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Valerie Rumbold

Interpretation, agency, entropy: annotating Pope's *Dunciads*

Alexander Pope's *Dunciads* are parodic texts embodied in parodic books; and both the texts and their material forms knowingly foreground the interpretative power of annotation: through a sequence of versions that extends from *The Dunciad. A Heroic Poem* in 1728, through *The Dunciad Variorum* of 1729, into *The Dunciad in Four Books* of 1743, a slender poem develops a massive array of prose paratexts, of which the annotations form a substantial part. But how, exactly, did the interpretative force of the annotation develop at each stage? Who was in control, and how? And what does the process have to say to annotators today, schooled in the very different ideals of objective information and interpretative neutrality and confronting the challenges and opportunities of digital annotation? This paper addresses these questions by showing how the greatest English poet of the early eighteenth century seized on annotation as an intrinsic part of his satirical mock-epic project, making the notes yet another part of his lifetime project of shaping his own reception. In the process, he commandeered and appropriated the writings of his enemies for their own undoing, and crafted additional scholarly voices to manipulate his readers' responses to his poem. But in the end, his project found itself subject to yet another round of interpretative annotation, this time at the hands of a younger collaborator equally intent on making a place for himself as writer and moralist.

While the present essay focuses on annotation, rather than on the decorations, prefaces, critical essays, documentary archives, bibliographies and indexes that make up so large a part of succeeding *Dunciads*, this is not to deny that these paratexts too play an important part in framing and manipulating interpretation of the poem. The notes, however, have a particularly direct impact on reading because they appear at the foot of each page of verse, and relate directly to the particular lines with which the reader is engaged at any particular moment. They constitute a nominally subordinate element that constantly increases both in copiousness of content and elaboration of layout; they range in length from a scrap to

an essay, adopting playfully multifarious approaches to explication as they go; they constantly shift focus between the line-by-line detail of the verse and a range of wider contexts; and they vary significantly, sometimes in major and sometimes in minor detail, from one edition to the next. All in all, they are much harder to focus on, as a whole, than such discrete, freestanding paratexts as prefatory essays: tendentious as many individual notes obviously are, their constant presence on the page (along with the undeniable fact that many do indeed offer something that might be called information) makes it difficult to gain an overview of their significance to the complex *Dunciads* that Pope developed over time.¹ This essay therefore focuses on some of the larger strategies of annotation, and on its development across the fifteen years that saw publication of the project's three main versions (1728, 1729, 1743). In 1743, however, the year before his death, Pope brought in a new collaborator, one whose enthusiastic embrace of the annotatory project was to work against the longer-term interest of poem and poet alike.

Sparse but suggestive: the notes of 1728

The first *Dunciad* to reach print was *The Dunciad. A Heroic Poem*, a slim, neatly printed duodecimo in the fashionable Elzevier style (Figure 1).² It offers a clean page with little or no annotation; and for this reason this first *Dunciad* is not usually discussed in terms of its annotation at all. Nevertheless, its few notes already show just how strategically Pope is shaping interpretation. A more immediate clue to the work's themes is its frontispiece, and in particular the pile of books on which the owl of wisdom somewhat suspiciously sits: Colley Cibber's plays, Delarivier Manley's *New Atalantis*, John Dennis's works, Lewis Theobald's *Shakespeare Restored*, and Sir Richard Blackmore's epics *Prince Arthur* and *King Arthur*. Taken with the prefatory 'The Publisher to the Reader', the image singles out for readerly contempt some of the authors who will prove to be Pope's key targets, including Theobald (1688-1745), mock-hero of the 1728 and 1729 versions, and Cibber (1671-1757), who will

replace him in 1743. The notes also, though much less conspicuously, set out an agenda for developments to come.

In this first *Dunciad* large numbers of proper names are indicated only by initials and dashes, challenging readers to guess at the targets, and it is not clear that even Pope had decided on a ‘right answer’ for each of them (Rumbold (ed.), *Dunciad and Dunciad Variorum*, 7). Swift, from his vantage point in Dublin (where a locally produced edition filled in names with particularly implausible results) advised adding an extensive annotation:

The notes I could wish to be very large, in what relates to the persons concern'd; for I have long observ'd that twenty miles from London no body understands hints, initial letters, or town-facts and passages; and in a few years not even those who live in London. I would have the names of those scriblers printed indexically at the beginning or end of the Poem, with an account of their works, for the reader to refer to. I would have all the Parodies (as they are call'd) referred to the author they imitate. (Swift, *Correspondence.*, vol. 3, 189)

Although Swift's desire for a version more transmissible across space and time would in part be answered by the expanded notes of 1729 and beyond, the *Dunciad* of 1728, where deliberate blanks are common and explanatory notes very uncommon, still invites analysis on its own terms. Is its annotation randomly applied, or is there a strategy?

It may seem surprising, for instance, that only one note, the very first, points to a poetic allusion (to Pope's poetic predecessor John Dryden), whereas in later versions citations of “Imitations” will loom large, as will Pope's explicit deployment of parallels between his own career and that of Dryden (see Figure 2; Pope, *Dunciad* I.6, p. 19; ‘Plotting Parallel Lives’). Moreover, in contrast with the lavish quotations typical of the poem's later commentaries, only the abbreviation ‘*Dryd.*’ is given, leaving the reader to fill out the name and identify the target text. Such a bland and perfunctory invocation of Pope's great

predecessor might at first suggest something of a protective function for the note, perhaps insuring Pope's 'Say from what cause, in vain decry'd and curst, / Still *Dunce the second reigns like Dunce the first*' against suspicions of treason (for George II had in fact succeeded George I only the previous year).³ The note points the reader towards evidence that this was in fact a gibe of much longer standing, namely Dryden's 'Tom the Second reigns like Tom the First' – a comment, from 'To My Dear Friend Mr Congreve', ostensibly concerned not with kings but with laureates, but irresistibly evoking the fact of Dryden's ejection from the role when the protestant William and Mary replaced the catholic James II in 1688.⁴ The conventions of regal numbering deployed in the line which Pope now echoes ensure that kings are necessarily called to mind at the beginning of this first *Dunciad*, rendering Pope's studiously laconic invocation of the older poet at best a flimsy defence. Pope, also barred from the laureateship by his Catholicism, spoke from outside the Whig establishment that celebrated the post-Revolution order. Moreover, readers of this first instantiation of the *Dunciad* would soon discover in its fable of Dulness's choice of a monarch a larger structural allusion to Dryden, namely to his earlier mock-epic *Mac Flecknoe*: the perverse quasi-royal succession between one bad poet and the next now prompts readers to frame, in the new light cast by the Revolution, a laureate succession in which the displaced Dryden is succeeded by the excluded Pope.⁵ These are large implications for such a tiny, rare note, but Pope's ambition of critiquing by stealth the relation between power and culture in his society is fully in line with what we now know of the poem's manuscripts, which from an early stage incorporated annotation that would be released to readers of the published texts only gradually and in part (Rumbold (ed.), *Dunciad and Dunciad Variorum*, 2-3, 6-7).

The taunting of authority that this note suggests is also consistent with the highlighting in a subsequent note of the Lord Mayor of London, Sir George Thorold, whose inaugural procession by land and water Pope compares to the triumphs of the Greek general Cimon (Pope, *Dunciad and Dunciad Variorum*, I. 73-4, p. 26). The poem declares right at the

beginning that its hero, Tibbald (the lawyer, poet, dramatist and Shakespearean commentator Lewis Theobald), is ‘the first who brings / The *Smithfield* muses to the ears of kings’, a breach of decorum that Pope lays at the door of the ‘great *Patricians*’ who support entertainments that he levels with the popular shows of Bartholomew Fair at Smithfield (Pope, *Dunciad and Dunciad Variorum*, I. 1-4, p. 19). Thorold’s ritual accession to leadership of the mercantile City thus presents not only an explicit analogy with the triumphs of the Greek Cimon but also an unspoken parallel with George II and his court.⁶ In Book III, Pope goes on to offer two notes alleging specific crimes of cultural destruction by Chinese and Islamic rulers, thus extending his critique of cultural vandalism across space and time; and he also offers a note that implicitly blames the medieval church for ‘Wars in *England* anciently, about the right time of celebrating *Easter*’ (Pope, *Dunciad and Dunciad Variorum*, III. 69, 73, 99-104, p. 87). All these notes suggest a global reach for his indictment of individuals and institutions singled out for their alleged destruction and corruption of culture.

Almost all the other notes in this first published *Dunciad* concern either Lewis Theobald or the late Elkanah Settle (1648-1724), signalling, like the books stacked up in the frontispiece, the poem’s concern with writing, and with drama in particular. This degree of emphasis fits the prominence of Tibbald and Settle within the poem: Theobald, a lawyer turned Shakespeare critic and writer of stage entertainments, serves, in the demeaningly spelled character of Tibbald, as its hero; and the City poet, dramatist and pamphleteer Settle becomes, by allusion to Book VI of Virgil’s *Aeneid*, father Anchises to Tibbald’s Aeneas. The notes on Theobald and Settle also show an unusual level of satirical development, anticipating the tone that readers of Pope will recognise from later, more elaborate versions. Thus Theobald’s pantomimes are glossed as ‘extravagancies ... actually introduced on the Stage, and frequented by the first Quality of *England* ... ’till they were all swallow’d up in the *Beggar’s Opera*’, neatly confirming the theme of elite culpability – and also heralding the celebration of John Gay’s satire that will be developed in later versions.⁷ Settle, meanwhile, in

a note that echoes through all succeeding *Dunciads*, is already skewered as political turncoat and failed dramatist:

Settle was once famous for party papers, but very uncertain in his political principles. He was employ'd to hold the pen in the *Character of a Popish Successor*, but afterwards printed his *Narrative* on the contrary side. (Figure 3)

He managed the ceremony and pageants at the burning of a famous *Pope*, and was at length employ'd in making the machinery at *Bartholomew* fair, where, in his old age he acted in a dragon of leather of his own invention.⁸

In sum, it is worth attending to the scatter of tiny notes in 1728 precisely because they are so scattered and tiny that they risk passing unnoticed. Their power to direct readers' interpretation lies in their selective focus, and in particular in the balefully satirical light that they throw on abuses of political and cultural power.

Lavish and many-voiced: the notes of *The Dunciad Variorum* (1729)

These features of the 1728 annotation already indicate the rhetorical focuses of the much more obviously coercive version of the poem that was published in the following year. *The Dunciad, Variorum. With the Prolegomena of Scriblerus* was a much larger book, designed as a quarto, and it featured an extensive array of paratexts in addition to its expanded annotation (Figure 4).⁹ Its title advertises it as a variorum edition (an edition that reports the views of various people), and the preliminary list of "Pieces contained in this Book" indicates who these people are:

NOTES VARIORUM: Being the *Scholia* of the learned M. SCRIBLERUS and Others, with the *Adversaria* of JOHN DENNIS, LEWIS THEOBALD, EDMUND CURL, the Journalists, etc. (Pope, *Dunciad and Dunciad Variorum*, 121)

Scriblerus takes the lead, as the accredited scholar in the list, and after him come three of Pope's most clearly established antagonists. One is Theobald, who had already been hero in

1728; but he is now preceded by the elderly critic John Dennis (1658-1743), who had early led the attack on Pope; and he is followed by the bookseller Edmund Curll (d. 1747), who had regularly and damagingly pirated Pope's work. (He had also, since the publication of the *Dunciad* in 1728, responded to the market opportunity constituted by its blanks and initials by issuing three editions of *A Compleat Key to the Dunciad; Pope, Dunciad and Dunciad Variorum*, 122, 373) Following on behind are 'the Journalists, etc.', suggesting a broad constituency ranged against Pope, but one whose attacks will now be humiliatingly transformed into further documentary support for his project. This exploitation of enemies both old and new is confirmed by the 'Index of the Author's of the Notes' that follows the poem in 1729, which lists, alongside the established figures, writers such as James Ralph (d. 1762) who had attacked Pope only in the wake of the first *Dunciad* of 1728.¹⁰

Pope's variorum-style revised *Dunciad* thus declares two major new dimensions to its annotation: one is the deployment of the fictitious character Scriblerus, and the other is a selective repurposing of what had been written against him by enemies both old and new. Martinus Scriblerus is in a sense already Pope's property, for he had been invented in the 1710s by Pope, Swift, Gay, Arbuthnot and others as a satire on false learning, a parodic scholar of the old school; so it is in a sense apt that he should now be developed as a character who can give his views on the *Dunciad*.¹¹ He addresses the reader, intimately but outmodedly, as 'thee', and elaborates an annotatory style characterised by archaism, hyperbole and hair-splitting; self-satisfied fuss is his default setting, and he shows little capacity to put his typically pettifogging concerns into anything like a normal perspective. More problematic than redeploying this inherited figure is the task of converting Pope's actual antagonists into commentators who will show off the poem to advantage; but here Swift had already shown the way in 1710 by incorporating into the fifth edition of his *Tale of a Tub* elements of a hostile but usefully scholarly critique by William Wooton.¹² Much of what Pope would cite would be ludicrous by comparison, but his older friend had shown the way.

The effect of combining the characterisation of Scriblerus with the citation of Pope's enemies is given added force by the *mise-en-page* of the *Dunciad Variorum*, which presents the notes as a substantial – if subordinate – part of the page (Figure 5). For instance, a substantial note, attributed to Scriblerus, whose ostensible purpose is simply to gloss the name of the Roman poet Bavius (cited by Virgil as an example of a bad poet), actually serves as opportunity for Pope to deploy a highly strategic citation of writings by his antagonists:

Bavius was an ancient Poet, celebrated by *Virgil* for the like cause as *Tibbald* by our author, tho' in less christian-like manner: For heathenishly it is declar'd by *Virgil* of *Bavius*, that he ought to be *hated* and *detested* for his evil works; *Qui Bavium non odit* — Whereas we have often had occasion to observe our Poet's great good nature and mercifulness, thro' the whole course of this Poem.

Mr. *Dennis* warmly contends that *Bavius* was no inconsiderable author; nay, that “he and *Maevius* had (even in *Augustus*'s days) a very formidable Party at *Rome*, who thought them much superior to *Virgil* and *Horace*: For (saith he) I cannot believe they would have fix'd that eternal brand upon them, if they had not been coxcombs in more than ordinary credit.” An argument which (if this Poem should last) will conduce to the honour of the Gentlemen of the *Dunciad*. In like manner he tells us of Mr. *Settle*, that “he was once a formidable Rival to Mr. *Dryden*, and that in the University of *Cambridge* there were those who gave him the *preference*.” Mr. *Welsted* goes yet farther in his behalf. “Poor *Settle* was formerly the *Mighty Rival* of *Dryden*: nay, for many years, bore his Reputation *above* him.” [Pref. to his Poems, 8^o. p.51.] And Mr. *Milbourn* cry'd out, “How little was *Dryden* able, even when his blood run high, to defend himself against Mr. *Settle*!” *Notes on Dryd. Virg. p. 175*. These are comfortable opinions! and no wonder some authors indulge them.

SCRIBLERUS. (Pope, *Dunciad and Dunciad Variorum*, note on III.16, p. 268)

This performance goes far beyond providing information. There is amusement to be had at Scriblerus's naivety in crediting Pope with 'great good nature and mercifulness' towards his attackers; but the heart of the note is its devastating rhetorical deployment of quotation and summary, which frames the authors he despises as architects of a systematically self-serving distortion of literary history both ancient and modern. Pope's enemies are cast as talking up the Baviuses and the Settles against the Virgils and the Drydens, and this allows Pope to shape an implied parallel with his own situation, aligning himself with Virgil and Dryden against the Baviuses and Settles of his own day. Every element in such a note is evaluative, guiding the reader towards contempt for Pope's enemies and admiration for Pope; and its effects transcend the merely local, building into a systematic exaltation of Pope's poise and mastery in contrast with the hapless flailing of his critics.

Indeed, in order to reinforce the system so powerfully articulated in the notes and more widely in the extensive paratexts to this version, Pope reserves a final interpretative intervention for the very end, the 'Index of Things (including Authors) to be found in the Notes, etc.' (Pope, *Dunciad and Dunciad Variorum*, 359-65). In this tendentious index Pope selects and summarises his account of individuals and topics in such a way as to invite the reader to a guided rereading of the poem and its notes. Those who have read the poem in order, following its narrative development, are now teased into a different approach, drilling down by person and topic to focus on patterns of critique across the range of the book. The role of the bookseller Edmund Curll is summarised as follows:

CURLL, Edm. His panegyric, II.54.

— His *Corinna*, and what she did, 66.

— His Prayer, 75. – Like *Eridanus*, 176.

— Much favour'd by Cloacina, 93, *etc.*

— Purged and vomited, ii. 143.

— Tost in a Blanket and whipped, *ibid.*

— Pillory'd. ii. 3. (Figure 6; Pope, *Dunciad and Dunciad Variorum*, 360)

Even when the reference is to a line of verse, much of the relevant information, rhetorically shaped to Pope's purposes, is actually found in the notes. So, for instance, the "panegyric" on Curll is found for the most part in the ironic note on his piracies and prosecutions that accompanies the challenge issued by "dauntless Curll" in the verse at II. 54:

... we shall only say of this eminent man, that he carried the Trade many lengths beyond what it ever before had arrived at He possest himself of a command over all authors whatever; he caus'd then to write what he pleas'd; they could not call their very names their own He was taken notice of by the *State*, the *Church*, and the *Law*, and received particular marks of distinction from each. (Figure 7; Pope, *Dunciad and Dunciad Variorum*, 216)

When the reader looks up the teasing headings from the index, it is to find that what Corinna did (allegedly) was to spend the night with Curll and empty her chamber-pot into the street; Curll's prayer was that he might win a race that he had in justice lost; he was like the mighty Po (Eridanus) in the copiousness of his urine; he was favoured by the goddess of the sewers (Cloacina) because of their mutual delight in filth; he was given an emetic by Pope to punish him for the unauthorised printing of material embarrassing to Lady Mary Wortley Montagu; he was tossed and whipped by the boys of Westminster School for printing a garbled account of the funeral of their former headmaster; and he was pilloried for publishing the unauthorised and politically sensitive memoirs of a former spy.¹³ The index thus presents Curll as a flagrant exponent of a commerce in print entirely unconstrained by decency or legality, an exemplar of one important aspect of the modernity whose triumph Dulness has come to celebrate. Following through the guided re-reading of the verse that Pope has plotted in the index also underlines the effectiveness with which his notes work as part of a distributed rhetorical system, contributing far more than (and much less than) straightforward information. The notes are intrinsic to the work as a whole, not just witty in themselves and in their relation to

their text, but also constructed to frame readers' interpretation of the poem and to emphasise Pope's own significance in the culture wars of his time.

'And Universal Darkness covers All': Warburtonian commentary in *The Dunciad in Four Books*

In 1743 Pope published *The Dunciad in Four Books*, a revised version of the three-book poem with an added fourth book in which it was revealed that the hero was no longer Tibbald, but Bays, a figure based on the poet laureate Colley Cibber (Figure 8).¹⁴ Much of the commentary and apparatus for the original three books remained as before; but a dynamic and ambitious new associate had recently entered Pope's life, and this collaboration brought about a major shift of gravity.

Taken aback by the furore about the alleged heresy and impiety of *An Essay on Man* in the late 1730s, Pope had been enormously impressed by the vigour, ingenuity, and zeal in his defence of the lawyer and clergyman William Warburton (1698-1779) (Pope, *Dunciad in Four Books*, 11-12). Pope, now largely bereft of his Scriblerian friends (for Swift, by now the lone survivor, had not visited England since 1728), met Warburton in 1740, made him a collaborator on *The Dunciad in Four Books*, and bequeathed him the literary property in all his works on condition that he wrote notes on them: this meant that Warburton's future standing, both financial and cultural, depended on becoming Pope's authorised annotator.¹⁵

Pope thus wrote to Warburton of his 'Project ... to make you in some measure the Editor of this new Edit. of the Dunc. if you have no scruple of owning some of the *Graver Notes* which are now added' (Pope, *Correspondence*, IV. 472). Warburton also put on record, after Pope's death, his own specific claim to particular notes in the 1743 *Dunciad*, adding 'P' or 'W' or sometimes 'PW' to indicate which of them had contributed a particular note or part-note. He would also later claim that the whole idea of adding a fourth book was his (Pope, *Dunciad in Four Books*, 267). This seems exaggerated at best, because some of its elements at

least had been drafted in manuscript long before Warburton met Pope; but what does seem clear is that Warburton helped shape and intensify the fourth book's distinctive turn away from the literary and party-political controversies of the first three books. Instead, he encouraged the fourth book's aspiration to theological and apocalyptic grandeur, supporting Pope in developing the sense that his enemies' campaign is ultimately a war against God, that Cibber is not just a feeble poet laureate, but in some sense a vision of Antichrist.¹⁶

Pope had, to an extent, always worked collaboratively: Scriblerus himself had been a group invention, and now Warburton had been recruited as the last invited sharer in Pope's creative process. Warburton, however, was not Pope's senior or contemporary, but ten years younger, a humbly born lawyer and clergyman who, though now in his 40s, had his fortune still to make. The role of Pope's authorised editor significantly helped him on the path towards marrying an heiress, becoming a bishop and establishing himself as an omnipresent public intellectual, amassing advantages that would later be sharply noted by Samuel Johnson, himself an experienced and much less privileged entrant into the world of books:

From this time Pope lived in the closest intimacy with his commentator, and amply rewarded his kindness and his zeal; for he introduced him to Mr. Murray, by whose interest he became preacher at Lincoln's Inn, and to Mr. Allen, who gave him his niece and his estate, and by consequence a bishoprick. When he died, he left him the property of his works; a legacy which may be reasonably estimated at four thousand pounds.¹⁷

None of this necessarily made Warburton any the easier to like, and his dogmatic and overbearing performance as the proprietor of the text of Pope was probably a significant factor in the fading of the poet's popularity later in the century.

Warburton made a particular contribution to the apparatus and annotation of the four-book *Dunciad* that related to a major bugbear whom Pope had long held in reserve, namely the distinguished editor and philologist Richard Bentley (1662-1742) ([Pope, *Dunciad in Four*](#)

Books, ed. Rumbold, pp. 7-8, 11-12). This was an old resentment, dating back to Bentley's attack on Sir William Temple's casual acceptance, in his 1690 'Essay upon the Ancient and Modern Learning', that the so-called Epistles of Phalaris really had been composed by the sixth-century BC Sicilian tyrant (Temple, pp. 60-61). The young Swift, then Temple's secretary, had taken up his employer's cause in 'The Battle of the Books', and Pope, though two decades Swift's junior, adopted the tradition of hostility to Bentley's innovative brand of professional philology as part of his anti-modern scepticism.¹⁸ It might, indeed, have seemed by 1743 too old a story to be worth reviving, had Bentley not in 1732 brought himself into a renewed and ludicrous prominence by publishing *Milton's Paradise Lost. A New Edition*, by Richard Bentley, D.D, in which he claimed that accepted readings in what was by now regarded as a modern classic were no more than ill-advised editorial interpolations. Prompted by this intervention, Pope and Warburton created a new mock-Bentley who not only appears in the verse of the new fourth book as 'Aristarchus', but also busies himself self-importantly among the paratexts, and, in the notes in particular, subjects the older Scriblerus to an arrogant and patronising critique. The style of this 'Bentley' is strongly differentiated from the breathless accumulation of adjectives and doublets that bespeak the busily officious Scriblerus (whom Warburton also voices in part, if with limited success). The leading characteristic of 'Bentley' is ponderousness, expressive in its very syntax of a conviction of superiority so massive as to have no need to exert itself. In contrast with Scriblerus's fussy courtesy he is patronising at best and at worst offensive; and notable among his archaisms is the rare but unpleasant adjective 'putid', a term notoriously used by the real Bentley (Pope, *Dunciad in Four Books*, ed. Rumbold, p.76).

The aggressive and overbearing character of 'Bentley' is made clear from the moment he enters the preliminaries to *The Dunciad in Four Books* with his essay 'Ricardus Aristarchus of the Hero of the Poem':

Of the nature of *Dunciad* in general, whence derived, and on what authority founded, as well as of the art and conduct of this our poem in particular, the learned and laborious Scriblerus hath, according to his manner, and with tolerable share of judgment, dissertated. But when he cometh to speak of the *Person* of the *Hero* fitted for such poem, in truth he miserably halts and hallucinates. For, misled by one Monsieur Bossu, a Gallic critic, he prateth of I cannot tell what *Phantom of a Hero*, only raised up to support the Fable. A putid conceit! (Pope, *Dunciad in Four Books*, ed. Rumbold, pp.75-6)

Unfortunately, more than a hint of the laboured contempt here attributed to Bentley can be detected also in the aggressive pertinacity of Warburton himself. The annotation that Warburton now adds to *The Dunciad in Four Books* would in course of time be formally claimed by his marginal ‘W’ (which demonstrated his fulfilment of the terms of Pope’s will); but even without the initial, this new element in the commentary is often readily distinguishable by its crude pertinacity from the relative wit and indirection of previous layers.

One of Warburton’s most characteristic methods is summary and paraphrase. Near the beginning of Book I, he voices Scriblerus, adding a new note on Dulness’s first appearance, ‘in clouded Majesty’:

Milton, Book iv. See this Cloud removed, or rolled back, or gathered up to her head, book iv. ver. 17, 18. It is worth while to compare this description of the majesty of Dulness in a state of peace and tranquillity, with that more busy scene where she mounts the throne in triumph, and is not so much supported by her own Virtues, as by the princely consciousness of having destroyed all other.

SCRIBL. (Figure 9; Pope, *Dunciad in Four Books*, ed. Rumbold, I.45, p. 105)

Admittedly, Warburton does try to imitate Scriblerus’s characteristic *copia* in the pointlessly redoubled phrases ‘removed, or rolled back or gathered up to her head’; but what is far more

revealing is the cross-referencing by which he insists on the unity of the new four-book structure, and the tone of moral trumpeting with which the note concludes. Since Warburton's future depended on a status as annotator that, as a late-comer to Pope's circle, he could claim only in relation to this late four-book version of a long-revised poem, his insistence that the added book completes (rather than spoiling) the older structure is understandable. But there is more at work here than can be so easily rationalised, for the sheer pleasure of insisting on counterintuitive interpretations (a disposition perhaps further developed by his legal training) is one of Warburton's most characteristic intellectual drives, a key not only to his defence of *An Essay on Man* but also to the paradoxical energy of his vindication of orthodox belief in a future state of rewards and punishments, *The Divine Legation of Moses Demonstrated*.¹⁹

One striking way in which Warburton's annotation differs from Pope's is in a tendency, strategically consistent with Warburton's chosen role as defender of orthodoxy, to insist on a single, unambiguous meaning. Such insistence had clearly been a relief to Pope during the furore over *An Essay on Man*, reassuring him that his poem really could be read as orthodox rather than heretical; but while insisting that a poem means only one thing and works in only one way may be a good way of avoiding controversy, it is not necessarily a good way of engaging readers, and it sits awkwardly with the subversive ambiguities of Pope's 1728 and 1729 *Dunciads*. Perhaps the most serious charge against Warburton's notes on *The Dunciad in Four Books* is that giving full play to their dogmatic paraphrase makes the poem less interesting and less suggestive – in a word, too boring.

This becomes clear when, in the final movement of Book IV, Dulness yawns and the whole creation falls asleep. Scriblerus (now apparently voiced by Warburton) takes the reader step by step through 'The Progress of this Yawn' which he insists is 'judicious, natural, and worthy to be noted', in line with his commitment to demonstrating the formal unity and coherence of Pope's massively diversified text (Pope, *Dunciad in Four Books*, ed. Rumbold, note on IV. 607, pp. 352-3). But what is quite astonishing – given Pope's record as poet of

opposition – is the way in which Warburton's note concludes by letting the government off the hook in a way quite at variance with the general trend of this greatest and most despairing of Pope's satires, a poem which had been lambasting Walpole's effect on the national culture since 1728 and, in 1743, still has apparent difficulty in assimilating the end-of-era implications of his recent fall from power amid the venal manoeuvrings of the so-called 'Patriots'.²⁰ Warburton, in contrast, seems entirely ready for the national narrative to resume after a brief pause. According to the note, 'the effect of [Dulness's yawn], tho' ever so momentary, could not but cause some Relaxation, for the time, in all public affairs'. Readers may well ask what 'for the time' can have to do with the relentless falling asleep of all the centres of cultural authority that the poem is itemising here, or with the 'Universal Darkness' that is about to bury 'All' at the conclusion of the poem. Here, in contrast with the elderly Pope's valiant retrospect on the failure of a lifetime's hopes, the relatively young and ambitious Warburton takes the long view, and prudently draws back from any permanent breach with 'the Great' (Pope, *Dunciad in Four Books*, ed. Rumbold, pp. I. 3, p. 98).

An analogous point could be made about the whole of Warburton's annotation of the celebrated end of the fourth book, where he interprets the final return of Chaos and the 'Universal Darkness' that 'buries All' in an almost exclusively theological sense. By using this final sequence of notes as an opportunity for an unremitting attack on threats to religious orthodoxy, Warburton lays claim to a kind of moral high ground that is much less likely than Pope's long-established opposition to King and Minister to prove problematic as the establishment reconstitutes itself after Walpole's fall. Such an exclusive and condemnatory focus on theological novelty effectively deflects attention from the political subversion of the larger *Dunciad* project, seeking to reassure readers that even the greatest satirical verse can be read as safely one-dimensional. Warburton is indeed, and for good reason, much more alert to the demands of the moment than the poet, now in radically failing health, who had been developing the myth in print for fifteen years, and in manuscript for some time longer.

It is indeed a sobering experience to read, consecutively, these notes on the last few pages of *The Dunciad in Four Books*: Scriblerus, as ventriloquised by Warburton, makes his last appearance at IV. 624, with a quibble that concludes in weighty Warburtonian moralising; and thereafter, for the remaining thirty-two lines of the poem, the field is clear for Warburton to vaunt his theological orthodoxy unimpeded either by further hints from Pope or by the mask of Scriblerus (Figure 10; Pope, *Dunciad in Four Books*, ed. Rumbold, pp. 355-60). He elaborates at length the theological dangers that he discerns in modern philosophy, and concludes, not with the poem and what it might be saying about ‘Universal Darkness’, but with a snide comment about Shaftesbury and the deists. He even finds an opportunity, in his penultimate note on this apocalyptic moment, to stress that Religion only ‘veils her sacred fires’ (my emphasis), ‘as her [light] alone in its own nature is unextinguishable and eternal’. This insistence on the ‘unextinguishable and eternal’ light of religion sits in bald contradiction to the ending of the poem:

Thy hand, great Anarch! lets the curtain fall;

And Universal Darkness buries All.

(Pope, *Dunciad in Four Books*, ed. Rumbold, IV. 649, p. 360).

Conclusion

This is a sad moment in more ways than one, not just the end of the world as we know it, but also the end of a particular kind of Popean wit. Pope had in 1729 crafted his notes as an ingeniously rhetorical complement to the verse, framing his poem with an agile counterpoint of information, irony, impersonation, and indirection. The notes functioned not simply as a help (or even a guide) to reading the verse but as an intrinsic part of a satiric performance that integrated a wide range of paratexts. In the 1730s, however, Pope had had to come to terms with his role as committed opposition poet, a somewhat soberer figure than the squibs and skirmishes of his youth might have suggested, though not nearly as forbiddingly sober, nor so

ready to accommodate himself to the post-Walpolean establishment, as Warburton would make him appear. Since 1729, the *Dunciad* had been less a poem with notes than a composite work of verse and prose, and when Pope invited Warburton to become his collaborator the character of that composite work was inevitably affected by his coarser wit and more crudely instrumental perspective. It was still possible to try to ignore or disregard the notes, but it was difficult to do so – particularly because, taken as a whole, the annotation still possessed much of the Popean playfulness that had first made it so engaging a part of the satire. The interpretative potential of annotation may at first seem a powerful friend, but it can equally become a powerful enemy – as Pope demonstrated when he allowed it to pass into the less subtle but no less strategic hands of his young friend Warburton.

The development of Pope's *Dunciads* in the final years of his life has much to say to the perplexities of later annotators. These texts offer an extreme example not only of the detail and obliquity with which eighteenth-century verse satire challenges the annotator's skill, but also of the self-reflexive complexity that results when the work to be annotated already incorporates a supposedly explanatory commentary of its own. For annotators working in digital media, where so many more agents can be involved, so many more pieces of information gathered, so many more annotatory fields created, and so many more pathways between text and notes devised, the *Dunciad* commentaries are particularly suggestive.

First, Pope's *Dunciads* show right from the beginning that even the sparsest of notes influences interpretation. Unlike annotators today, Pope and Warburton held no brief for neutrality: commentary is for them yet another space in which to develop their rhetorical designs on the reader. Notes, the *Dunciads* thus remind us, are powerful instruments that need to be handled with care – and arguably with rather more care than Pope exercised in giving the loose to the annotatory impulses of his new friend Warburton. The artistic, political, theological, reputational and financial motives discernible in Pope's and Warburton's notes may also encourage us to consider (candidly, if not unkindly) the variously interested motives that prompt a person to become an annotator – as indeed to become *any kind of published writer* -- whether digitally or in print.

Second, because notes affect interpretation, their authorship matters. The *Dunciads* of Pope's lifetime have no interest at all in rendering their authorship transparent: Pope told readers of the three-book poem in 1729 that the commentary had been '*sent me from several hands*', but most of the time it sounds very much like Pope, and it is for the most part unclear what, if anything, was contributed by others.⁰⁰⁰ Rumbold, *Dunciads of 1728 and 1729, Poems of AP, vol III, p. 122.*⁰⁰⁰ By 1751, when Warburton claimed his own contributions to the commentary of the four-book poem of 1743, he was interested only to divide the credit with Pope, rather than to excavate earlier stages of collaboration – a task for which, as a late arriver on the scene, he was in any case poorly qualified. By this time Pope was dead, and the uneasy overlaying of his words by Warburton's was already an established part of the reading experience, a fact that Warburton's self-interested attempt at reconstructing the process did little to ameliorate. As digital editions now move into the mainstream, information about the authorship of particular notes can indeed be incorporated from the outset, rather than abandoned to later reconstruction by survivors with an axe to grind – but this will only happen if attribution is recognised as important. In an era of collaborative research grants and crowd sourcing, it may be more important than ever.

Third, the material forms of Pope's *Dunciads* are a reminder that the impact of notes depends on their presentation. Readers encountered a poem that was at times almost crowded off the page by its footnotes: the visually busy commentary at the foot of the page was distinguished from the spacious, uncluttered verse at the top by smaller type, lavish italics, double columns and other special layouts, constituting an almost irresistible distraction.⁰⁰⁰ Only those who bought the 1735 luxury editions with endnotes saw a clean text of the poem (⁰⁰⁰ *Dunciads of 1728 and 1729, Poems of AP, III, p. 115*).⁰⁰⁰ With the passage of time emerged the further problem of how to incorporate modern annotation into this already complex mass. The difficulty was well illustrated by James Sutherland's magisterial twentieth-century one-volume standard edition, whose readers

sometimes found it difficult to register the force of the angle brackets (<>) by which Sutherland scrupulously distinguished his own notes from the original. 000 Alexander Pope, *The Dunciad*, edited by James Sutherland, *The Twickenham Edition of the Poems of Alexander Pope, Vol. V, third edition* (London, Methuen, 1963: first edition 1943) 000 Separating modern from original commentary in a visually obvious way was therefore a crucial aim of my 1999 edition of the *Dunciad in Four Books* for Longman Annotated English Texts. At a time when word-processing and publishing software were already opening up new possibilities, it proved feasible to divide the printed page into three textual streams: the poem, Pope's notes, and my notes – with the latter cordoned off from the original material by a rule. Typography also played its part: a traditional type was used for verse and original commentary, and a modern sans serif for my notes. The effort of the publisher's editor and designer in conceiving and testing this design was considerable, but the result, we hoped, was a page that readers could readily navigate.000 I am grateful to Philip Langeskov, at that time the series editor for Longman Annotated English Texts, whose enthusiastic support made this possible.000 The new(ish) freedom of digital editions from the material bounds of the printed page does not necessarily make it easy or cheap to bring together technical expertise and textual understanding, and familiar *Dunciad*-ical questions still reverberate: how easy is it to find the modern editor's notes? how easy is it to tell them from Pope's notes? how easy is it to ignore one or both in order to read straight through the poem, or to assemble sections of each in the same view with the poem? Design and presentation still carry implications that matter.

Literary editors in the early twenty-first century inherit some familiar challenges in regard to annotation. Like Pope and his booksellers, like literary editors and publishers down to the mid twentieth century, and like the recent makers of print editions already inflected by digital innovation, today's editors face the challenge of maximizing the benefits of available technologies while minimizing their disadvantages. Digital annotation can already accommodate fuller information, more diverse contributors, more ingenious architectures and more choices for readers; but the ironies of Pope's annotated *Dunciads* remain.

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¹ There is an exception to the placing of the notes as footnotes: in the luxury quartos and folios of 1735 they follow the poem as endnotes; V. Rumbold, ed., *Alexander Pope: The Dunciad (1728) & The Dunciad Variorum (1729)*, in *The Poems of Alexander Pope* (Harlow 2007), Vol. III, Longman Annotated English Poets, Pearson, 2007. Cited here at 115.

² D. Foxon and J. McLaverty, *Pope and the Eighteenth Century Book Trade*, The Lyell Lectures, Oxford 1975-1976 (Oxford 1991). Cited here at 31, Plate 2. In addition to the duodecimos, an octavo was produced as large paper version; see Rumbold (ed.), *Dunciad and Dunciad Variorum*, 5-6.

³ All in-text references are to the following edition of Pope's *Dunciad*, except if indicated otherwise: A. Pope, *The Dunciad in Four Books*, Longman Annotated Texts, ed. V. Rumbold (Harlow, 1999). Cited here at 19, I.6.

⁴ J. Dryden, *The Poems of John Dryden*, ed. P. Hammond and D. Hopkins, 4 vols, Longman Annotated English Poets (Harlow 1995-2000). Cited here IV. 333, l. 48.

⁵ Dryden, *Poems*, vol. 1, 306-36; Pope, *Dunciad and Dunciad Variorum*, 8-9; Th. Woodman, “‘Wanting nothing but the Laurel’: Pope and the Idea of the Laureate Poet”, in D. Fairer, *Pope: New Contexts* (Brighton 1990), 45-58.

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⁶ For comment on Pope’s annotation, as well as the verse itself, see Pope, *Dunciad and Dunciad Variorum*, ed. Rumbold, I. 73-78 (pp. 26-7).

⁷ Cp. the following: III. 185, n. (1728); III. 229, n. (1729) (both in Pope, *Dunciad and Dunciad Variorum* pp. 99, 291); III. 233, n. (1743) (Pope, *Dunciad in Four Books*, p. 249).

⁸ Cp. the following: III. 233, n. (1728); III. 281 n. (1729) (both in Pope, *Dunciad and Dunciad Variorum*, pp. 103, 297); III. 283, n. (1743) (A. Pope, *The Dunciad in Four Books*, Longman Annotated Texts, ed. V. Rumbold (PLACE 1999). Cited here 254).

⁹ Octavos were subsequently provided as a smaller and cheaper option, and folios for those who preferred the larger and more old-fashioned luxury format (Pope, *Dunciad and Dunciad Variorum*, 115).

¹⁰ For ‘Index of the Author’s of the Notes’, see Pope, *Dunciad and Dunciad Variorum*, 316. Ralph, author of *Sawney. An Heroic Poem* (1728), is also attacked in the ‘Index of Things (including Authors) to be found in the Notes, etc.’: a cross-reference under his name leads the reader to an entry on *Sawney* that points to six different allegations of his ignorance and vanity (Pope, *Dunciad and Dunciad Variorum*, 364; and see also references to Ralph summarised in editor’s Biographical Index, 414).

¹¹ V. Rumbold, ‘Scriblerus Club (*act.* 1714)’, in D. Cannadine, ed., *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online edition (Oxford 2016). <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/theme/71160>, last accessed 21 July 2016.

¹² J. Swift, *A Tale of a Tub and Other Works*, in M. Walsh, ed., *The Cambridge Works of Jonathan Swift*, vol. 1 (Cambridge 2010). Cited here xxxiii-xxxiv.

¹³ For details, see the passages indicated in the index quoted above, and editorial commentary in Pope, *Dunciad and Dunciad Variorum*.

¹⁴ A version of the fourth book had appeared separately in the previous year, but without any indication of a change of hero (Pope, *Dunciad in Four Books*, 11).

¹⁵ D. W. Nichol, *Pope’s Literary Legacy: The Book-Trade Correspondence of William Warburton and John Knapton with other letters and documents 1744-1780* (Oxford 1992). Cited here xxviii-xxxiii; Pope, *Dunciad in Four Books*, 23, 25.

¹⁶ Cp. the influential theological reading developed in the 1950s by Williams; A. L. Williams, *Pope's Dunciad: A Study in its Meaning* (London 1955). Reference here chapter 6, 'The Anti-Christ of Wit', 131-58); for critique, see L. Damrosch, *The Imaginative World of Alexander Pope* (PLACE 1987). Reference here 263-6.

¹⁷ S. Johnson, *The Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets; with Critical Observations on their Works*, ed. R. Lonsdale, 4 vols. (Oxford 2006). Cited here vol. 4, 42.

¹⁸ Swift's 'Battle' was published as part of *A Tale of a Tub. Written for the Universal Improvement of Mankind. To which is added, An Account of a Battel between the Antient and Modern Books in St. James's Library* (1704; modern texts usually based on the enlarged 5th edition of 1710). J. Swift, *A Tale of a Tub and Other Works*, ed. Marcus Walsh (Cambridge 2010), vol. 1.

¹⁹ W. Warburton, *A Critical and Philosophical Commentary on Mr. Pope's Essay on Man* (a collected edition of his original defences of the *Essay*), London, 1742; W. Warburton, *The Divine Legation of Moses Demonstrated, on the Principles of a Religious Deist, from the Omission of the Doctrine of a Future State of Reward and Punishment in the Jewish Dispensation. In Six Books*, 2 vols, London, 1738-41.

²⁰ Rumbold, "'The Meaning of this Preference;'" Pope, *Dunciad in Four Books*, 10-11.