

**Of Dunces and Demons:
Pope's Allusion to *Paradise Lost* in *The Dunciad*
and His Transcendence to the Tragic**

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“Learn, ye DUNCES! not to scorn your GOD” (3.224) says Alexander Pope, in the most direct statement of his purpose in *The Dunciad*. Like Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, which aims to “justify the ways of God to men” (Milton 1.26), Pope’s mock epic, in a sense, intends to “unjustify” the ways of Dunces; Pope’s end is satirical, and is served by his allusions to *Paradise Lost*. Of all the epics whose allusions Pope weaves into *The Dunciad*, *Paradise Lost* figures most prominently because of its centrality to this meaning: duncery is essentially the perversion of the light of reason, a perversion which, in Pope’s satirical vision, essentially unmakes human civilization. This intellectual apocalypse concluding Pope’s mock epic is, in many ways, an ironic completion of Milton’s epic: whereas Milton depicts the unfolding of Providence to us in Books XI and XII, Pope adds to that Providence a secular sort of Second Coming, in the form of Dulness returning the earth to the Chaos and Night whence it was created, constantly referring back to Milton’s epic to remind us of the tradition in which his mock epic falls.

Pope’s engagement with Milton, in a similar manner, brings Miltonic themes from the authentically epic world of Pope’s poetic predecessor to the mock epic world of Pope’s present, but this transfer is not without its problems. Pope’s politics are strongly allied with the Tories, whereas Milton’s are republican; Pope is Catholic, and Milton is decidedly Protestant, almost Puritan. The two are equally divergent in their poetics: whereas Milton altogether eschews rhyme, uses

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difficult, Latinate syntax, and works generally within an aesthetic of the sublime, Pope, on the other hand, employs the heroic couplet, constantly structures his syntax into balanced phrases to fit this poetic form, and works within an Augustan aesthetic prizing balance, order, symmetry and, most of all, restraint. Milton has no fear to approach Heaven on his poetic wing, where Pope, instead, deliberately takes the “middle flight” (Milton 1.14) Milton shuns. As a result of these differences, we can conclude that Pope's engagement with Milton must necessarily not be mere imitation, but, rather, reinterpretation.¹

The way Pope uses Milton in *The Dunciad* has been debated by critics. The past fifty years have seen the rise of two schools of thought: John Setter, Aubrey Williams, Reuben Brower and Barbara Lewalski in the 1950s through the 1970's generally agree that the allusions to *Paradise Lost* in *The Dunciad* indicate an underlying seriousness in Pope's satire of his own world. Williams states this view with particular clarity: “by no other means could Pope have so readily revealed the evil implicit in duncery as he conceived it than by his parody of *Paradise Lost*, the metaphoric alliance of duncery with diabolism” (191). In the 1980s, however, we see a shift in critical opinion, in which, as David Griffin puts it, “some critics...sought to re-emphasize that *The Dunciad*, both in its surface and in its very nature, is a comic poem, and that its subject is the Triumph of Wit over the comically bumbling forces of Dulness” (174).² Though the comic element stressed by Griffin is important in *The Dunciad*, the older school of criticism has interpreted the structure of Pope's mock epic more accurately: the comedy is at the surface of Pope's work, but his moral indignation always lies underneath, as indicated by his allusions to Milton's more serious epic. There are a number of allusions, however, that the older sources do not include, which this paper hopes to shed light upon, and which help generate this sense of moral outrage.

In creating this morally indignant air, the allusions to *Paradise Lost* prove central to *The Dunciad*: as Williams implied previously, Pope's invoking of Milton's epic exposes us to “the evil implicit in duncery,” and, as such, an understanding of Pope's allusions is crucial to the satirical intentions of this work. Although motivated by a Juvenalian sort of anger at how far his culture has deviated from traditional moral standards, there is something more at work in Pope's satire: at its

deepest level, this work is not only serious, as Lewalski and those siding with her would agree, but something more. Juvenal would criticize his targets, but he would never accuse them as the harbingers of an intellectual apocalypse. Though Pope is motivated by essentially the same anger as Juvenal, he takes this anger out of the ranting monologue of the Roman satirist, and brings it into the world of the mock epic, producing a work not merely comic, not merely serious, but *tragic*. The dark vision of the Dunces' final triumph gains its inner tragedy from its allusions to another, more serious work — and, indeed, it is not only from surface allusions that this tragic undertone is derived. Pope's engagement with Milton occurs on numerous levels, a study of which reveals quite clearly that *Paradise Lost* is of prime importance to *The Dunciad*.

Allusions in *The Dunciad*, Book I

Though the critics, even Griffin, all agree upon the importance of *Paradise Lost* to this text, there is a general manner in which the allusions progress in Pope's work, a pattern which the critics grant little, if any, attention. As *The Dunciad* moves towards its dark end, allusions become echoes, echoes become parallels, and parallels become extensions — or, more simply put, the level on which Pope engages Milton deepens as we read. As such, the allusions in Book I suitably are more literal, verbal, more on the surface, than in the other books, but are certainly not confined to these levels.

Milton's text is activated in the reader's mind from the very beginning of Book I as Pope engages in his invocation to the muse, simply because both authors operate in the epic tradition dictating this initiatory ritual. Pope's version of it, however, proves suitably comical, especially when juxtaposed with Milton's:

The Mighty Mother, and her Son who brings
 The Smithfield Muses to the ear of Kings,
 I sing. Say you, her instruments the Great!
 Call'd to this work by Dulness, Jove, and Fate;
 You by whose care, in vain decry'd and curst,
 Still Dunce the second reigns like Dunce the first;
 Say how the Goddess bade Britannia sleep,

And pour'd her Spirit o'er the land and deep. (Pope 1.1-8)

Pope's introduction lacks certain details of Milton's, such as what his Muse is ("Heav'nly" [Milton 1.6]), the ambitions of his poem ("my adventurous Song" [Milton 1.13]), what his Muse has done in the past ("Thou from the first / Wast present" [Milton 1.20]), or even so much as a mentioning of God or "Eternal Providence" (Milton 1.25). This failure to mention God is appropriate, as Pope's poem is secular, even Pagan: Dulness is allied with "Jove, and Fate," setting up from the outset a pattern of Pagan concepts that Pope will associate with the Dunces later on. Pope's Muse also, ironically, does not "Sing" (Milton 1.6) as Milton's does, but merely "says" — the only "singing" in Pope's invocation, in fact is done by him as the poetic speaker, and anticlimactically at that. Where Milton builds up to the verb "Sing" over the course of five lines (1.1-5), Pope, in his first two lines, appears to do that, but quickly counters the crescendo with the deadpan iamb, "I sing." Comparing Pope's invocation to Milton's quickly reveals that Pope's subject matter is hardly similar to Milton's, but the important aspect here is the lack of any Christian concepts in this introduction.

The absence of Christianity becomes important later on in the mock epic, as Pope intends to dissociate the Dunces from all that is right and good, and associate them instead with the Demonic. One way in which Pope does this is through the repeated plurality of "Gods," ostensibly to fit his work better into a classical epic context, but with the intent of reminding us of Milton's Demons referring to themselves as "Gods." This parallel can be drawn in Cibber's first action: "Swearing and Supperless the Hero sate, / Blasphem'd his Gods, the Dice, and damn'd his Fate" (115-6). We get the sense from this of an atheistic worldview devoid of the divine, akin to Satan's constant avoidance of the word "God" throughout his speeches, substituting it instead with "th' Almighty." The lines narrating Cibber's subsequent actions likewise imply a similarity between his uninspired state and a kind of Hell: "Sinking from thought to thought, a vast profound! / Plung'd for his sense, but found no bottom there, / Yet wrote and flounder'd on, in mere despair (118-20). Satan, too, "With hideous ruine and combustion down / To bottomless perdition" (Milton 1.46-7) falls "Nine times the Space that measures Day and Night"

(Milton 1.50) and lies “vanquisht, rowling in the fiery Gulfe” (Milton 1.52) — that is, when he is first seen, he has tumbled down through a bottomless fall and is floundering, like Cibber.³ Both Milton’s archfiend and Pope’s “Hero” even complete the action by surveying their fallen state: Milton’s Satan “round...throws his baleful eyes” (56), recalling his situation “Both of lost happiness and lasting pain” (54), just as Pope narrates that “o’er his Books [Cibber’s] eyes began to roll / in pleasing memory of all he stole” (137-8). Pope’s opening scene recalls Milton’s, but also makes the parallel ironic: where Satan is tormented by his inward despair, Cibber seems filled with a gloating reminiscence bordering on triumph. Satan’s fall from Heaven, then, is echoed here by Cibber’s fall from sense, but Satan, as Milton narrates, has already progressed at this point from gloating triumph to “obdurate pride and steadfast hate” (1.58), where Cibber still seems caught in the former, premature stage of evil, as he surveys his library. In this sense, Pope suggests Cibber as not only a type of Satan, but not even a complete one at that: Cibber’s smugness in Pope’s opening scene contrasts heavily with the inward despair of Satan in Milton’s, suggesting that the evil of Dulness is a petty and mediocre one, more suitable to mock epic than to Miltonic epic.

Lewalski observes also the parallel between Cibber in thought and Satan in Hell, and draws the parallel further to include him as a Messianic figure, using “the sacrifice of his own abortive works and the books from which he plundered them” (74) as evidence that Cibber is a character who, like Milton’s Messiah, makes a sacrifice. Interesting an observation though this may be, the satirical power of the parallel to Milton’s Messiah derives, again, from the comparison of small to great: where the Messiah is willing to suffer death to redeem humanity, Cibber seems only willing to burn a few unwanted books, and, at that, solely for the cause of writing his next piece of hackneyed drivel. Lewalski’s mention of this parallel is succinct, but does not explore the significance of the comparison — specifically, that there is, between Cibber and the Son, no grounds for comparison at all between characters so divergently different. Lewalski mentions later on how “Dulness so proclaims [Cibber]: ‘My son! The promis’d land expects thy reign...Lift up your gates, ye Princes, see him come’” (Lewalski 74), further drawing out this parallel,⁴ but, again, not explaining it in

full: the irony of the parallel lies in Cibber's inherent lack of worthiness as a Messianic figure, or, in the case of Dulness herself proclaiming him, Dulness' ignorance of this unworthiness. Though Lewalski still agrees that the Miltonic allusion to *The Dunciad* is crucial to its meaning as a serious satire, she does not always draw out these allusions to their fullest extent.

Similarly, though Griffin makes plenty of valid observations in his work, he still arrives at the conclusion that Pope's comparison of his Dunces to Milton's Demons is ultimately comic, not tragic. On the issue of how Cibber is depicted in this opening scene, for instance, Griffin asserts that "Pope's poet-hero emerges from the allusion not as a dangerous agent of evil but as a desperate and incompetent hack" (176), which, again, is a valid claim in itself, but works on too literal a level: of course we get the sense that Cibber is an inept writer from witnessing his struggles in his study, but, if this is the only end that Pope wishes for this scene to accomplish, then why did Pope make the apt parallel between Cibber in thought and Satan in Hell? Griffin offers the explanation that this allusion to *Paradise Lost*, like others, "induce[s] in the reader not a sense of alarm (these [D]unces are doing the devil's work), but a sense of amused superiority; recognizing the allusions (as the [D]unces presumably do not), he laughs at their humiliation, incompetence, and impotence" (176). Griffin makes a very apt implication here that Pope's purpose in these allusions is essentially to put us in the same position as Milton's God laughing at Satan in his flight through Chaos in Book III of *Paradise Lost*, as superior to the Dunces, but part of the complexity of *The Dunciad* as a whole is its interplay between this comic surface and tragic core. Of course we are intended to laugh at Pope's depiction of these Dunces, but it is in their tragic triumph that we see a serious caution: unlike Milton's Demons in their vain war against God, Pope's Dunces can wage a war against reason, and succeed.

The Dunciad, then, becomes almost a cautionary tale warning against false intellect, and demonstrating to us the possibility of the triumph of Dulness, albeit in an ironic, satirical manner. We get the sense from the comparison between Cibber and Satan, implied by Pope's allusions, of Cibber as a ridiculously incompetent agent of evil, but an agent of evil nevertheless. The Pagan imagery developed around

Dulness and the Dunces fits the Satanic parallel to Cibber, and enhances it to suggest that these Dunces, like their Demon counterparts, are a morally dangerous force working against Christian ideals. And, finally, Pope's imitation of Milton from the outset not only initiates the pattern of Miltonic allusions running throughout the piece, but also makes clear to us the piece's satirical intent, to "unjustify," in a sense, the ways of Dulness to man. Though Cibber is, as Lewalski succinctly implies, not even a decent savior to the Dunces, the "poet-hero" is likewise, as Griffin points out, not even an intimidating Satan, either; the very mediocrity of Dulness and the Dunces becomes an integral part of their evil as Pope's *Dunciad* unfolds.

Echoes in *The Dunciad*, Book II

Being neither decent Christians nor proper Demons, the Dunces, at first, strike us as mediocre, harmless, and comedic, and this sense seems to persist throughout Book II, but, as the Miltonic allusions become more frequent and direct, so, too, does the sense of the comedic begin to diminish gradually towards Book III. The surface comedy on which Griffin builds his argument, however, is more present in the humorous celebratory contests in this book than in any other, but the Miltonic echoes are still intermittently present to keep Pope's focus on the moral nature of Dulness. This focus is preserved by a very clear allusion to Milton with which Pope opens the book, an allusion discussed by critics on both Lewalski's and Griffin's side of the spectrum.

Perhaps the clearest allusion to *Paradise Lost*, the allusion to Satan's throne in Pandemonium is quite deliberately made by Pope. Pope carefully parodies Milton's original, balancing exact imitation with appropriate variation:

High on a Throne of Royal State, which far
Outshon the wealth of *Ormus* and of *Ind*,
Or where the gorgeous East with richest hand
Showers on her Kings *Barbaric* Pearl and Gold,
Satan exalted sat...(Milton 2.1-5)

High on a gorgeous seat that far out-shone

Henley's gilt tub, or Fleckno's Irish throne,
 Or that where on her Curls the Public pours,
 All-bounteous, fragrant grains and Golden Show'rs,
 Great Cibber sate...(Pope 2.1-5)

The two descriptions occupy the same amount of space and follow the same sequence, and even end their elaborative flourishes on a similarly anticlimactic note of the verb "sat"; their differences, however, are wherein the humor lies. Images of Milton's opulent and decadent East are replaced with much nearer-by, more mundane authors of Pope's time, and the showers of pearl and gold are replaced by beer dregs ("fragrant grains") and rotten egg yolk ("Golden Show'rs") pelting Curl at his pillory (371n.). Other differences include the changing of Milton's "Throne of Royal State" to a mere "gorgeous seat": Cibber's "seat" claims no royalty, and, therefore, to Pope, with his politics far more conservative and royalist than Milton's, that seat holds no authority. There is also the simpler comedy lying in that Cibber, for all we can tell from Pope's much less specific term "gorgeous seat," might as well be sitting in a decorated privy. Pope's allusion here, though, as with previous ones, implies a comparison between one of his satirical targets and Satan⁵ — indeed, between Grub Street and Pandemonium — but the mediocrity in which Pope's Cibber is decked, as well as his "seat," simultaneously implies that the two characters are far removed from each other with respect to grandeur.

Pope's *Variorum* points out another Miltonic allusion when we see Curl again, pursuing the phantom-poet created by Dulness in her contests, equated with Satan struggling through Chaos: "As when a dab-chick waddles thro' the copse / On feet and wings, and flies, and wades, and hops; / So lab'ring on, with shoulders, hands, and head" (2.63-4), Curl makes chase. Milton's Satan is reduced here to a puddle-hopping "dab-chick" to suit better a comparison with Curl; there is, however, an interesting Miltonic device on which Pope elaborates in this passage. Milton's original arranges the verbs as, "And swims or sinks, or wades, or creeps, or flies" (2.950), showing a steadily downward, more bestial mode of motion with each verb, until he ends with "flies"; Milton uses this selection of degrading verbs to mock Satan on his fatal voyage through Chaos. Pope similarly uses a

downward gradation of verbs, “On feet and wings, and flies, and wades, and hops” (2.64), rearranging the Miltonic progression, with “flies” starting the sequence instead of ending it, to emphasize the lowering motion even further, ending his sequence with the comic “hops.” A similar inversion of Miltonic order occurs in Pope’s next line, “So lab’ring on, with shoulders, hands, and head” (2.65), in which Milton normally would have placed “head” and “hands” first, as in “With head, hands, wings or feet” (2.949). Again, where Milton’s list names lower and lower parts of the body as it goes, from “head” to “feet,” Pope, to use a pun, depicts Curl going with his “head” first. Just as Satan makes his rag-tag voyage however he can, Curl does the same, only, because of Pope’s rearrangements, appears to be tumbling in pursuit of the phantom like some sort of a comic acrobat. Pope makes, again, a comparison between the two characters, but reinterprets it to ridiculous effect.

Not all of Pope’s comparisons, of course, involve Milton’s Satan: to compare evil with good in a comic context, can produce effects as ridiculous as between greater and lesser evil. An ironic comparison, for instance, exists between Oldmixon standing “In naked majesty” (Pope 2.283) before his muckraking plunge into the polluted Thames, and the unfallen Adam and Eve, whom we see, naturally, standing in an unclothed state similarly described. Adam and Eve’s “naked majestie” (Milton 4.290) applied to the Dunce Oldmixon derives its comedy not from its being fitting, as the previous parallels of other characters to Satan have, but instead is humorous for its incongruity: associating the “naked majesty” of the first two human beings with a plagiarist and “Perverter of History” (2.199n.) hardly seems fitting, but it is in more than mere phrase-echoing on Pope’s part that this absurd comparison is suggested. We see both Adam and Oldmixon “surveying” themselves: “My self I then perus’d, and Limb by Limb / Survey’d” (Milton 8.267-8), Adam relates to Raphael, of his moments following his creation, just as Oldmixon “Milo-like surveys his arms and hands” (Pope 2.284). Where Adam begins to run, speak, name, and reason after his self-inspection (Milton 8.267 – 77), Oldmixon merely queries, with appropriate inanity, “And am I now three-score? / Ah, why, ye Gods, should two and two make four?” (Pope 2.285 – 6). Where Adam arrives deductively at a single “Maker” (8.277) as

God, Oldmixon, as per the Pagan cant of his fellow Dunces, invokes “ye Gods,” and focuses his mental energies on vain questions — “Why should two and two make four?” — instead of on more heavenly matters like Adam. The parallel between a modern Dunce, then, and the Edennic first man, both naked and examining themselves, is ridiculously incongruous for its own right, but comparing the actions of the two characters shows in stark contrast the degree to which Pope's Dunces have fallen from the more perfect past.

Thus we see Pope comparing one of his Dunces to an unfallen being, and the incongruity of the comparison works just as other Miltonic comparisons in *The Dunciad*: comparing a Dunce to the unfallen Adam shows us how ridiculous the Dunces are even among other mortals, just as comparing the Dunces to Satan and the Demons showed us how mediocre they are as harbingers of evil. However, both techniques of comparison lead to the same conclusion: the Dunces are no match for virtue, but, even though they are inept in their evil, they are still an evil force to be reckoned with nevertheless. Seeing this in the context of the horseplay surrounding Cibber's coronation, it would be easy to forget the Demonic aspect of the Dunces on account of the surface comedy of the situation,⁶ so Pope engineers direct, verbal Miltonic parallels between Cibber and the enthroned Satan, Curl in pursuit and Satan in flight, and between Oldmixon in naked stupefaction and Adam. Pope relies on our knowledge of *Paradise Lost* here to keep sight of his satirical purpose.

Parallels in *The Dunciad*, Book III

This satirical purpose becomes more apparent into Book III, and the Miltonic allusions become more elaborate to suit. There are not so many verbal allusions present in this book as there are implicit parallels to Miltonic concepts, both expressed outright in *Paradise Lost* and on the deeper levels of Milton's epic. Pope here is taking his Miltonic comparison beyond the level of simple allusion, patterning an entire episode from Milton into the narrative structure of this book, specifically Book XI of *Paradise Lost*. The subtler level of allusion allows Pope to turn from the comparatively lighthearted tone of Book II to a more serious tone, anticipating a satire of false learning even greater than what has been presented in Book II, portending thereby

the very dark, tragic conclusion he will reach in Book IV.

In a clever manner, Pope sets the increasingly satirical tone by disclaiming at the beginning, under the guise of Scriblerus, that “the following Vision is...not a real or intended satire on the Present Age” (3.5n.), which, considering the persona through which Pope makes this statement, is likely meant to be taken with a grain of salt, to say the least. If the satirical disguise of Scriblerus is not enough to reveal Pope’s satirical intentions, then Pope’s reference to Milton’s *Paradise of Fools* — “the Fool’s Paradise” (Pope 3.9) — helps re-establish the satirical undertone he denies as Scriblerus. Milton’s purpose for this false paradise in Book III of *Paradise Lost* was to satirize misguided, vain, or fanatical intellect; Pope’s alluding to it, therefore, must be to impart the same sort of satirical intent. The Miltonic allusion works, again, to activate Milton’s text in the reader’s mind, reminding us of the same sort of fallacious learning that Pope satirizes in this passage, and also helps create the ironic tone in Scriblerus’ footnote.⁷

The use of Miltonic allusions to create irony elsewhere can be seen later on in Book III, when Settle, showing Cibber the future empire of Dulness, assumes the position of Michael showing the workings of Providence to Adam in Book XI of *Paradise Lost*. This ironic effect is achieved by a device we have already seen, the comparison of true epic to mock epic, of good to evil: Adam’s vision from Michael is a positive one, designed to bring him the hope that his was “a fortunate fall”; Settle’s vision to Cibber, however, is a dark one, portending the very apocalypse in which *The Dunciad* ends. Its being placed in similarity with Milton’s Angelic vision, however, creates an incongruity of tone, an irony stemming from the juxtaposition of Milton’s prophecy of Providence to Pope’s one of Dulness. The two prophecies are essentially exact opposites of each other: Milton’s prophecy dwells in the Biblical world, Pope’s in the barbaric recesses of the globe; Milton’s prophecy foretells sacred events, and Pope’s foretells events in the secular, misguided realm of the Dunces; Milton’s promises redemption, Pope’s promises an anticlimactic Armageddon. Pope’s *Variorum* note points this out as “a general allusion” (3.53n.), once again serving to align the two prophecies specifically, so that their ironic juxtaposition can be seen clearly. Placing his prophetic vision in such an alignment with Milton’s creates a sense that Pope is mocking how self-important

and complacent the Dunces feel in their false intellect, adding to his satire thereby.

A part of the mockery of the Dunces inherent in Settle's vision to Cibber is the presence of the Barbaric East as the source of the Dunces' "sciences." "Far eastward cast thine eye" (3.73), says Settle to Cibber, connecting the rise of science to the direction in which the sun rises (3.74), but failing to mention Greece and Rome, whence rose the sorts of humanistic learning Pope would have advocated, and likewise neglecting the Middle East, the important birthplace of Christianity. Pope is also possibly using the East in the same sense as Milton, as a metaphorical direction whence evil or Pagan forces rise (Flannigan, footnote to *Paradise Lost* 2.2).⁸ Just as Milton bedecks Satan's throne in a manner "which far / Outshone the wealth of *Ormus* and of *Ind*" (2.1 – 2) to associate Satan with the Pagan world, Pope plays on the same notion here in Settle's prophecy to paganize the Dunces, allying them with the Barbarians that destroyed the Classical world ("Lo! Rome herself, proud mistress now no more . . ." [Pope 3.101]).⁹ Though the connection here is too tenuous to constitute an outright allusion, it is interesting to see how Pope elaborates on this Miltonic concept of the East as Satanic, and such elaboration underlying Miltonic themes becomes important towards the end of *The Dunciad*.

The Miltonic notion of the Demons as future Pagan deities is alluded to by Pope, likewise, to associate his Dunces with all things unchristian, in Settle's prophecy. As he describes the triumph of Dulness in England, he comments, "Behold and count them, as they rise to light...An hundred sons, and ev'ry son a God" (3.130, 134), recalling many of Satan's speeches to his Demons in which he appeals to the supposed divinity of his followers to win their allegiance. Satan's arguments are based on the notion of his Fallen Angels being equal to him, and of him being equal to God; similarly, the mentality of Pope's Dunces all being equal before Dulness is the same sort of rationale. In Book II, examples of this can be seen when Dulness announces, first to her noise-making contest, "Hold!...a Cat-call each [of you] shall win; / Equal your merits! equal is your din" (2.243-4), and, again, Dulness offers a reward to all participants in her contest for churning the muddy waters of the Thames: "A pig of lead to him who dives the best; / A peck of coals a-piece shall glad the rest" (2.281-2). Equality

among the Dunces during these contests served to acknowledge their collective ineptitude; here, in Settle's prophecy, the same notion of equality now rewards each of the Dunces divine status in a sort of Satanic pact, and thereby serves to point out the Dunces' collective moral perversion. Pope's use of a Miltonic notion, here that of godliness as a reward to evil followers, is, again, not a literal allusion, but serves to align the Dunces with the Demons.

Where Satan and his Demons, however, are careful not to admit their wrongdoing in any of their speeches, Settle, as per the Dunces' ineptitude, stumbles into a "ray of Reason" (3.125) at the end of one of his: "Learn, ye DUNCES! not to scorn your GOD" (3.224) he declaims in conclusion to his prophecy, and, as "a ray of Reason stole / Half thro' the solid darkness of his soul" (3.225 – 6), he pauses in his babbling, seeming wholly dumbfounded for a moment. As though quickly trying to save face for this slip of the tongue, he suddenly changes the subject, saying, "See now, what Dulness and her sons admire!" (3.228). The Pagan and Satanic references relating Pope's Dunces to Milton's Fallen Angels have, by this point, clearly established a connection between the two in our minds, a connection Pope has been playing on all along in his comical comparisons, and a connection which adds to the comedy of Settle's *lapsus linguae*. But, as is the case with so much of Pope's comedy, there is a seriousness at the heart of this instance thereof: to "scorn God" is essentially the central sin of the Fallen Angels, and that Settle must warn his colleagues not to perform it is no minor fact, indeed. Taking the concept at the center of Milton's Fallen Angels and applying it to his own Dunces, again, is more than a mere allusion: by making the Dunces' sin the same as the sin of Milton's Demons, Pope is morally justifying his satire of them.

Such a moral justification indicates clearly the underlying seriousness of Pope's work, represented by his allusions to and comparisons with Milton, which grow in complexity over the course of this book, in anticipation of Book IV. The shift of tone from the comedic to the tragic in Book II begins as a latent irony mocking the Dunces, placed in the mouth of Scriblerus, and ends as an outright denunciation of their Demonic sin, in the mouth of the mock prophet Settle. Settle's prophecy presents an ironic reversal of Michael's prophecy in Milton, ending not on a sternly hopeful note of "A paradise

within thee" (Milton 12.597), but of a gloatingly triumphant one of promiscuity, frolicking, and drinking (Pope 3.333-48). The level of Miltonic allusion here has moved to a broader one, encompassing entire episodes and concepts from Milton — Michael's prophecy to Adam, the Paradise of Fools, the metaphor of the Opulent East and Barbaric North, and, finally, a direct statement of the Dunces' deepest sin — instead of mere verbal echoes. Pope's development of the Miltonic metaphor is accelerating here, in anticipation of sharper satire to come, and of Pope's conclusion, wherein he will transcend the serious, and enter into the tragic.

Book IV of *The Dunciad*: Beyond Milton

This sense of the tragic becomes more palpable as we are carried towards the completion of Settle's prophecy, and, along with it, Pope begins to draw out the Demonic qualities of the Dunces to an even greater extent than Milton shows us with his own Demons. The allusions become more and more pointed, completing the background of diabolism with which Pope has been depicting his Dunces all along. Along with the sense of the Demonic, we begin to see for ourselves what Settle had depicted for us in the previous book: it is essentially a vision of the spawning of a trash culture, the same sort of disintegration in civilization Dryden hints at in his *Mac Flecknoe*, but drawn out here in full by Pope, thanks to his aligning the Dunces with Milton's Demons in the previous books. Deepening his satire of the Dunces through the completion of his mock epic, we finally reach the conclusion of the Dunces' triumph, a tragic intellectual apocalypse in which all light of reason, morality, and of God, is extinguished by the pedantry of pride.

This book of *The Dunciad*, in its apocalyptic content, suitably opens up with a reference to the "darkness visible" (Pope 4.3) characterizing Milton's Hell in Book I of *Paradise Lost*. An allusion so clear that Pope apparently felt no need to highlight it in his *Variorum*, the echoed phrase from Milton, naturally, associates with Dulness' ascension to power by being at the beginning of the book describing that ascension, and the association is made even more so by the mention of Chaos and Night, the allegorical parents of Dulness, just prior to that of "darkness visible."¹⁰ Pope's association of the mental darkness exuded by Dulness

with the spiritual darkness Satan sees as he first surveys Hell suggests that, as was the case with the frustrated Cibber railing in his study in Book I, the state of Dulness is itself a kind of Hell, especially in that, as the Pagan and Satanic analogy connected to the Dunces thus far has suggested, the state of Dulness is, in a sense, a separation from God. Viewed in this light, the triumph of Dulness becomes a sort of intellectual apocalypse, a unique way, on Pope's part, of completing the Miltonic vision of Providence.

Pope's apocalyptic conclusion has, of course, a vaguely comic air, but the comedy at this point is heavily outweighed by the profound pessimism of the situation, a pessimism far divergent from Milton's ultimately optimistic vision of Providence, and shading darkly even the moments of lighter comedy still present in the fourth book of Pope's mock epic. One such comic moment, for instance, occurs when Dulness "mounts the Throne" (Pope 4.17) of her power, revealing "In broad Effulgence all below" (4.18) — her posterior to all of the onlookers below her. "Effulgence," a Latinate word used in many places by Milton in *Paradise Lost* — the *Oxford English Dictionary*, in fact, points specifically to Milton's use of the word, with "On thee Impresst the effulgence of his Glorie abides" (Milton 3.388 quoted in *OED*) — is used in many of Milton's Angelic descriptions, and its use here is rather ironic, considering that Pope's association of the "effulgence" is not with the head, like a halo or nimbus, but with quite the other end of the body. It is laughable, of course, that Dulness' rear end essentially is shining like a full moon for all to see, but that this is happening during her ascension to the throne, during the start of her triumph and the apocalypse resulting from that triumph, dampens the humor noticeably. It is also possible that Pope, in his aesthetic of balance, intends to use this piece of fairly crude humor to compensate for the dreadful moment at which his climax begins. Either way, whether Pope intends for seriousness to temper humor or vice-versa in this case, the Miltonic allusion in "Effulgence" helps make the joke.

But the joke is, again, a mere superficiality, especially when followed by a parade of flattering Dunces at the throne of Dulness. Of these Dunces, Williams lists numerous parallels between Busby and Moloch, and Beëlzebub and Bentley (133) — appropriate parallels, indeed, by what has already been said — but Williams neglects to

mention an interesting comparison drawn by Pope himself, between Bentley and Milton's Michael. After approaching the throne of Dulness and receiving his due bows, Bentley, "kingly did but nod" (Pope 4.207), a phrasing reminiscent of Michael, who, when the fallen Adam receives him, "Kingly from his State / Inclined not" (Milton 11.249 – 50). Such a simple and direct parallel between an Angel and a Duncel strikes us as odd, considering the often subtler, more oblique parallels Pope draws to the heroic characters in *Paradise Lost* than the more ostensible ones he draws to Demons, but, as with previous comparisons Pope makes with Milton's heroes, this one is intended to emphasize the difference between the two characters, rather than their similarities. Whereas Michael deigns not a bow to the fallen Adam on account of their being separated by sin, Bentley affords a restrained nod of the head, a gesture imparting a simultaneous admission of equality with his fellow Dunces, and a superiority to them. His command to Dulness to "dismiss that rabble from [her] throne" (4.209) after this bow clearly indicates an arrogance on his part, despite his gesture acknowledging the reverence of the same people he is now ousting. Michael, in an honest fashion, returns no reverence to Adam — after all, why would he, an Angel, condescend to nod in acknowledgement to a fallen mortal? Bentley, on the other hand, nods in minor obeisance to his peers, then sheds all pretense of modesty and arrogantly shoos them from his goddess' throne: where one has clear reason to defer from so much as an inclination of the head, the other has neither reason to bow his head, which he still does, nor reason to declare himself more worthy of an audience with Dulness in front of those he respected a moment before, which, again, he still does regardless. Just as we see with unbridled poignancy the separation between Adam and Michael in Book XI of *Paradise Lost*, so, too, we see with unbridled rudeness the arrogance with which the Dunces assert themselves to one another.

After Bentley's self-important dismissal of Dulness' "rabble," he makes a speech to Dulness in which he uses a pun, pointed out by Pope as Scriblerus: "See! Still thy own, the heavy Canon roll, / And Metaphysic smokes involve the Pole" (4.247-8). After turning the pun both ways, as a cannon and as a canon, Scriblerus pedantically comments:

It may be objected, that this is a mere *Paranomasia* or *Pun*.. But what of that? Is any figure of speech more apposite to our gentle Goddess, or more frequently used by her, and her children, especially of the University? Doubtless it better suits the character of Dulness, yea of a Doctor, than that of an Angel; yet *Milton* fear'd not to put a considerable quantity into the mouths of his. It hath indeed been observed, that they were the Devil's Angels, as if he did it to suggest the Devil as the author as well of false Wit, as of false Religion, and that the Father of Lies was also the Father of Puns. But this is idle...(4.247n.)

Again, Pope uses the sardonic disguise of Scriblerus to disclose some of his true intent: placing a pun in the mouth of a Dunces clearly identifies this Dunces with one of Milton's Demons, whose speeches throughout *Paradise Lost* are fraught with this lowly literary device. Scriblerus' continued defense of puns in this footnote points out their use by the Church Fathers onwards "till the debauch'd reign of Charles the Second" (4.247n.), an action whose delightful irony merely twists the stabbed knife, causing Scriblerus to impute the clergy with the rest of the punning Dunces. Pope here is using the disguise of Scriblerus, in essence, to point out one of his own imported Miltonic concepts, that of connecting evil to poor taste in literature, and, by extension, in art in general — a concept applied only too appropriately to Pope's Dunces. Pope uses his mock-footnotes not only to satirize yet another aspect of Duncedom, but, once more, to highlight their textual connection to Milton's Demons.

Another of these footnotes points out a verbal echo later on when one of the Virtuosi describes his pursuit of a butterfly: "It fled, I follow'd; now in hope, now pain; / It stopt, I stopt; it mov'd, I mov'd again" (4.427-8). Pope draws his connection here to Milton's Eve as she recollects her pursuit of her own image; "It started back, but pleas'd I soon returnd, / Pleas'd it returned as soon with answering looks" (4.462-3). Though not a connection to the Demonic, Pope's drawing of the comparison is more a moral one: just as Eve regards her reflection with misguided vanity, the Virtuoso pursues the butterfly, as per the Dunces' general manner, with misguided effort and reason.¹¹

Eve, at least, recants her fallacious self-worship when Adam reprimands her; the Virtuoso, however, persists in it, as per the incessant ignorance of duncery. The allusion here shows not a nearness of one evil to another, but, rather, the distance of Eve's virtue and the Virtuoso's pride, allying him more with his Demonic brethren thereby. The Virtuoso's sin is a kind of pride, the presumption that, as he puts it, only his sphere is worth "meddling" in (4.432), this earthly sphere of petty insects, instead of higher things.

From the Virtuoso's vain pursuit of the butterfly, to Bentley's self-important nodding, to Scriblerus' pedantic defense of puns — the Miltonic allusions in Book IV begin to illuminate the central aspect of, to paraphrase Williams again, the evil implicit in Duncery (133). Where, before, the Miltonic elements acted to show us *that* the Dunces are evil at heart, as well as the degree to which they have fallen from virtue and allied with mediocre vices, in Book IV these allusions begin to suggest *how* the Dunces are evil: their ultimate sin, even more perverse than scorning God in Book III, is the Satanic sin of Pride. This theme, foreshadowed by the allusions in Book IV, culminates in one of Dulness' final speeches: the Dunces, as their goddess bids them, "Make God Man's Image, Man the final Cause" (4.478),¹² and, thus, carry out her most telling commands, "be proud, be selfish, and be dull" (4.582). This, in a way, is even worse than scorning God: the Dunces intend to usurp Him and put themselves in His place. Milton's Satan may hate God, but never speaks of any intention to replace Him, at least, not outright; Pope is, though, essentially extending Satan's character to this conclusion of Satanic logic, in the form of the Dunces. If one hates God, then one implies oneself better suited for His place. Not so much by alluding to Satan himself, but by drawing out the implicit rationale Milton gives to Satan, Pope makes the Dunces the full expression of Satanic pride.

This drawing out of the Dunces' central sin to its fullest extent coincides with the completion of Milton's vision in *Paradise Lost*: after asserting outright what the Dunces most desire — not merely to scorn God, but to oust Him — Pope commences with his intellectual apocalypse. From the first lines of this conclusion — "In vain, in vain, — the all-composing hour / Resistless falls" (4.638) — we no longer hear any sort of surface comedy, but, rather, a tone of tragic

despair. Where Milton would interpret the Second Coming as the conclusion to divine Providence, Pope varies on his ending of the world with, as Setter puts it, “the secular idea that Chaos is both the alpha and the omega” (111):

Lo! Thy dread Empire, CHAOS! Is restor'd;
 Light dies before thy uncreating word:
 Thy hand, great Anarch! Lets the curtain fall;
 And Universal Darkness buries All. (4.653–6)

The “uncreating word” of Chaos touches upon the important concept of God as poet, and of Dulness and the forces allied with her as “anti-poetic”: just as true poetry is creative art, Dulness is art that is both uncreative and uncreating. By making Chaos the Omega, Pope is removing God from the apocalypse and is substituting Dulness for the Son¹³ as she carries out the will of Chaos, and this all, naturally, suits the will of the Dunces perfectly. As though Pope intends to flatter the Dunces by appealing to their own desire to war with and replace God, just as Milton’s Demons do. Pope structures all of *The Dunciad*, with the help of his engagement with Milton, in anticipation of this Godless and tragic end.

Conclusion

This narrative end, however, is not necessarily the complete purpose of Pope’s *Dunciad*: indeed, as a satirist, Pope would never stand for the triumph of Dulness. Lewalski deftly, and succinctly, observes that “the manifestation of the poem itself makes the counterforce of wit” (42),¹⁴ and a dazzling one it is, for certain: we read this poem, and laugh, and marvel at its sheer virtuosity of comedy, both situational and intellectual. We cannot doubt that this comedy, on which Griffin bases his reasoning, exists, and we, likewise, cannot doubt that Pope’s own skill as a poet helps make it: even the fourth book, the least comedic in nature, presents “an epic fantasia, a series of free variations on the Miltonic theme of ‘right reason obscured’” (Brower 343) that entertains the mental faculties, even as these same faculties are imprisoned one by one and destroyed in the plot of the poem. But if we are to assume, as Griffin would have it, that Pope’s

own wit makes the poem comedic at heart, then we would miss one of Pope's key arguments: Pope's writing of this poem is a stand against Dulness, a stand which, as a satirist, Pope is doubtlessly urging us to take. We are not intended only to witness the triumph of Dulness, and laugh at it as preposterous and improbable; we are, instead, meant to be incited against the Dunces, and see them as ultimately amoral beings, as the allusions to Milton's *Paradise Lost* very clearly show.

These amoral beings, though "comically bumbling" (Griffin 174), are still a force to be reckoned with: they wage a war against reason in *The Dunciad* comparable to the war against God waged by the Demons in *Paradise Lost*, save that the Dunces, unlike the Demons, actually succeed, and *can* succeed. The Dunces' ineptitude and mediocrity may amuse us, and seem self-defeating, but the Dunces in Pope's time not only existed, but were gaining ground — if they were not, after all, then why would Pope feel compelled to attack them in this satire? Pope turns to Milton to fulfill this satirical purpose, using allusions to Milton's epic to create a representation of duncery even more scathing than Dryden, Pope's predecessor, presented in *Mac Flecknoe*, and made so by the diabolism and godlessness Pope associates with his Dunces. We see, then, that just as Pope was the poetic heir of Dryden, he made himself the poetic heir of Milton: rather than merely copy *Paradise Lost* into his mock epic, as one of his Dunces would have done, Pope chose to reinterpret Milton, reconciling, in effect, his differences with that poet. These differences were likely just as difficult for Pope to reconcile as the many different tones of this poem: the surface comedy of the incompetent Dunces, the inner seriousness of Pope's satire, and the central tragedy of the fall of Reason's forces to Dulness' forces all had to be placed in harmony with each other in order to make a cohesive final product — and they *did*. Pope's polyphony of tonalities cause this poem about Dulness to be, itself, dazzling work of wit, but of wit that is not invulnerable: in this vulnerability, wit, unlike God versus Milton's Demons, can still succumb to Pope's Dunces, and therein lies the true tragedy of the poem.

Notes

¹ "Imitation" is used here in the modern sense; in the eighteenth

century sense of the word, an “imitation” is essentially a reinterpretation (e. g. Pope’s “imitations” of Horace).

² After Griffin, towards the 1990s, it appears that the topic of Miltonic allusions in *The Dunciad* falls out of fashion, and is only rarely explored in its own right by any critics. One example of this is Keener’s “The Poets’ Secret,” in which he alleges that Pope read *Paradise Lost* with a sensitivity to Milton’s numerous parodies of the Holy Trinity, and explores, as he puts it rather convolutedly, “Pope’s imitation of Dryden’s parody of Milton’s Satan’s parody of Milton’s God” (87). However, again, this does not explore the function of Pope’s Miltonic allusions in full, but only in one aspect.

³ Many critics have noticed the connection between Satan and Cibber here: as Paul Baines puts it, “Cibber is pictured in a parody of epic anger; having lost at gambling, he . . . internalizes Satan’s fall through Chaos in *Paradise Lost*” (133).

⁴ Lewalski also draws a parallel between the goddess Dulness and the Messiah, suggesting that Pope uses her to parody the role of the role of “the Son at the Second Coming” (43), citing Dulness’ approbation of Cibber here as additional evidence. This parallel becomes more well-defined in Book IV. In Book I, however, as David Fairer observes, “A ‘veil of fogs’ [1.218] circulates around Dulness, making a link between her elusive nature and the traditional image of Satanic deception. We recall how Milton’s Satan wanders through Paradise as a dark mist in which he is able to enter the serpent’s mouth, paralleling the way which he can reach the organs of Eve’s fancy” (117). The dual nature of Dulness, as both a mock Messianic and Satanic figure, makes her wicked nature twofold in Pope’s depiction.

⁵ Baines connects this allusion to more than just Satan, in fact: “Cibber is seated on a throne which alludes complexly to Milton’s Satan, the coronation of George II, and the mock-coronation of Richard Flecknoe, hero of Dryden’s *Mac Flecknoe*” (135).

⁶ These humorous games have actually been interpreted as Demonic signs in themselves. Claude Rawson, for instance, would connect them with the “mythologising of Grub Street, the real place, country of the mind, and topographical site of cultural disintegration” (91). Extending Rawson’s statement to this episode, Book II’s mock heroic games are, in a sense, Pope’s version of the chaotic Demonic concourse in Milton’s

Pandemonium.

⁷ Lewalski notes that the Dome of Dulness, the setting for all of Book III, “owes much to Milton’s Paradise of Fools” (43), which relates to the aforementioned Miltonic allusion on higher levels of the text.

⁸ Baines believes that the parallel between Rome’s destruction “by the Goths and Vandals . . . [and] then by superstition” is designed to mirror the fall of Britain to the Dunces, or, as he puts it, “the armies, those same ‘millions’ thronging to the bookshops” (139).

⁹ Williams makes the similar observation that the Dunces’ “common home is the north, the seat of evil; their onslaught is annihilative, barbarous” (134). Besides associating the Dunces with the barbarians that sacked Rome, Williams also notes a Demonic parallel: “The number of the [D]unces is as the number of the fiends” (134).

¹⁰ Griffin interprets this “darkness visible” as an invocation on Pope’s part to veil his satirical intent (177). This is a valid observation, and it is likely that Pope uses this allusion both as Griffin suggests, and as is suggested above.

¹¹ Lewalski notes this parallel to Eve, as well, implying that it signifies the vanity of the Virtuoso (44), but, again, she mentions this allusion too succinctly, and does not explore it well as it warrants.

¹² Williams notes the Satanic element of this speech: “Thus, too, like the Great Apostate, who ‘at one slight bound high over leap’d all bound [*Paradise Lost* 4.180] and proceeded to subvert Creation, the [D]unces, “. . .at one bound o’er-leaping all his laws, / Make God Man’s Image, Man the final Cause” (136). This parallel aligns the Dunces in general with Satan, but Williams does not illuminate the Satanic sin of Pride inherent here.

¹³ As mentioned before, Lewalski notes the parallel between “the Goddess Dulness” and “the role of the Son at the Second Coming” (43).

¹⁴ Later critics would begin to align their arguments with this view towards the 1980s. Laura Brown, for instance, comments that “The attack on amorality in this poem, then, is balanced by a reciprocal enactment of creative vitality, even of fertile regeneration” (147), interpreting all Miltonic allusions in *The Dunciad* as a part of this “vitality.”

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