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THE RHETORICAL SELF OF ALEXANDER POPE'S IMITATIONS OF HORACE

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On my honor, I have neither given nor received any unacknowledged aid on this thesis.
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I

In his Imitations of Horace, Alexander Pope undertakes a very special task. Borrowing from the classical tradition, he creates a very characteristic poetic self which quickly becomes apparent to the reader. His linguistic, and thereby fictional, self endeavors to impress upon its reader the gravity of his existence. Yet despite this, Pope's rhetorical self is characterized by an undogmatic tone. Pope chose this rhetorical posture because he found it to be so effective when employed by his predecessors in literary history. As his biographies and critics make clear, the most notable influences on Pope's poetic thought were Michel de Montaigne, Erasmus, and Horace himself. The works of these writers are defined by a similarly undogmatic moral voice. Perhaps the most influential was Montaigne, whose Essais exemplify the rhetorical self in its most patent form. In this study, I will endeavor to analyze and explain the nature of Pope's linguistic self as evidenced in two characteristic works, Epistle I i and Epistle II ii. I will discuss the works themselves, their theoretical framework, and Montaigne's Essais as they apply to Pope's rhetorical self. In addition, I will, at times, employ the modern critical language of Soren Kierkegaard and Paul de Man to develop the theoretical aspects of this thesis.

The concept of the linguistic self which is central to the understanding of this thesis can be best described using the analytical language of the nineteenth century philosopher Soren Kierkegaard in The Sickness Unto Death and that of Paul de Man in "The Rhetoric of Temporality." The defining qualities of the human individual are described as the "self" in both works. Kierkegaard and de Man describe the self as a vastly complicated entity so as to justify their own philosophical claims about the plurality of consciousnesses that defines human existence. That is to say that for both authors, the human entity is a personal metaphysical construct that not only relates to the world around it but to itself on a number of levels. The self is thereby broken into separate existential personalities which relate to meaning in different ways. Jean Paul Sartre's description of the self is a good example of

the same kind of philosophical rhetoric. Sartre describes the self as being comprised of three distinct selves: l'être-en-soi, l'être-pour-soi, and l'être-pour-autrui. For Kierkegaard, the self is always mis relating itself to itself, and the goal of his work is accordingly to bring the reader to a better understanding of this complexity so that, through faith, he can orient the self properly.[1] For de Man, human consciousness is split into at least two selves, one linguistic and one empirical. In this thesis, I will concern myself with the linguistic self which presents itself textually in Pope's Imitations of Horace.

The linguistic and philosophical posture that Alexander Pope adopts in Imitations of Horace is an undogmatic one. Through this flexibility Pope endeavors to impress upon his readers that he is not an individual who possesses a transcendent view of the way in which one should live. This posture appears in the form of his fictional self which is created in and through the language of his poetry. Pope's poetic self brings its own critical eye to bear upon itself to emphasize the importance of the reader's own relationship to himself by example.In order to justify this conclusion that the most important task of any man is to attend to himself, Pope turned to writers whom he deemed the most skillful and honest in their duty to edify the reader. One such influence was Michel de Montaigne, whose Essais served as a model for his own literary efforts. Pope began to read the Essais in 1706, at the age of eighteen (Mack 82). In the following passage from the inside of the back cover of his copy of Charles Cotton's translation of the Essais, Pope expresses his great respect for the work:

> This is (in my opinion) the very best Book for Information of Manners, that has been writ. The Author says nothing but every one feels at the Heart. Whoever deny it, are not more wise than Montaigne, but less Honest. (Mack 82)

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[1] I am here using Kierkegaard's language from The Sickness Unto Death. Kierkegaard describes the self as follows: "A human being is spirit. But what is spirit? Spirit is the self. But what is the self? The self is the relation that relates itself to itself or is the relation's relating itself to itself in the relation ..."(13)

Here, Pope attributes several qualities to Montaigne's book. First, he writes that the Essais are the "very best" source for "manners" which has been written. Therefore, "manners", for Pope, are the subject of the Essais, and the word does not mean "the way a thing is done or happens" or "a person's bearing or way of behaving towards others" as it does today (OED, "manners"). Rather the subjects of the Essais are the problems which daily present themselves to man as he is trying to exist as an affirmed moral agent. Montaigne's thesis is that one can find the answers to these questions if one attends to one's self honestly and faithfully. This is what Pope means when he writes that the essays are "what every one feels at the heart." The questions dealt with in the Essais are therefore those that Pope and Montaigne feel are truly central to the intellectual existence of any individual. For Pope, any man who does not consider these questions worth considering is not "Honest" because he thereby denies that the way in which he lives is important.

Accordingly, when Montaigne describes the way in which he deals with moral and ethical issues, the real business of life, he is not only describing his own struggle with these issues but the struggle that any man must feel in order to be true to himself. Montaigne's stance is therefore not one of a willful pedant who would offer advice as if it were a command, but it is rather of one who turns back onto himself to stress the similarity which each individual bears to every other individual. In attending to his own self with humility and consideration, Montaigne rightly makes the gravity of the reader's own existence his real thesis. Thus, the sole idea that Montaigne argues polemically is that it is always human pride and vanity which seek to turn a man's self away from itself (Regosin 52).

The following passage from "Of the Inconstancy of Our Actions" serves as a good example of Montaigne's self-critical, undogmatic method:

> For my part, the puff of every accident not only carries me along with it according to its own proclivity, but moreover I discompose and trouble myself by the instability of my own posture; and whoever will look narrowly into his own bosom, will hardly find himself twice in the same condition. (6)

Here, we see Montaigne's rhetorical self questioning its own grounds of authority. In saying "I discompose and trouble myself," Montaigne evidences the patent self-reflexivity which is so characteristic of the Essais. Furthermore, having stated that he engages in this reflection, Montaigne's self proceeds undogmatically to urge the reader to test his own posture in the same fashion. The answers to one's own questions are to be found within oneself.

However, for many people, Montaigne's reasoned and self-reflective answers to the questions of ethics and morality are the very ones which they themselves had been looking for. Such was the case for Alexander Pope. In his poetry, and in his correspondence, Pope cites Montaigne's Essais as the preeminent handbook for thinking and acting in the world. For Pope, Montaigne's Essais were a proper and healthy product of a self which relates to life and to God correctly. That is to say that Pope perceived that the Essais offer advice that should be followed because Montaigne himself was so aware of the issues he strives to resolve. Moreover, Montaigne's rhetorical posture of the undogmatic moral thinker makes Pope respond to the Essais more seriously and, paradoxically, to embrace their views more strongly because they are presented with humility.

Pope's consideration of the Essais as important counsel is evidenced in several of his letters. For example, in his letter of December 1713 to Swift, Pope cites Montaigne's essay "De l'amitie'" because it best describes his relationship with "Dr. Swift" (Correspondence I:201). Here Pope recalls that Swift had introduced him to important

people, and that Swift had encouraged him to write much poetry. Pope further takes note of the fact that their friendship had not yet been very amicable of late. The thrust of the letter, then, is that Pope feels an obligation to Swift despite their recent falling out. The importance of Montaigne's description of what being a friend entails for Pope is captured in the language he uses to introduce Montaigne's opinion on the matter. He begins:

> For Monsieur de Montayne has assured me, that the Person, who receives a Benefit, obliges the Giver; for since the chief Endeavor of one Friend is to good to the other... (Correspondence I:201)

The word "assured" connotes Pope's deference for Montaigne's opinion on the matter of friendship. Even though Montaigne presents his idea with his typical "que sais-je" posture, Pope takes it as the standard way of handling the matter. Pope's respect can be attributed to the effectiveness of Montaigne's rhetorical device of the undogmatic self.

In the following passage from his biography of Pope, Maynard Mack describes the way in which Montaigne justifies his thought with respect to the church:

> Montaigne's religious thought- his humbling of human reason, his impatience with doctrinal niceties even while submitting to the teachings of his church in some large general sense well removed from life's ordinary arenas, his founding of a personal ethic on the nature of the visible world and of men and women as they are rather than on ecclesiastical or scriptural fiats, his strong stress on just and compassionate behavior as the primary obligation of religious life, and his conviction that such behavior is not only God's will, but man's happiness- accord extremely well with the "system of ethics" that Pope was eventually to work out in his Essay on Man... (84)

This sentence is worth quoting because it summarizes the stance that Montaigne takes in the Essais. Because Montaigne's "ethic" is "personal" and based on the way people interact with each other as individuals, it can be described as undogmatic and infused with a certain human insight. Furthermore, Mack contrasts Montaigne's philosophical mode with the "ecclesiastical or scriptural fiats" because those sorts of ethical authorities are dogmatic while Montaigne himself is not so. Pope's rhetorical posture in An Essay on Man is similar to that in the Imitations because both are characterized by an ironic self-implication within the ethic that each work describes.

Montaigne's influence on Pope becomes even more important when one considers the similarities in the backgrounds of the two men. Montaigne served as an antecedent Catholic for Pope (Mack 83). Maynard Mack notes that both men had to deal with religious divisions in their respective families (83). The early education of the two writers was also similar in that they both found their later schooling unprofitable after having had superior academic experiences at home (Mack 82). Another trait on which Pope based his identification with Montaigne was a "youthful personality which prompted his associates to set him down as lazy" (Mack 82). In his copy of the Essais, Pope wrote Alter Ego ["Just like me!"] next to the following passage from Montaigne's "That it is Folly to measure Truth and Error by our own capacity":

> There was no fear that I would do ill, but that I would do nothing; nobody suspected that I would be wicked, but useless. (Mack 82-3)

A final characteristic common to both Pope and Montaigne was a thorough saturation in classical learning. This shared knowledge is evident in the work of both writers.

The significance of this common influence is that the works of both writers are infused with the classical sense of the fragility and finitude of the human mind. Maynard Mack nicely sums up the "chief contribution" of Montaigne's thought to Pope's own thought:

> [It was] to render vivid and irrefutable, as most of the classical poets had done, the sub- and nonrational dimensions of human personality: not only the fragility of its hold on order but the importance of recognizing this deficiency lest in the intoxication of its rational pride it destroy itself...(84)

Mack's account is accurate because it stresses three things: the classical posture and philosophy, the frailty of human existence, and the danger of human pride with respect to moral and ethical issues. It is these ideas that form the rhetorical and philosophical starting point for The Imitations of Horace.

It is important to note that the reader of the Essais cannot help but notice that he is being addressed by a human voice that seems to lose none of it immediacy in being presented in essay form. Accordingly, one thinks that one is being addressed by Michel de Montaigne himself. However, one must keep in mind that the "voice"" of a poem is a purely linguistic manifestation of personality and that in being communicated in language, a rhetorical self can never be the actual self of the writer. This possibility is always already destroyed by the violence of writing.[2]

In composing the Imitations of Horace, Pope also drew on the literary history of the imitation form itself. Pope's rhetorical self finds a comfortable launching point in the imitation form because of its unique attributes; as Dryden analyzed it, discussing translation:

> The third way is that of imitation, where the translator (if he has not lost that name) assumes the liberty, not only to vary from the words and sense, but to forsake them both as he sees occasion; and taking only some general

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[2]I am here using the deconstructive rhetoric of Jacques Derrida in his Of Grammatology, especially Part II, chapter 1: "The violence of the letter: From Le'vi-Strauss to Rousseau."

> hints from the original, to run division on the groundwork, as he pleases. (Dryden p 18-24)

In this passage from his "Preface to the translation of Ovid's Epistles, "John Dryden authoritatively describes the convention of imitation. Alexander Pope accords himself the highest degree of liberty that this definition provides. That is, that in his Imitations, Pope uses Horace only in so far as he takes "some general hints from the original." However, the convention of imitation is not as derivative and dependent a form as Dryden implies. In the following passage from his Pope and Horace: Studies in Imitation, Frank Stack explains the merits of the practice of imitation:

> On the one hand, imitation of the ancients sprang from immense respect for their value and authority...On the other hand, as John Gay suggests, imitation was also an easy way of writing poems for any occasion and on any subject...we must recognize, however, that the Imitation as a form was wholly compatible with genuinely creative expression, and the freer the Imitation, the more this was so. (18-9)

Thus, the form of imitation is in itself a means for creativity to emerge from a form that on the surface would not appear to be creative. Pope's choice of imitation as a form was thus the perfect one if one takes into account the nature of the rhetorical self which addresses the reader of the Imitations.

The functional self that Pope employs in the Imitations is tinged with irony because it always turns back onto its own fictional nature. That is to say that Pope the poet emphasizes the finite and thereby limited nature of his own mind by having his linguistic self turn back onto itself with the same realization. The form of Pope's Imitations reflects the same irony. Frank Stack notes that Pope's Imitations were an especially challenging

undertaking because with the Augustan tradition of the parallel text format, they implied a close relationship between the original and the imitation. However, this implication proves to be false because, as we have said, Pope was "only taking some hints from the original" (Dryden 24).

In addition, the imitation convention, as the most liberal form of translation, allows the imitator's own rhetorical self to manifest itself as much as possible. In the following passage from his "Preface," Dryden describes this unique feature of the convention:

> To state it fairly; imitation of an author is the most advantageous way for a translator to show himself, but the greatest wrong which can be done to the memory and reputation of the dead. (31-34)

Accordingly, Pope can "best show himself," through his rhetorical self, by using the imitation convention. Furthermore, Pope's rhetorical self implies its undogmatic nature by speaking under the guise of a translator's voice. The rhetorical self thus undercuts its own authority in fictionally attributing its own stances to the original author. However, within the context of the poem as a whole, the actual undogmatic posture is always supplanted by a suggestive dogmatism that necessarily accompanies a poem's being conveyed in and through the privileged form of writing.

II

In " The First Epistle of the First Book of Horace Imitated," Alexander Pope creates a rhetorical self that seeks to reinscribe itself within the experience of the author himself. The rhetorical self begins with this humble posture in order to ironize and question Pope's own role as a moral poet. Through his carefully chosen diction, Pope proceeds to write above his empirical authority while regularly stepping off of his pedestal so as to convince the reader that he is really not in a position to be doing so. Moreover, by adhering to and departing from Horace's original, Pope produces the effective and edifying discourse which he strives to create in Epistle I, Book I.

The first evidence for the presence of Pope's manifest rhetorical consciousness is found at the poem's beginning. In the following passage , Pope expresses his own self-consciousness through an analysis of his role as poet:

> St. John whose love indulged my labours past
> Matures my present, and shall bound my last!
> Why will you break the Sabbath of my days?
> Now sick alike of Envy and of Praise.
> Publick too long, ah let me hide my Age! (I, i. 1-5)

Here, Pope affirms what one finds to be the pose of weariness characteristic of many of the Imitations. Already, the reader can notice the voice of the linguistic self. The first person possessive "my" in lines one, two, three and five belongs to the rhetorical self since this voice exists only as a textual construct in the form of the poem. The existence of this self is further evidenced by the complaint made in line four and five. In these two lines, Pope's rhetorical self becomes separate from his empirical self by its very reflection on it. That is to say that since the poem relates that Pope feels "sick alike of Envy and of Praise./ Publick too long," then a transcendent self of rhetoric is already present. This split in consciousness is achieved only at the expense of Pope's

empirical self, which by definition cannot appear as the printed words on a page.

Pope proceeds to escalate the dramatic scale of his discourse by introducing another fictional voice in lines ten through twenty two. In the following first six lines of this section, Pope involves this voice in his poetic dilemma of being a poet who has lost his passion:

> A voice there is , that whispers in my ear,
> ('Tis Reasons voice, which sometimes one can hear)
> 'Friend Pope! be prudent, let your muse take breath,
> And never gallop Pegasus to death;
> Lest stiff, and stately, void of fire, or force,
> You limp, like Blackmore, on a Lord Mayor's horse! (I, i. 17-22)

Here, the language of the poem describes the poetic dilemma as being one in which Pope's philosophical self, "Reasons voice," is urging his linguistic self to stop writing poetry, lest he do so "void of fire, or force." In order to create this conflict between selves, Pope's empirical self created this poem. The two voices, that of the narrative, poetic self and that of philosophical "Reason," represent the confusion of the mature Pope as regards his role as poet. Accordingly, the rest of the section is devoted to temporarily resolving this conflict:

> Farewell then verse, and Love, and ev'ry Toy,
> The rhymes and rattles of the Man or Boy:
> What's right, what true, what fit, we justly call,
> Let this be all my care- for this is All:
> To lay this harvest up, and hoard with haste
> What ev'ry day will want, and most, the last. (I, i. 17-22)

The resolution of this conflict is that Pope has indeed galloped "Pegasus to death," and that he should stop writing poetry. This situation is ironic because this very decision to

stop writing is undermined by its being communicated by the poet in a poem. Therefore, the conflict can only be justified by the rhetorical self's being a fictional entity and not Pope himself. That is to say that my reinsicription of the narrator within the text and within language itself allows one to understand the ironic drama of the epistle. The poem describes "verse" as a "Toy" and as "the rattles and rhymes of the Man or Boy" and proceeds to contrast "verse" with morality, which is the real business of the self described as "what right, what true, what fit, we justly call." The difference between writing poetry and attending to one's moral existence is further emphasized by the poetic contrast of "Love," presented as a "Toy" as mystified and silly as poetry, with the moral business of the mature mind described as "All: ...what ev'ry day will want, and most, the last."

Pope continues his fictional attack on writing poetry in lines 39-42 to charge the poem with the intensity of its own drama. He writes:

> So slow th' unprofitable Moments roll,
> That lock up all the Functions of my soul;
> That keep me from Myself; and still delay
> Life's instant business to a future day: (I, i. 39-42)

Here, we see the same contrast of moral duty with less important concerns such as poetry. The primacy of "Life's instant business" is asserted over such "unprofitable moments." It is also interesting to note the poem's reference to the idea of philosophical self-reflection in the third line of the above passage. The split of the self into one empirical self and one linguistic self is nicely expressed by the rhetorical self's description of inattention to moral duty as moments that "keep me from Myself." In other words, "me" and "Myself" are juxtaposed in their being able to be kept from each other. The self-conscious rhetorical self thus destroys and affirms his own existence through a deconstruction of the unity of the self. This dramatic self-questioning leads

to an important shift in the posture of the rhetorical self which takes place in line 55. The reader then notices that the brooding, chiding voice becomes characterized by the spirited authority which is to be expected of a moral poet writing above his own experience.

In the following passage, one should notice not only the thematic shift of the poem, but also the self-reflective last lines:

> Say, does thy blood rebel, thy bosom move
> With wretched Av'rice, or as wretched Love?
> Know, there are words, and spells, which can controll
> (Between the Fits) this Fever of the soul:
> Know, there are Rhymes, which (fresh and fresh apply'd)
> Will cure the arrant'st Puppy of his Pride. (I, i. 55-60)

The first word of the passage, "Say," lets the reader know that a shift in posture has taken place because it is exclamative and addresses the reader instead of the rhetorical self reflexively. The repetition of "thy" within the same line further emphasizes that both the poem's thrust and the rhetorical self's posture have changed.

The question that these two lines pose is whether or not the reader is morally fallible. The question is rhetorical because, for Pope, in being human one is always already guilty of being moved by one's passions, and Pope is therefore striving to impress upon the reader the importance of understanding that one's self has a moral and theological dimension; instead of continuing to question himself as a poet, the rhetorical self has begun to question the reader. The energy of these first two lines is augmented in the four that follow. The narrator's beginning with the imperative "Know" evidences this trend. The authority of the address to the reader is mirrored by its meaning. The rhetorical self thereby extends the other half of his conflict, that of poetry and language, to the reader. He accordingly asserts that poetry, in the form of "Words," "Spell," and "Rhymes," is a sure way to bring one to an understanding of

one's moral duty. The authority of this evolved narrator is connected by the language of the last line which describes the unaffirmed individual as the "arrant'st Puppy." This demeaning description serves to delineate the distinction between the transcendent, rhetorical self of the poet with the finite, empirical self of the reader.

The dramatic situation is further complicated by the poem's unification of language and morality. This assertion that discourse can bring morality seems to contradict the previous distinction between writing poetry and living morally. However, the initial separation and later equation of poetry and morality actually define the problematics involved in being a poet. That is to say that Pope's sensing of this seeming contradiction licensed his determined changing of his rhetorical self's posture. In order to capture the contradiction, Pope had to poetically and dramatically represent it in the poem.

The contradiction between poetry and morality is further emphasized in the passage by the narrator's parenthetical additions in lines 58 and 59. The words "Between the Fits" indicate that the seemingly transcendent narrator is not unaware of the limitedness of man's ability to control his own mind. He affirms that it is in these fits that control his sinful desires. Beyond their literal, medical reference, the words "Fresh and Fresh apply'd" indicate that the narrator is mindful of his previous conclusion that he was an old, worn-out poet. That is to say that the narrator does not assert that this Epistle is such an edifying discourse because it cannot be "Fresh."

Thus, Pope's rhetorical self proceeds undogmatically because he does not hold onto his own myth of transcendence. The humility of the rhetorical self fails to escape the reader's attention because the self of the narrator is constantly turning back onto itself and affirming its own finitude. The effect is that the humility of the rhetorical self is impressed upon the reader's mind as the humility of Alexander Pope. Furthermore, this impression, even though it is rhetorically contrived, helps administer the moral

message of Epistle I effectively. The undogmatic pose of the narrator in lines 55-60 is best captured by the final line of that paragraph: "All that we ask is but a patient Ear." (60). Here, the narrator demonstrates that he sympathizes with the reader's finite predicament. That is to say that the rhetorical self, in requesting the reader's attention, is mindful of both his own finitude and that of the reader. This rhetorical identification of the narrator with the reader is thus established before the narrator resumes his transcendent pasture which will imply his moral authority. It is important to note that the moral theme of the poem still has to be delivered, and in choosing a self-conscious narrator, Pope makes his discourse more genuinely human and thereby more honest and convincing. Pope affirms the totality of the poem as any proper moral poet must. The undogmatic self of the poem merely lets the reader know that Pope is aware of the fragility of his textual construct in the face of his own limitedness as a man.

In Epistle I i Pope advises the reader to be aware of the vices which people so often incorporate into their own lives. His attack centers on avarice and adultery. The earlier, detached voice of the rhetorical self, which proclaimed that he would abandon writing poetry is gone. The rhetorical self of Epistle I i engages in the business of the poem in lines 65-160. In order to justify his change in attitude towards writing poetry, the rhetorical self insists that virtue is a just cause. In the following passage Pope contrasts the virtuous mind with that of the corrupt clergyman so as to delineate his own justification for writing this Epistle:

> Yet every child another song will sing,
> 'Virtue, brave boys! 'tis Virtue makes a King.'
> True, conscious Honour is to feel no sin,
> He's arm'd without that's innocent within;
> Be this thy Screen, and this thy Wall of Brass;
> Compar'd to this, a Minister's an Ass. (I, i. 91-6)

Here, we see the rhetorical self speaking to the reader and to himself. After insisting that even a "child" knows that "virtue" is what "makes a king," the narrator goes on to stress the philosophical importance of virtue. Within the framework of the poem, the importance of understanding moral rectitude is asserted over the importance of realizing the finitude of one's self. The rhetorical self, being "conscious Honour" is "arm'd" with virtue. This virtue is the screen and the "Wall of Brass" that justifies the Epistle. That is to say that because the occasion and motive for the creation of the poem is virtue, the rhetorical self is justified in speaking with transcendent authority. Similarly, Pope's rhetorical self urges the **reader** to let virtue be **his** screen against those who would attack his moral seriousness on the grounds of its being idealistic. The fiction of the Epistle is therefore a positive one for Pope because its cause is that of virtue. Using the undogmatic self as his device, Pope makes the reader aware that he is aware of both the contradictory role of the poet, being both finite and transcendent, and the difficulty involved in any man's coming to terms with his self.

The poem's rhetorical self describes his own predicament best in the following passage:

> But when no Prelate's Lawn with Hair-shirt lin'd,
> Is half so incoherent as my Mind,
> When (each opinion with the next at strife,
> One ebb and flow of follies all my Life)
> I plant, root up, I build, and then confound,
> turn round to square, and square again to round; (I, i. 165-70)

Here, Pope makes several important points. In the first two lines, the rhetorical self turns back onto itself in saying that his mind is only half as coherent as that of an ascetic "Prelate." The reader is thus invited to understand that the rhetorical self is really not any better than he is. However, in the following four lines, the rhetorical self describes his task in the poem. The "strife" of "Opinions" described as "One ebb and

flow of Follies" is actually a description of the changes in the posture of the self during the poem because the poem is the "Life" of the rhetorical self. Thus, in lines three and four, the self acknowledges his contradictory nature. In the last two lines of the above passage, Pope uses garden imagery (of changing the shape of flower beds) to describe his own method of delivering the moral theme of the poem. In first planting, the rhetorical self described himself as a poet in the first four lines of the poem. In rooting up, the rhetorical self questioned and destroyed the stability of his role as poet by saying that he wished to cease writing poetry. In confounding, the rhetorical self went against his decision to stop writing poetry, justifying his efforts in the name of virtue. The last line also describes the progression of the poem, but in different terms. "Round" is a metaphor for the finite man and for the finite poet. "Square" is a metaphor for the transcendent, authoritarian poetic voice. The self began with a round, undogmatic posture, then shifted to a square, moral posture to carry out the business of the poem, and then shifts back to the round posture in the end of the poem.

The end of the poem (lines 171-188) is accordingly devoted to once again impressing upon the reader the contradictory nature of the rhetorical self. In the first part of this end section, the rhetorical self addresses the reader:

> You never change one muscle of your face,
> You think this Madness but a common case,
> Nor once to Chanc'ry, nor to Hales apply;
> Yet hang your lip, to see a Seam awry! (I, i. 171-4)

Here, the rhetorical self envisions the response of "St. John" to its square, authoritarian posture. St. John is thereby unaffected in not changing "one muscle of " his " face." "This madness" refers to the rhetorical mode of the poem in which the rhetorical self does not agree with itself or with the self of the poet. The seam's going awry refers to St. John's limited realization of the trivial faults of the rhetorical self. After

acknowledging that St. John may react in this fashion, the rhetorical self confesses its own folly thus:

> Careless how ill I with myself agree;
> Kind to my dress, my figure, not to me.
> Is this my Guide, Philosopher, and Friend? (I, i. 175-7)

The first two lines constitute the rhetorical self's confession that it agrees "ill" with itself. The third line is the self's question as to whether or not he should take St. John as his counselor. Considering how little insight that St. John has provided into the self's true problem, its misrelation to itself, it is understandable why the self might ask such a question. That is to say that because St. John only sees "a Seam awry" (174), he is unaware of the undogmatic self's moral and existential problem.

Pope finishes the poem by having his rhetorical self acknowledge that St. John, a God-like figure, is the only entity who can allow one to have a divine voice of virtue. By appealing to St. John, Pope is appealing to the ultimate manifestation of poetic metaphysics. In his moral power and stability, St. John is different in kind from other men who are limited and fragile. In the following passage, Pope's rhetorical self makes this appeal:

> This, He who loves me, and who ought to mend?
> Who ought to make me (what he can, or none,)
> That man divine who wisdom calls her own,
> Great without Title, without Fortune bless'd,
> Rich ev'n when plunder'd, honour'd while oppress'd,
> Lov'd without youth, and follow'd without power,
> At home tho' exil'd free, tho' in the Tower. (I, i. 178-84)

In this passage, "He" is obviously St. John because St. John is the person to whom the poem is addressed. The rhetorical self, who comes very close to embodying Alexander

Pope himself, appeals to St. John to "mend" his finitude so that he can be a truly transcendent moral voice. That is to say that the rhetorical self asks St. John for the authority to be what he has pretended to be through his square, authoritarian posture in the poem. Pope rightly attributes this power to St. John because he knows that it is not within the scope of his own power to make himself a poetic divinity. The ensuing lines describe this divine poet This "man divine whom wisdom calls her own" is both St. John himself and the divine poet who the rhetorical self aspires to become. The ensuing adjectival verb phrases serve to describe both the qualities that St. John posseses and those which the rhetorical self hopes to attain. This ideal poet of divine wisdom is thus the acknowledged absolute poet who the rhetorical self can never be because his own individuality is rooted in and defined by language whose absolute meaning is always already lost.

Beyond the irony of the fiction of the poem, Pope asserts that the moral poet is a man whose message is to be attended to by the reader because his end, virtue, necessarily justifies his means, poetry, even though language is a limited form. The reader thus finds that even though the undogmatic pose of the rhetorical self has made him feel comfortable, he is made responsible for his own moral rectitude through a reaffirmation of the gravity of our moral existence.

Thus, in many ways, Epistle I i delineates the nature of Pope's rhetorical self effectively. It is important to note that the thesis of the poem is delivered through the union of the undogmatic posture and the authoritarian posture of the rhetorical self. Balancing the effect of the language on the reader, Pope's methodology in Epistle I i grips the reader with the gravity and fragility of his own existence by example. That is to say that the dual nature of the rhetorical self is a model for the duality of the reader's own individuality. In being self-critical, the reader can master his moral life as well as he can given his finitude.

III

In Epistle II ii, Pope creates a rhetorical self similar to that in Epistle I i. It will now be my purpose to explicate the rhetorical self of Epistle IIii through an examination of the pertinent language of the poem.

In "The Second Epistle of the Second Book of Horace Imitated by Mr. Pope," Pope embarks on a mission similar to that of his other Epistles. That is to say that he embodies a moral message through the carefully molded web of language that comprises the text. This Epistle reveals the presence of its rhetorical self even more patently than Epistle I i does.. The rhetorical posturing of this poem is very apparent and grips the reader throughout his study of the poem.

Pope opens the poem with an extended metaphor that describes the predicament of the poem. He begins by telling a story in which a boy is being presented for hire to a well-to-do colonel. The thrust of this narrative is that since the man presenting the boy warns the colonel that the boy is a thief, then he can hardly be blamed if the boy steals from the colonel. This theme of the value of a warning is then applied to the role of the poet.

After opening with this somewhat detached narrative, the rhetorical self emerges as the voice with which we are now familiar. In the following passage, the rhetorical self first makes itself known:

> Consider then, and judge me in this light;
> I told you when I went, I could not write;
> You said the same; and are you discontent
> With Laws, to which you gave your own assent?
> Nay worse, to ask for verse at such a time!
> D'ye think me good for nothing but to rhime? (II, ii. 27-32)

One should first notice the gripping effect of the imperative mood of the word

"consider" which involves the reader in the drama of the poem. The reader can take the above lines to be the voice of the rhetorical self for several reasons. First, the "me" of the first line is the self of the poem because it is he who is being judged by the reader. The first person pronoun "I" in line two refers to the rhetorical self because he is the one that relates that he can "not write." The metaphor of the tale of the young thief is applied in the above passage by comparing the poet with the boy. In other words, since the reader is being warned by the rhetorical self that he cannot write poetry skillfully, then the reader cannot blame him if the poem is of poor quality. This message is ironically presented because it is rather absurd for the narrator to make excuses for his poetry. Looked at philosophically, though, the irony of this apology describes the undogmatic posture of the rhetorical self because it shows him to be a figure characterized by humility. Furthermore, the poem thereby turns back onto itself and throws its own meaning into question by parodying its own content.

Pope's strategy in Epistle IIii is to contrast his rhetorical self, which is wise and morally self-reflective, with examples of men who are driven by avarice. He thereby strongly asserts that the thematic fiction of the poem must supercede the poem's undogmatic posturing. The literal "theme" of the poem concerns avarice. Pope relates that avarice has many objects, including wealth, power, fame, and pleasure. Through contrasting poetic characters having these vices with the moral, authoritative posture of the rhetorical self, Pope hopes to urge the reader to model his own thinking after that of the rhetorical self. Of course, Pope regularly ironizes and undercuts his own rhetorical strategy by using the language of the undogmatic posture.

The next appearance of the rhetorical self occurs one paragraph later in the poem. In the following passage, the rhetorical self creates and reveals his own history:

> Bred up at home, full early I begun
> To read in Greek, the Wrath of Peleus' Son.

Besides, my Father taught me from a Lad,

The better Art to know the good from bad. (II, ii. 52-5)

Here, one finds that the rhetorical self is actually explaining the events in Pope's own life. Pope's empirical self seems to merge with his linguistic self in the fictional context of the poem. The point of the above lines is to set the stage for a criticism of the intolerant King William. Beyond this aim, though, Pope begins to describe the qualities of his rhetorical self which make it proper model for the reader. Pope asserts the greater importance of knowing "the good from bad" and links it to the study of ancient texts. Thus, the authoritarian language of the rhetorical self justifies its own goal of morally edifying the reader.

The poem proceeds to describe Pope's own life. Of course, being presented in the fictional context of the poem, this autobiography is intended to persuade the reader to listen to the rhetorical self.

In the following passage, the rhetorical self of the epistle shifts from its authoritarian posture to its undogmatic posture:

Years foll'wing Years, steal something ev'ry day,

At last they steal us from ourselves away;

In one our Frolicks, one Amusements end,

In one a Mistress drops, in one a Friend:

This Subtle Thief of Life, this paltry Time,

What will it leave me, if it snatch my Rhime? (II, ii. 72-7)

In this passage, the narrator explains the detrimental effect that time has on one's self. It takes away one's pleasures, one's lovers, and one's friends. Finally, the rhetorical self relates that we lose "our selves." This statement thus emphasizes the fragility of the self which has no control over its relation to itself. Beyond this, the rhetorical self, is describing its own fictional nature. That is to say that the fictionality of Pope's

rhetorical self is always already forecast by its being composed in language. In the last line of the passage, this point is elaborated. There, the rhetorical self asks the reader what would be left of him if time snatched his "Rhime." Of course the answer is "nothing" because the rhetorical self **is** language and stealing his "Rhime" would necessarily coincide with stealing the narrator's self. In addition to having this self-referential meaning, this passage describes the role of the poet as Pope perceives it. He accordingly views the life of the poet as one which revolves around his art, and it is through the decay of his art that the poet feels the decay of his empirical self.

Paul de Man comes to the same conclusion in "The Rhetoric of Temporality." In the following passage from the essay, de Man describes the consequences to the self of the writer as he practices his art:

> The ironic, twofold self that the writer or philosopher constitutes by his language seems able to come into being only at the expense of his empirical self, falling (or rising) from a stage of mystified adjustment into the knowledge of his mystification. (214)

Thus, for de Man, the actual self of the writer is supplanted by his linguistic self which ironically asserts its own fictionality. In the context of the poem, the rhetorical self relates that time has stolen its self in line two and then proceeds to ask what will be left if one steals his "Rhime" in line six. Thus, for Pope's rhetorical self, time steals the empirical self of the poet first and then it steals away even his linguistic self. The result of this realization by the narrator is that his posture has been humbly undogmatic in this section.

Pope's next move in Epistle II ii is to switch back to his authoritarian posture and to explain the value of moral affirmation. Pope recounts the fate of the poet in saying that he must face his inability to please every reader. In the next stanza he writes: "But after all, what wou'd you have me do?/ When out of twenty I can please not two" (80-1). The rhetorical self thus reflects on his own undertaking, the writing of poetry, and realizes that

popular appeal and skill are not always consonant. Pope's description of the task of the poet becomes a metaphor for the moral business of the individual.

In the next stanza, the rhetorical self of Epistle II ii relates that virtue is the just cause of the poet. In London, the poet finds that his work does not always have the moral impact that he wishes it would. In the following lines, Pope laments how difficult it is to affirm oneself morally and philosophically in a world of confusion: "'Oh but a wit can study in the Streets,/And raise his Mind above the Mob he meets.'" (98-9). This hopeful affirmation of the power of the poetic mind describes the state of any individual who decides that his own free will can govern his life when guided by moral discourse. However, the rhetorical self of the Epistle goes on to ironize this conclusion later in the paragraph. In the following passage, the reader hears the rhetorical self explaining to the reader, to the poet, and to himself how one is to go about affirming oneself morally:

> Go lofty Poet! and in such a Croud,
> Sing thy sonorous Verse-but not aloud.
> Alas! to Grotto's and to Groves we run,
> To Ease and Silence, ev'ry Muse's Son: (II, ii. 108-11)

In this section, the rhetorical self first addresses the figure of the transcendent poet, the "lofty Poet," which we encountered in Epistle I i. The self addresses this poet with the spirited imperative of the verb "to go," and orders him to write poetry by saying "Sing thy sonorous Verse." The rhetorical self goes on to ironize this goal by telling the poet not to do so "aloud." Thus, philosophically, the rhetorical self shifts its attention back onto itself and realizes that, as a poet, one must face one's reception by the public with humility. The rhetorical self then appears to merge with Pope's own poetic self in using the pronoun "we" in line three of the above passage. Thus the rhetorical self becomes the "lofty Poet" that he is addressing because he too runs to "Grotto's" and to "Groves" in order to create his art. Here, Pope is recounting his own experience of writing in his secluded

Twickenham grotto. In the "Ease and Silence" of this setting, the poet is able to compose poetry because it is better suited to his solitary task of moral self-reflection. Pope urges the reader to spend **his own** time alone in the same way- reflecting on one's own immediate moral nature as a self. The rhetorical self thus checks itself by reminding itself that its fictional transcendence is best expressed through art rather than through life. That is to say that the poet can only be "lofty " when he is writing within the prefigured fictionality of the text of his poem. The reader, as an individual, seeks to create the same kind of fictional transcendence with respect to himself so as to assess the moral strength of his own character. That the rhetorical self finds that people do not reflect on themselves is by implication stressed repeatedly.

Later in the same paragraph, the rhetorical self again reflects on his curiously paradoxical role. Pope writes: "Shall I, in London, act this idle part?/ Composing Songs, for Fools to get by heart?" (II, ii. 125-6). Here, the rhetorical self undogmatically reflects on the futility of his task. He relates that too often the moral dimension of poetry is missed when people merely memorize a poem. Thus, the self of the poem needles the reader to understand that one must strive to grasp the moral message that is represented by the fictional and thematic unity of the poem.

In the next several paragraphs, the rhetorical self continues to reflect on his role as the poet. In the following passage, he points out another problem involved in writing poetry:

> This jealous, waspish, wrong-head, rhiming Race;
> And much must flatter, if the Whim should bite
> To court applause by printing what I write:
> But let the fit pass o'er, I'm wise enough,
> To stop my ears to their confounded stuff. (II, ii. 148-52)

Here, the rhetorical speaks of the political injustice involved in writing poetry. The poet, in having to "flatter" and "To court applause" is compromising his art by engaging in such an

empty game. The rhetorical self then switches to his square, authoritarian posture and concludes that he can rise above these worldly games and affirm himself as a poet because he is "wise enough" to stop his "ears to their confound stuff." This apparently deliberate self-deception exemplifies the frustration that the poet feels in not being able to transcend concerns of the world. The tension of the rhetorical self is thus denoted in these lines. That is to say that the rhetorical self philosophically reflects on the purely fictional nature of his transcendence. The stopping of his ears shows the almost childish self-deception that the poet must engage in in order to write for the cause of virtue to an unreceptive audience.

Pope's next complaint is listed against unskilled poets who do not put into practice the moral advice that they mete out. In criticizing these men, Pope again emphasizes the importance of always turning one's moral insight to bear on oneself. In not doing so, one is obviously not attending to morality at all, but one is instead engaging in an empty quest for fame. In the following passage, Pope reveals this contradiction:

> In vain, bad Rhimers all mankind reject,
> They treat themselves with most profound respect;
> 'Tis to small purpose that you hold your tongue,
> Each prais'd within, is happy all day long.
> But how severely with themselves proceed
> The Men, who write such Verses as we can read? (II, ii. 153-8)

The rhetorical self describes these "bad Rhimers" as men who consider themselves "with most profound respect" because they feel that because as they are poets, they are beyond reproach. At the same time, these hypocritical poets "all mankind reject" because they judge others with a critical eye which they do not turn back onto themselves. The rhetorical self's question as to "how severely with themselves proceed" could answer itself with a resounding "not at all." These men forget that the real value of art is to encourage reflection upon the self and not to affirm one's claim to be a perfect moral agent. These poets also serve as foil metaphors for Pope's rhetorical self which reflects on itself with honesty and

humility so as to not fall into the hypocritical game that the "bad Rhimers" do. In this way, Pope justifies his use of a self-reflective rhetorical self in these lines. By using this device, Pope demonstrates the kind of introspection that he urges his readers to adopt.

After continuing the digression on the problems involved in writing poetry, Pope's rhetorical self turns back to the real business of the poem. In the following section, Pope describes the method which he has employed in the Epistle:

> Well, on the whole, plain Prose must be my fate:
> Wisdom (curse on it) will come soon or late.
> There is a time when Poets will grow dull:
> I'll e'en leave verses to the Boys at school: (II, ii. 198-201)

The "Wisdom" that the narrator tells us "will come soon or late" is about to be presented at this point in the Epistle. The rhetorical self thus stops talking about and begins to speak of :"wisdom." Furthermore, the rhetorical self's contrast of poetry with "plain Prose" is emblematic of the contrast between the unprofitable moments of one's life and those moments in which one reflects upon one's self. In the last four lines of the same paragraph, this contrast is explicated by the rhetorical self:

> To Rules of Poetry no more confin'd,
> I learn to smooth and harmonize my Mind,
> Teach ev'ry Thought within its bounds to roll,
> And keep the equal Measure of the Soul. (II, ii. 202-5)

Here, the rhetorical self is speaking from its most authoritarian posture while at the same time infusing it with undogmatic insight. The self is here describing the real business of life to which to which the poet and the reader should devote their minds. Learning to "smooth and harmonize" one's self is the task of reflecting on and properly relating to one's self. The rhetorical self decides to turn away from the morally unproductive business of writing poetry and to attend to his moral affirmation.

Pope continues to discuss this moral activity in the following paragraph. The rhetorical self recounts the way in which it has carried out this task in the following passage:

> Soon as I enter my Country door,
> My Mind resumes the thread it dropt before;
> Thoughts, which at Hyde-Park-Corner I forgot,
> Meet and rejoin me, in the pensive Grott.
> There all alone, and compliments apart,
> I ask these sober questions of my Heart. (II, ii. 206-11)

The dichotomy created between the "country door" and "Hyde-Park-Corner" is borrowed from the classical rhetorical posture of Horace himself. This posture is characterized by a sober, mature attitude linked to the philosophy that one can best live one's life without the silly attractions and distracting illusions of the city. The rhetorical self thus envisions his moral task as a humble one that is removed from the politics and fame of the city. Only in such solitary, reflective moments can the self "ask these sober questions" of itself.

By using the mature classical posture of Horace, Pope is able to make his point more effectively. The reader is more likely to follow the advice of this country gentleman than that of a "bad Rhimer" who does not practice what he preaches.

Pope continues to treat the same sort of themes dealt with thus far in my analysis. He boldly attacks the hypocrisy of the Church of England through a satire of its preachers whom he calls "Flatt'rers" (225). Pope's treatment of the hypocrisy of the "bad Rhimers" prefaces his treatment of the same human problem as regards the church. In the later sections, Pope criticizes those who indulge in gluttony, again through a satire of characters who exemplify this problem.

The last paragraph of the Epistle is an excellent example of the kind of strongly authoritarian pose that the undogmatic self is constantly shifting into. In the following paragraph, Pope admonishes the reader to learn from what he has read in the Epistle:

Learn to live well, or fairly make your Will;
You've play'd, and lov'd and eat, and drank your fill:
Walk sober off; before a sprightlier Age
Comes tilt'ring on, and shoves you from the stage:
Leave such to trifle with more grace and ease,
Whom Folly pleases, and whose Follies please. (II, ii. 322-7)

One should first notice the imperative mood of the verb "to learn" which opens the passage. Pope's rhetorical self is thereby exemplifying its moral authority. The content of the paragraph is, therefore, moral advice. The reader is told to relate his self to itself in life. In walking "sober off" the stage of life, one keeps in mind one's finite place in the theological universe. By contrasting the mature, sober mind with the mind of the "sprightlier Age," the self ironically reinscribes himself back into the audience to which it is speaking. Furthermore, the poem's rhetorical self urges the reader to affirm himself with respect to this sprightly/mature dichotomy. That is to say that if one finds that one's life has been lived to satiety, then one should "walk sober off" the stage so as to not make a fool of oneself. The rhetorical self then compliments the mature reader in saying that these activities which should be abandoned are really foolish and created for foolish people. The rhetorical self thus ironizes his own existence and reminds us that we are all fools whether or not we acknowledge it.

In Epistles I i and II ii, Pope has thus masterfully delivered themes of moral worth using a rhetorical device that at first glance might seem ill-suited for the task. That is to say that, all too often, moral advice is handed down to individuals by other individuals who forget that they too are necessarily sinful, finite beings. Pope infuses these Epistles with a strong sense of the communality of human experience. The reader finds that he is drawn into the fiction of the poem smoothly because the self that speaks to him through the language of the poem is constantly affirming the irony of his own posture by switching it

frequently through the course of the poem. These Epistles exemplify mastery of the undogmatic posture equal to that of Montaigne in his Essais.

Obviously, I believe that the best way to express one's moral observations is through a self-reflective and self-reflexive rhetorical strategy. The moral poet, writer, of clergyman can thereby affirm in his own mind the importance of following his own advice. Through conceding beforehand that he is not perfect but finite, Pope's rhetorical self makes the reader realize the fragility of his own self. In so doing, Pope grips the reader with the extreme difficulty involved in affirming oneself as a moral agent.

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