'rules' for the epic and to incorporate the basic features of the genre in his poem, *The Rape of the Lock* stands within the epic tradition to a degree shared only by *Le Lutrin*" (Broich 111).[25] Thus, Pope's emulation of Boileau is, for Broich, the closest of all mock epicists'. Just as with the couplet structure, Pope uses the epic/mock epic form to establish a background of tradition and its implied order and reason.

---

[25] *Le Lutrin* is by Boileau, who is considered the "author of the first truly authentic mock-heroic poem" (Broich 93).

In fact, Ritchie Robertson claims that the epic is necessary for the mock epic to exist: " 'Mock epic' is an antigenre to classical epic (sometimes also to Christian epic), and depends on the continued prestige of its serious counterpart" (5). Just as the couplets unceasingly declare their regularity (thereby setting off any variations, which are only variations by virtue of the couplet's continued prevalence), the epic must maintain its high status in order for the mock epic to be recognizable.

However, the legibility of Pope's "heroi-comedy" was under threat in English society at this time. In *An Essay on Criticism*, Pope advocated for the preservation of high quality literature and for his audience to recall the ancients and rules of composition to guide their tastes. He wrote critically about the literary market's sudden explosion, particularly because of the decline in the standards for published content and the rapid rise of hack writers due to the specialization of publishers and authors.

In his instruction of authors and critics, Pope writes:

> First follow NATURE, and your Judgment frame
>
> By her just Standard, which is still the same:
>
> *Unerring Nature*, still divinely bright,
>
> One *clear*, *unchanged*, and *Universal* Light,
>
> Life, Force, and Beauty must to all impart,
>
> At once the *Source*, and *End*, and *Test* of *Art*.
>
> Art from that fund each just supply provides,
>
> Works *without show*, and *without Pomp* presides. (*Essay on*
>
> *Criticism* ll. 68-75)

Pope, in the beginning of his poem, seeks to "[construct] a harmonious system in which he effects a compromise among all these conflicting forces [amongst rules of criticism, the guiding principle of Nature, the influence and authority of the ancients, and genius]— a compromise that is typical of his times" (Lipking and Noggle 2497). This attempt to bring harmony to the system of criticism and literature suggests that Pope had hoped to help remedy the divide forming between critics and authors. The *Essay on Criticism* especially encouraged writers and critics to look to Nature as they composed. Nature, for Pope, serves as a guiding force, an unchanging constant. By pointing out and discussing the various aspects which he believed to be key to the production of good literature, Pope attempted to harmonize writers and critics with the tradition from which they had emerged. The negative reaction to his *Essay on Criticism*, which was meant only to "give to generally accepted doctrines pleasing and memorable expression and make them useful to modern poets," seems to signify to the author that his audience no longer respected or followed the "generally accepted doctrines" (Lipking and Noggle 2496). Pope's fear that literary standards were declining was only intensified by the upper class's growing desire for trivialities, or, as Wall notes, miniatures. However, whereas Wall believes that miniaturization did not signify reduction but, rather, magnification, Fairer points out that the growing habits of the upper class threatened greater meaning. Writing of the trivialities in mock heroic, Fairer contends that "Pope is satirizing contemporary upper-class society for being obsessed with trivia; things have got out of proportion, modern values are all wrong, and if we measure them against the great actions of the past we shall see life in its true perspective" (*The Poetry of Alexander Pope* 59). He continues on to say that "mock-heroic works by setting up one

figure/situation/term against another, so that we get both a sense of similarity *and*

difference. It is too simple to say that we judge between them and conclude that because

one is important the other is trivial" (*The Poetry of Alexander Pope* 59-60). The "sense

of similarity *and* difference," while a reference to content and overall poem structure, is

reminiscent of John A. Jones' comment about the antithesis in the couplets in *An Essay*

on Criticism. In *Pope's Couplet Art*, he writes:

> The ideal toward which everything in the *Essay* points is one of wholeness
>
> and corporateness since the critic, and the poet too, must be whole in
>
> Pope's classical and humanist sense in order to meet on the common
>
> ground of Nature and therefore to write and criticize significantly. To
>
> emphasize the ideal of wholeness, Pope first throws into relief the
>
> oppositions in the literary disputes of his times, polarizing such important
>
> pairs of terms as poet—critic, wit—judgment, whole—part, inspiration—
>
> rules, ancient—modern. […] Within his tightly drawn parallels, Pope sets
>
> the antithetic relations which fragment his ideal of Nature […] The whole
>
> tenor of Pope's antithetic parallelism is to a 'reconciliation of opposites'
>
> within the ideal principle of Nature. (Jones 46-47)

Jones' evaluation of Pope's poem suggests that unification is possible when opposing

sides appeal to the "common ground" that belongs to Nature. Thus, a " 'reconciliation of

opposites' " can be achieved, as Jones argues, through "antithetic parallelism." Jones'

reading, however, overlooks the presence of triplets in the *Essay on Criticism*.

Reconciliation of opposites can occur as he describes, but, if solely examining Pope's

couplets, the reconciliation is only enacted through the unification of the structures'

content within the readers' minds. The couplet form itself does not directly offer such reconciliation because the first line stands in opposition to the second, albeit in a very revelatory way. However, the triplet form that appears in the poem does offer a sort of reconciliation through its metapoetic training of the audience to accept it and to follow the educational model it provides. The triplet can offer clear resolution in its third line, something left to intuition in the couplet structure.

Taking into account Pope's words to Caryll regarding the accusations of heresy in his *Essay on Criticism*, the kind of healing that needed to happen for Catholics and Protestants in England included an ideological re-examination and a greater emphasis on unity. Expressing his frustration at the public's response to the *Essay on Criticism*, Pope writes:

> Our silence in these points [the 'supersition' of the Middle Ages that persisted in the Catholic Church] may with some reason make our adversaries think we allow and persist in those bigotries, which in reality all good and sensible men despise, tho' they are persuaded not to speak against them—*I can't tell why*, since 'tis now no more the interest even of the worst of our priesthood (as it might be then) to have them smothered in silence; for the opposite sects now prevailing, 'tis too late to hinder our Church from being slandered. 'Tis our business now to show it was slandered unjustly, and to vindicate ourselves from being thought abettors of that which they charge us with. (I, 127). (emphasis added; Chapin 421-422)

Thus, Pope is critical of those who falsely accused him of heresy because of the greater, underlying problem that was plaguing England: division. He expresses his frustrations with the Church as well, but ultimately seems to conclude that the Church and its followers could be saved from further slander if they demonstrated their reason and ability to judge which Church teachings and practices were necessary, and which simply "bigotries" that needed to be addressed and gotten rid of. Pope explains that, in doing so, the Church would appeal to the reason of "all good and sensible men," once more reaching toward the perfection of Nature via the recuperation of its component elements, reason and goodness.

Reason, in the age of the Enlightenment, offered a common ground for people to reach an understanding of one another. Indeed, Rebecca P. Parkin explains how Pope navigated the religious tensions of his time by invoking reason and human nature. She writes, "[w]estern civilization has tended to turn away from the conviction that everything that lives is God-related. […] [However,] our own major poets have had to turn their eyes toward a unifying spiritual center" (Parkin 34). "But," she adds, "the poet of an age of common sense may find it good strategy, as Pope did with Belinda, to qualify [her] goddess-ship by emphasizing finite, human qualities" (Parkin 34). Thus, while many "major poets" have recognized a "unifying spiritual center," audiences in Pope's time were more willing to consider those more mundane aspects of humanity because their human nature (part of Nature itself) was a common, inarguable ground upon which they could meet one another. Thus, in order to teach and entertain his audience, Pope presents *The Rape of the Lock* as a mock epic that avoids the invocation of actual deities and focuses on miniatures and trivialities, as Wall and Fairer mention.

While the first version of *The Rape of the Locke* introduces many of the ideas which Pope would discuss further in his later versions of the poem, the first work did not include as much "machinery" as the later versions. Puetzer, in an examination of the poem's development from the 1712 version to the 1714 version, remarks that, with regard to "the shorter poem's structure[,] there is very little action, interspersed with long descriptive passages. […] the seeming abruptness is, in fact, the start of a pattern: short passages of actions surrounded by long descriptive passages, the vehicles of satire. It is the pattern, in fact, which Pope enlarges upon in the first canto of the longer poem" (Puetzer 7). The lack of action and the focus on description provide a poem pleasing to the ear and to the mind's eye, but that fails to engage audiences less in tune with the poem's message. Therefore, Pope alters his methods and increases both the action of the poem and the characters, adding strange creatures and occult beliefs to liven the tale for his audience.

Pope explains that "machinery" is "a term invented by the critics, to signify that part which the deities, angels, or demons are made to act in a poem" (qtd. in Lipking and Noggle 2514). His added machinery included sylphs, nymphs, gnomes, and salamanders, creatures that came from the "Rosicrucian doctrine of spirits" (qtd. in Lipking and Noggle 2514). Pope's reference to the short-lived, obscure religious system of Rosicrucianism appears to shroud any direct references to Catholicism and Protestantism. By invoking a lesser known religious doctrine, Pope is inviting his audience to draw connections with their faith as well as with how the creatures from Rosicrucianism—a faith that could arguably be labeled "superstitious" by Pope—ultimately fail to alter the course of the action, which eventually culminates in a form of unification. By creating a

mock-epic poem in this style, Pope is playing with ambiguities in judgment in order to encourage readers to be more critical of their own thoughts and judgment processes (*The Poetry of Alexander Pope* Fairer 60). In doing so, Pope creates a mock—or, "pretend"—situation for his readers to navigate, an educational, or perhaps more appropriately, metapoetic, mock trial that imitated well the religious conflict of their time.

According to Chester Chapin, Pope was very well-versed in his knowledge of the controversies that continued to wage between Anglicans and Catholics (427-429). He had spent much of his youth reading about the debates and carefully tracing the developments in each side's arguments (Chapin 428). In a later letter to Bishop Atterbury, Pope admits that, through his reading, he "found [himself] a Papist and a Protestant by turns, according to the last book I read (I, 453-54)" (Chapin 428). Pope's acute judgment allowed him to find merits in both Protestant and Catholic arguments. Swayed by the reason on both sides, Pope refused to simply follow Catholicism without good reasoning as to why he should do so. To Bishop Atterbury, Pope wrote about his conception of the Catholic faith:

> I am not a Papist, for I renounce the temporal invasions of the Papal
>
> power, and detest their arrogated authority over Princes, and States. I am a
>
> Catholick, in the strictest sense of the word. If I was born under an
>
> absolute Prince, I would be a quiet subject; but I thank God I was not. I
>
> have a due sense of the excellence of the British constitution. In a word,
>
> the things I have always wished to see are not a Roman Catholick, or a
>
> French Catholick, or a Spanish Catholick, but a true Catholick: and not a
>
> King of Whigs, or a Kings of Tories, but a King of England. Which God

of his mercy grant his present Majesty may be, and all future Majesties!

You see, my Lord, I end like a preacher: but this is *Sermo ad Clerum* [a

word to the clergy], not *ad Populum* [to the people]. (translations added;

Chapin 65*n*12)

The religious and political overlapped and blended into one another during Pope's time,

and Pope's admission that he found himself a Catholic and a Protestant depending upon

the book he was reading reflects the confusing relationship between the two faith

traditions. His express rejection of the Papacy upholds the authority of the state and its

ruler, which offers insight into how Pope thinks about Catholicism. "Catholic" can mean

"[o]f universal human interest or use; touching the needs, interests, or sympathies of all

men" ("catholic, adj. 3). The term has been used in works as early as approximately

1631; specifically, it was used by Jonathan Swift in 1704 in this way ("catholic, adj. 3).

As Pope and Swift frequently communicated with one another, Swift's use of the

definition is highly likely to have come into Pope's vocabulary, if it had not already been

there before. Pope's sense of obligation to uphold the British constitution and his clear

denial of being a Papist suggest that his understanding of true Catholicism tended more

toward an appreciation of its universal appeal to all of humankind.

There were, of course, many in his time who were quite willing to accuse Pope of

being a Papist or, on the other hand, to accuse him of anti-Catholic heresy. John Dennis,

a Whig and a supporter of the Protestant monarchy, crafted a particularly hateful response

to *An Essay on Criticism*, calling Pope a " 'hunch-back'd Toad,' " who did not support "

'our Protestant kings,' " and " 'must be by Politicks a Jacobite,' " who was "'Politickly

setting up for a Poet-Laureate against the coming of the Pretender' " (quoted in

Goldsmith 70, 71). While Dennis' strongly worded critique was later largely dismissed as unreliable and excessive, he opened the door for others to criticize the young poet (Goldsmith 70). John M. Aden writes in *Pope's Once and Future Kings* that the poet "flirted, or affected to flirt, with the fashion of freethinking," and, in doing so, elicited some anxiety in those closest to him (23, 24). However, Aden adds, Pope was "an earnest Catholic," despite his disagreement with some Catholic doctrine (23, 24).

Geoffrey Tillotson contends that Pope did not discuss his religion in his poetry at all. In *Pope and Human Nature*, Tillotson argues that Pope, while "a Christian himself," explored morality as inherent in human nature, an element Homer and other ancient writers discussed and that Christianity, much later, helped to reinforce (41). He adds that, "though [Pope's] own religion was Catholic, it would scarcely be gathered from his poems" (Tillotson, *Pope and Human Nature* 41). Douglas H. White, in *Pope and the Context of Controversy*, agrees, suggesting that Pope does not explicitly discuss Christian doctrine because of an early eighteenth-century "game" in which "[a] system of natural religion was the result of an author's attempt to construct a moral and/or theological system by reason alone" (11). This system established certain boundaries that, while they did not deny the "efficacy of Christian revelation," did not utilize revelation, as it was not rooted in human reasoning alone (White 11).

Even those who acknowledge some form of Christianity, specifically Catholicism, in Pope's writing suggest that his faith did not necessarily conform with Catholic doctrine. James W. King's "Alexander Pope and Roman Catholicism" contends that Pope's faith plays a role in his poetry, but such a role reveals the unorthodoxy present in Pope's following of the Church. Chapin reaches a similar conclusion in "Alexander

Pope: Erasmian Catholic." By examining Pope's commonalities with the thinker

Erasmus, Chapin shows that both writers focused on "whatever in religion tended to unite

Christians, and to minimize or deplore whatever divided them" (424). Thus, for these

critics, Pope may have conveyed some Catholic ideologies in his writing but, most

significantly, those ideologies fit with his reasoning and, therefore, sometimes strayed

from the strict doctrine of the Church itself. While Francis Beauchesne Thornton, in

Alexander Pope: Catholic Poet, contends that Pope, "in a way, felt himself to be the

actual champion of enlightened Catholicism [in his controversy with Joseph Addison],"

this strain of thought is tempered by the mentions of Pope's "too great dependence on his

own opinion" and his "liberalism," with which his "ardent Catholic" father "quite

[possibly] […] should have been at variance with" (Thornton 64). Nancy K. Lawlor's

article "Pope's *Essay on Man*: Oblique Light for a False Mirror" maps out Pope's use of

Thomist orthodoxy, specifically in Pope's *Essay on Man* (311). However, she is still

careful to point out that "[t]he important thing here is [Pope's] recognition that dogmatic

theology and natural theology often overlap in regard to those truths that have been

revealed and that can also be established by reason"—*The Rape of the Lock* thus offers

the opportunity to bring together dogma and natural theology, thereby offering another

situation where Lawlor's theory might be applied (Lawlor 311). Thus, while some critics

support the notion that Pope was Catholic and conveyed several Catholic ideals through

his writing, this idea is cautioned by the suggestion that Pope followed Catholicism on

his own terms.

Pope's relationship with religion is difficult to decipher, even with extensive

collections of his letters and poems. However, perhaps the difficulty that critics have

reading Pope's faith is intentional—not simply because, as a Catholic (at least nominally) in Protestant England, it benefited Pope not to advertise his religious status. Perhaps it is also Pope's ability to see merit in each side of the religious controversy that allows the poet to lead his audiences toward a resolution for, or, following in Dryden and Pivetti's steps, a restoration of the community of England.

Thus, through the antithetical structure of the couplet, the careful balance between satire and epic in the mock epic, and his appeal to reason in the midst of strife between two religious sects, Pope enacts the triplet form in the structure of *The Rape of the Lock*. Presented with two opposing lines, forms of epic, and religious views, the poet not only teaches his readers to think critically about his poetic structure and his stylistic choices—thereby performing the metapoetic aspect of the triplet for his readers—but he also situates his readers in the social divide that specifically afflicts their century—thereby drawing out the eighteenth-century metapoetic triplet to reach resolution. While Dryden certainly offered a strong example for Pope to follow, no one could have predicted the evolution of anti-Catholicism[26] in the eighteenth century. The social divide deepened

---

[26] As a Catholic, Pope already paid fines for recusancy and "was forced to conceal his assets, to vest the title of his property in alien hands, to live outside of London at inconvenient intervals, [and] to deprive himself of the use of horses" because of his faith (Thornton 8). Maynard Mack in the biography *Alexander Pope: A Life*, David Fairer in *The Poetry of Alexander Pope*, and John M. Aden in the aforementioned *Pope's Once and Future Kings* all discuss the Catholic and Protestant (particularly Anglican) controversy that was occurring during this period, showing how the controversy exerted a lot of pressure on Catholics to either convert to Anglicanism or to cease their Catholic practices.

One of the most famous examples of the stiffening anti-Catholic laws under William of Orange and Queen Anne came in the form of the Test Act, which had been passed by Charles II around thirty years before William arrived in England. The Test Act, according to Aden, was designed to "[exclude] Catholics from both houses of Parliament by requiring an oath quite impossible for a conscientious Catholic to take" (9). He goes on to say that, "With the exception of the Duke of York, who was exempted, no

and, with the significant societal shift in literary tastes and practices, the age required a restoration that would combine the lessons of the ancients and of their present moment to form a united community. The future of England depended upon such a unification.

Structurally, therefore, Pope enacts the specifically eighteenth-century metapoetics of the triplet. However, he also embodies the triplet form in the contents of *The Rape of the Lock*. Through the ornamentation of the sylphs and the resurrection of Belinda's lock, Pope offers a vision of Mahoney's notion of the triplet as representing "one, one another, and all." In doing so, Pope offers an example of a social restoration.

The presence of the sylphs offers a telling example of the nature of Pope's triplet at work. Part of Pope's "machinery," the airy creatures are often interpreted as distorted versions of the angels in Milton's *Paradise Lost*. This parallel, whether intentional or not, would have had deep resonances with Pope's audiences, reminding them of the serious nature of Milton's epic, of Milton's Protestantism, and of Pope's labeling his work as heroi-comical instead of mock epic. Thus, the creatures not only act as part of the poem's content, they also continually refer the reader back to the structure of the poem and to the religious and political debate that was waging around them.

Roman Catholic sat in Parliament again until 1829" because the Act required individuals to denounce central Catholic beliefs in "transubstantiation, invocation of saints, and the Roman Mass" (Aden 9, 13). Thornton claims that "the penal laws straitened Pope his whole life long, both in mind and substance […] only the law held more terror for him than death" (5). While later critics have placed greater emphasis on Pope's self-confidence and his ability to navigate somewhat more freely in the English atmosphere because he had made enough money translating the *Iliad* to avoid patronage, the restrictions that the poet had to confront offer a better understanding of how his discussions of Catholicism and the need for community were affected in is writing.

In addition, as "machinery" that only serves to enhance the message of Pope's poem, the sylphs are fashioned as having a much more ornamental role overall. Their function is reminiscent of the first triplet in *An Essay on Criticism*, which reads: "But as the slightest Sketch, if justly trac'd, / Is by ill *Colouring* but the more disgrac'd, / So by *false Learning* is *good Sense* defac'd" (ll. 23-25). Describing how color can ruin a sketch, the triplet warns authors and critics that improper education can affect their judgment. By reminding audiences of his initial warning in the *Essay on Criticism*, Pope implies that readers should carefully evaluate the sylphs' role in the work. Just as they had misinterpreted his message in his earlier poem, they could fail to recognize the sylphs' role in this poem and, thereby, completely miss Pope's lesson about unification.

In the beginning of *The Rape of the Lock*, the sylphs serve to "[prolong] [Belinda's] balmy rest," "fold the sleeve," "plait the gown," and "divide the hair," among other tasks, preparing Belinda for her entrance into the identifiable eighteenth-century world (Pope, *Rape of the Lock* I.20, 146-147). However, in tracing the obligations and actions of the sylphs, Pope never mentions how the sylphs draw out Belinda's natural beauty. Instead, her beauty seems to appear only after makeup is applied: "First, rob'd in White, the Nymph intent adores / With Head uncover'd, the *Cosmetic* Pow'rs. / A heav'nly Image in the Glass appears" (*Rape of the Lock*, I.123-125). Belinda's "heav'nly Image" only appears after her makeup has been applied. The sylphs' application of ornament in order to color the "sketch" or frame of Belinda's face once again reminds readers of Pope's first triplet in *An Essay on Criticism* and the need to apply proper judgment when distinguishing between the sketch (or underlying structure and message) of the poem and its coloration.

The figurative parallel between the sylphs and the angels and the placement of the sylphs in the Rosicrucian religious system serve to set the creatures apart from the natural world. They are part of an archaic belief system, and, therefore, only shadows of the (Christian/Catholic/Protestant) angels who navigate between heaven and earth. Thus, their role is indistinct, only reminiscent of the angelic role of mediation between earth and heaven. Instead, they mediate between Belinda and the outside world, supposedly to protect her. However, when the Baron approaches Belinda to cut her lock, the commanding sylph Ariel cannot protect his charge. Pope's designation of them as machinery becomes particularly relevant when considering the sylphs as unnatural ornaments because they do not have an active role in the poem: They are not quite human and they are not quite angels, so their role is just as blurred as their identity. Thus, the role of the sylphs is not specifically identifiable in the story, but it is recognizably unnatural. Their unnaturalness, however, helps highlight the role that Nature (the epitome of the natural) and humanity must play in reforming a community in England.

The heroi-comical triviality of the severing of Belinda's lock and the resulting battle to regain the lock is meant to encourage readers to reflect on the trivialities that they allow to control them. With the severing of the lock, Pope invokes reason (to show how ridiculous the scene is) and passion, to show how Belinda's desire for the Baron overcomes the ornamentation of the sylphic machinery. When Belinda's affection for the Baron is revealed, Ariel can do nothing to protect her from the scissors that then take her hair. He attempts to warn her, but her human desire momentarily overcomes her vanity and disallows her from hearing the sylph (*The Rape of the Lock* III.117-146). Thus, the machinery in the poem is denied its ability to play an active role in the story because

Belinda's human desire interferes, thereby underscoring the important role that humanity will ultimately have in removing the ornamentation of the story to reveal the underlying call for unification.

Belinda's hair, apparently parted into two main locks, lays as a broken pair. In his book *The World of Pope's Satires*, Peter Dixon passingly remarks upon the broken pairs that appear in the poem (7). Of the lonely lock, Pope writes:

> The Sister-Lock now sits uncouth, alone,
>
> And in its Fellow's Fate foresees its own;
>
> Uncurl'd it hangs, the fatal Sheers demands;
>
> And tempts once more thy sacreligious Hands.
>
> (*Rape of the Lock* IV.171-174)

The description of the event suggests that the severance is "sacreligious" and "fatal" (*Rape of the Lock* IV.173-174). The lock left behind mourns the loss of its companion lock, demanding to be cut to join its lost, and apparently dead, brethren. The remaining lock and its severed sister provide a tangible example of Mahoney's notion of "one" and "one another." While the lock still intact demands to follow its sister, it is denied. Thus, the lock remains abandoned and only "one." Well aware of the debates between Catholics and Anglicans, and compelled by arguments on both sides, the trauma that divided the two churches must have proved doubly painful for Pope, especially as the two denominations held many similar beliefs. The remaining lock of hair had been part of a "family"—indeed, it is labeled "[t]he Sister-Lock"—and symbolizes the divide that occurred between the Lord Petre and Arabella Fermor's families. While the families were not related, they were family in their faith. Pope seeks to remedy their separation

by encouraging his audience to think more critically about how to bring the characters of *The Rape of the Lock* together, and, in so demonstrating this sort of unity, Pope carries his readers through the steps toward coming together as a community.

In the final scenes of the poem, Pope places Belinda's lock of hair in the heavens, writing:

> When, after Millions slain, your self shall die;
>
> When those fair Suns shall sett, as sett they must,
>
> And all those Tresses shall be laid in Dust;
>
> *This Lock,* the Muse shall consecrate to Fame,
>
> And mid'st the Stars inscribe *Belinda*'s Name!
>
> (*Rape of the Lock* V:147-150)

The ending, in true mock heroic form, memorializes the lock of hair. But, it also provides a moral critique: the "fair sunse" of a person's hair will fade away and the person him or herself will pass on. But, the lock of hair preserved in the heavens will exist for eternity. The severed lock, then, the representation of the strife that broke the parties apart, is also symbolic of what brings them together. In the end, all of the actors in the poem watch the lock ascend to the sky. The sylphs, however, "behold it kindling as it flies, / And pleas'd pursue its Progress thro' the Skies" (*Rape of the Lock* V.131-132). The viewers are drawn together in the lesson that the lock teaches about vanity as well as broken pairs, and the sylphs, no longer needed in the narrative and not inherently part of the lesson that Belinda and the Baron are meant to learn, leave the scene, attempting to follow the lock. The lock's upward movement "pleases" them, but the idea that they "pursue" it suggests, much like the aesthetic quality of the sylphs, that they will

never reach the lock and the moral foundation that it helps develop. Instead, they are bound to be machinery that helps emphasize the moral lesson of unity to which Pope is attempting to bring his readers.

The lock of hair in the heavens unites the viewers both as they watch it rise and as they see it permanently fixed in the skies. Through this communion, Pope draws together all of his audience members, Catholics and Protestants, Belinda and the Baron, and critics and authors in a common image. While the lock of hair may seem trivial, the beauty of its ascension and preservation suggest a permanence that will outlast mortal lives. The exit of the sylphs is particularly telling: They play no influential role in the world and, after they have been defeated by Belinda's passion, they leave. But, as they pursue the lock, they emphasize its importance. Without their help, Belinda must tend to her other lock of hair herself. Her moral development has prospered to the point that she no longer needs their aid because her beauty is no longer her main focus. Just as Pope hopes that Catholics and Protestants can come together in a deeper understanding of the community they hold together, the members of the poem unite in the end and are left with the light of a star, an illuminated moral, to guide their way.

Thus, *The Rape of the Lock* offers a temporally located, eighteenth-century triplet that enacts its metapoetic function by modeling how restoration and unification can happen via its structure, as it refers back to itself in *An Essay on Criticism*, for example, and via its modeling of unification in the poem itself. While Pope moved away from triplets as his career progressed, their influence remains visible. Examinations of how Pope interacts with the possibilities of the triplet structure offer productive insight into how the poet conceived of his work and how, despite the visible argument that he elected

not to use triplets anymore, his content and larger poetic structure argue otherwise.

Further examination of this phenomenon will be invaluable to further establishing ways

in which Pope helped incorporate different formal aspects of poetry into the English

poetic tradition. Indeed, while his triplet may have been transformed by the Romantics,

his manipulation of poetic form still affects us today in ways still being discovered. The

eighteenth-century metapoetic triplet offers a different approach to Pope that appreciates

him for more than his couplets.

Bibliography

Aden, John. *Pope's Once and Future Kings.* The University of Tennessee Press, 1976.

Alvarez, David. "Alexander Pope's *An Essay on Criticism* and a Poetics for 1688."

    Restoration: Studies in English Literary Culture, 1660-1700, vol. 39, no. 1, 2015,

    pp. 101-123.

Aristotle. "Poetics." *The Rhetoric and Poetics of Aristotle,* Translated Ingram Bywater,

    The Modern Library, 1984, pp. 219-266.

Audra, E., and Aubrey Williams, editors. *Vol. I: Poems of Alexander Pope: Pastoral*

    Poetry and An Essay on Criticism. Yale University Press, 1960.

Balliet, Conrad A. "The History and Rhetoric of the Triplet." *PMLA*, vol. 80, no. 5, Dec.

    1965, pp. 528-534.

Brown, Laura. *Homeless Dogs and Melancholy Apes*. Cornell University Press, 2010.

Beum, Robert, and Karl Shapiro. *The Prosody Handbook: A Guide to Poetic Form*. 1965.

    Dover Publications, Inc., 2006.

Canfield, J. Douglas, and J. Paul Hunter, editors. *Rhetorics of Order / Ordering Rhetorics*

    in English Neoclassical Literature. University of Delaware Press, 1989.

"Catholic, adj. 3." *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, May 2017.

Chapin, Chester. "Alexander Pope: Erasmian Catholic." *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, vol.

    6, no. 4, Summer 1973, pp. 411-430.

"Common, n." *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, March 2017.

Damrosch, Leo. "Repetition and Narration: Tracking the Enlightenment Self." *Ritual,*

    Routine, and Regime: Repetition in Early Modern British and European Cultures.

    Edited by Lorna Clymer, University of Toronto Press, 2006, pp. 49-62.

Denghan, Zhang. "Dialogue, Heterogeneity, and *An Essay on Criticism* by Alexander

     Pope." *Wenshan Review of Literature and Culture*, vol. 6, no. 1, December 2012,

     pp. 103-139.

 "Description of *Every Man Out of His Humour* by Ben Jonson." *Oxford University

     Press*, 2016, https://global.oup.com/academic/product/every-man-out-of-his-

     humour-9780719078392?lang=en&cc=us#. Accessed 12 Dec. 2016.

Durant, David S. "Man and Nature in Alexander Pope's Pastorals." *Studies in English

     Literature, 1500-1900*, vol. 11, no.3, Summer 1971, pp. 469-485.

Eighteenth Century Poetry. Edited by John Sitter, Cambridge University Press, 2001.

Erickson, Robert A. "Pope and Rapture." *Eighteenth-Century Life*, vol. 40, no. 1, Jan.

     2016, pp. 1-31.

Fairer, David. *The Poetry of Alexander Pope.* Penguin Critical Studies, 1989.

Fujimura, Thomas H. "Dryden's Changing Political Views." *Restoration: Studies in

     English Literary Culture, 1660-1700*, vol. 10, no. 2, Fall 1986, pp. 93-104.

Goldsmith, Netta Murray. *Alexander Pope: The evolution of a poet*. Ashgate Publishing

     Company, 2002.

Henke, Christoph. "The Discourse of Common Sense." *Common Sense in Early 18th-

     Century British Literature and Culture: Ethics, Aesthetics, and Politics, 1680-

     1750*. Walter DeGruyter GmbH, 2014, pp. 1-44.

Hollister, C. Warren. *The Making of England: 55 B.C. to 1399.* 7th ed., D.C. Heath and

     Company, 1996.

Hotch, Ripley. "Pope Surveys His Kingdom." *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*,

     vol. 13, no. 3, Summer 1973, pp. 474-487.

Hunter, J. Paul. *The Norton Introduction to Poetry*. 7th ed., W.W. Norton and Company, 1999.

Jones, John A. *Pope's Couplet Art*. Ohio University Press, 1969.

Jonson, Ben. *Every Man Out of His Humour*. C. 1637. Yurita Press, 2015.

King, James W. "Alexander Pope and Roman Catholicism." Dissertation, Princeton University, 1970.

Knowlton, E.C. "[Letter to the Editor] Origin of the Closed Couplet in English." *The Nation*. vol. 99, no. 2561, 30 July 1914, p. 134.

Lawlor, Nancy K. "Pope's *Essay on Man*: Oblique Light for a False Mirror." *Modern Language Quarterly*, vol. 28, no. 3, 1967, pp. 305-316.

Leonard, Sterling Andrus. *The Doctrine of Correctness in English Usage, 1700-1800*. 1929. Russell and Russell, 1962.

"licence, n., 2a." *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, March 2017.

"licence, n., 4." *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, March 2017.

Lipking, Lawrence, and James Noggle. *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*. W.W. Norton and Company, 8th ed., 2006.

Mack, Maynard. "Alexander Pope, 1688-1988: Salute to a Three-Hundredth Birthday." *Rhetorics of Order / Ordering Rhetorics in English Neoclassical Literature.* University of Delaware Press, 1989, pp. 98-119.

Mack, Maynard. *Alexander Pope: A Life*. Yale University Press, 1985.

Mack, Maynard. *Collected in Himself: Essays Critical, Biographical, and Bibliographical on Pope and Some of His Contemporaries.* University of Delaware Press, 1982.

Mack, Maynard, editor. *The Iliad of Homer: Books I-IX*. Yale University Press, 1967.

Mack, Maynard, editor. *The Iliad of Homer: Books X-XXIV*. Yale University Press, 1967.

Mahoney, Charles. "The Temptations of Tercets." *A Companion to Romantic Poetry*,

 edited by Charles Mahoney, Wiley-Blackwell, 2011, pp. 44-61.

Malof, Joseph. *A Manual of English Meters*. Greenwood Press, 1970.

Malof, Joseph. "Meter As Organic Form." *Modern Language Quarterly*, vol. 27, no. 1,

 pp. 3-17.

Martin, L. C. "Lucretius and The Rape of the Lock." *The Review of English Studies*, vol.

 20, no. 80, Oct. 1944, pp. 299-303.

Nichol, Donald W., editor. *Anniversary Essays on Pope's* The Rape of the Lock.

 University of Toronto Press, 2016.

Parkin, Rebecca P. "Mythopoeic Activity in the Rape of the Lock." *ELH*, vol. 21, no. 1

 (Mar. 1954), pp. 30-38.

Pegum, Caroline. "A fresh look at Charles Jervas." *Irish Arts Review (2002-)*, vol. 27, no.

 4, Winter (Dec. 2010-Feb. 2011), pp. 90-95.

Pope, Alexander. "Letter to William Walsh, 29 September 1706." *Eighteenth-Century*

 Collections Online, p. 69,

 https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/ecco/004809121.0001.000/1:9?cite1=Pope;cite1restri

 ct=author;rgn=div1;view=fulltext;q1=Walsh. Accessed 10 February 2017.

Pope, Alexander. *The Work of Alexander Pope, in Four Volumes Complete, with his Last*

 Corrections, Additions, and Improvements. Edited by J. Wenman, vol. 3, 1778.

Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics. Edited by Roland Greene, 4th ed.,

 Princeton University Press, 2012.

Puetzer, Jr., Bruno. "The Rape's Progress, 1711-36: A Study of Pope's Revisions."

    Thoth, vol. 11, no. 1, 1970, pp. 3-15.

Rawson, Claude. "Poetry of the first half of the eighteenth century: Pope, Johnson, and

    the couplet." *The Cambridge History of English Poetry*, edited by Michael

    O'Neill, Cambridge University Press, 2010, pp. 333-357.

Ricks, Christopher. "Dryden's triplets." *The Cambridge Companion to John Dryden*.

    Edited by Steven N. Zwicker, Cambridge University Press, 2006.

Robertson, Ritchie. *Mock-Epic Poetry from Pope to Heine*. Oxford University Press,

    2009.

Santesso, Aaron. "The Conscious Swain: Political Pastoral in Pope's Epic." *Eighteenth-

    Century Studies*, vol. 37, no. 2, Spaces of Enlightenment Winter 2004, pp. 253-

    271.

Schwandt, Pamela Poynter. "Pope's Transformations of Homer's Similes." *Studies in

    Philology*, vol. 76 (1979), pp. 387-417.

"Sect, n. 1" *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, April 2017.

"Sex, n. 2" *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, April 2017.

Shoptaw, John. "Lyric Cryptography." *Poetics Today*, vol. 21, no. 1, 2000, pp. 221-262.

Thornton, Francis Beauchesne. *Alexander Pope: Catholic Poet.* Pellegrini and Cudahy,

    1952.

Tillotson, Geoffrey. *Augustan Studies*. The Athlone Press, 1961.

Tillotson, Geoffrey. *On Pope and Human Nature*. Oxford University Press, 1958.

Tillotson, Geoffrey. *On the Poetry of Pope.* Oxford University Press, 2nd ed., 1950.

Tillotson, Geoffrey, editor. *The Rape of the Lock and Other Poems*. Yale University

Press, 1962.

Waites, Ian. *Common Land in English Painting: 1700-1850*. The Boydell Press, 2012.

Wall, Cynthia. "Poetic Spaces." *Cambridge Companion to Alexander Pope*. Edited by

Pat Rogers, Cambridge University Press, 2007, pp. 49-62.

Wall, Cynthia, editor. *The Rape of the Lock*. By Alexander Pope, Bedford Books, 1998.

Weiskott, Eric. "Before Prosody: Early English Poetics in Practice and Theory." *Modern*

Language Quarterly, vol. 77, no. 4, (2016) pp. 473-498.

White, Douglas H. *Pope and the Context of Controversy*. University of Chicago Press,

1970.