

ABSTRACT

Alexander Pope's *Dunciad* explicitly draws from major literary and philosophical texts ranging from the Bible to *The Aeneid* to *Paradise Lost*, but scholars have heretofore not observed how *The Consolation of Philosophy* of Boethius shapes and informs the text. After establishing the historical fact that Pope read and seriously engaged with Boethius, my thesis endeavors to establish a few key ways in which some of *The Dunciad*'s most famous puzzles are elucidated when read with an eye to *The Consolation*. Specifically, my thesis contends that the character of Lady Philosophy was one of the progenitor images Pope drew upon when inventing the goddess Dulness, just as the character-Boethius informed his descriptions of Tibbald and Cibber. Likewise, I argue that the Mock-Heroic Games of *The Dunciad*, Book II can be understood as the dunces' attempt to obtain satisfaction in the "Lesser Goods" delineated by Boethius in *The Consolation*, Book III, i.e. bodily goods, pleasure, wealth, fame, honor, and power. Furthermore, I propose that the problem of the ivory gate at the end of Book III can be resolved by reading Tibbald/Cibber's vision of the underworld as directly opposed to a Boethian understanding of fate and providence. Finally, I suggest that the "Problem of Power" in *The Dunciad* is satisfactorily answered by a Boethian understanding of the relationship between power and virtue.

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THE CONSOLATION OF DULNESS
The Influence of Boethius on Pope's Dunciad

by

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PART I: POPE AND BOETHIUS

Scholars of Alexander Pope have established a fairly stable canon of his major literary influences, with significant help from the explicit confession of the poet himself. Homer, Milton, and Virgil (especially as received through Dryden) stand foremost in this pantheon, with figures such as Horace, Shakespeare, Chaucer, Spenser, Swift, Erasmus, and the assorted authors of the Bible following close behind. Few, however, have contended that Boethius, “the Last Roman and the First Scholastic” and the author of *The Consolation of Philosophy*, ought to be included in their company, and none have suggested that the aforementioned philosopher’s hand can be seen anywhere in Pope’s *Dunciad*. This state of things is understandable in light of Pope’s near-complete silence on Boethius in his works and writings, yet as this essay will contend, that silence is grievously misleading. Not only is there significant evidence that Pope read and appreciated *The Consolation*, but when *The Dunciad* is read through a Boethian lens, many of the poem’s puzzling and apparently chaotic elements — such as the relationship between Dulness and Tibbald/Cibber, the structure of the Mock-Heroic Games, and the problem of the Ivory Gate — are revealed to possess a subtle order and intelligence which illuminate the philosophical content of the work. More bluntly, Boethius is not merely a major influence on the poem, but the entire *Dunciad* can be read as not only a mock-epic, but as a mock-*Consolation*.

If the reader is so serendipitous as to discover one of the few scholarly works on Pope that includes Boethius in its index, the entry will almost certainly refer to Pope’s translation of III.met9, composed no later than 1710 and likely well before, in either 1703 or 1704 (Donaghey 1967, 74). Although Pope probably worked from the original Latin, it is reasonable to imagine that the young poet also glanced at Chaucer’s translation of Boethius, typically referred to as *Boece*, which he received from Gabriel Young as part of a volume containing the collected

works of Chaucer in 1701 (Nokes 1976, 180). The Hurd Library at Hartlebury Castle, Worcestershire has the good fortune of possessing the volume, from which we know that Pope annotated fifteen passages of *Boece*, all contained within and between III.pr11 and III.pr12, and which center on the Boethian notion of the unity of the true good and the division in false goods. The annotations consist of pairs of “c” marks or double commas that do not provide any explicit hints as to what Pope thought of the lines in question, but they seem to indicate approval (Penney 2021). These things alone are enough to establish the historical fact that Pope read Boethius carefully, at least in part, and thought him sufficiently meritorious to serve as an exercise for his burgeoning poetic talents.

However, the *piece de resistance* is not in a brief, juvenile exercise composed at least nineteen years before *The Dunciad Variorum*, but rather in one of the poet’s greatest and most widely lauded pieces, published within a mere five years of it: Pope’s *An Essay on Man*. D. W. Robertson was evidently the first to seriously attempt to trace the many parallels between the *Essay* and *The Consolation* in his 1964 piece “Pope and Boethius.” In his 1985 M.A. thesis “An Essay of Consolation: Boethius in Pope’s *An Essay on Man*,” D. R. Gunto gave a lengthier treatment of the relationship between the two works, chiefly working to establish the political context in which Pope received and understood *The Consolation*. The last publication of note to consider these works in tandem was P. E. Phillips’ “Boethian Happiness in Alexander Pope’s *An Essay on Man*, Epistle IV,” published in 2002. These three pieces are the only ones to substantially remark on Boethius’s influence on Pope outside of his juvenile translation. A few of their findings have been reproduced below as sufficient evidence of the connection between *The Consolation* and the *Essay* for the present purposes, but interested readers are encouraged to read their works in full.

As an example, note the parallels between the following excerpt from Pope's translation of *The Consolation* and the subsequent quotation taken from *An Essay on Man*.

Eternal Reason! whose presiding soul
 Informs great nature and directs the whole! [...]
 Who fix't thy self amidst the rowling frame,
 Gav'st all things to be chang'd, yet ever art the same!
 (*Poems* 1963, pg. 115, ll.3-4; 7-8)

All are but parts of one stupendous whole,
 Whose body Nature is, and God the soul;
 That, chang'd through all, and yet in all the same,
 Great in the earth, as in th' ethereal frame
 (*Poems* 1963, 514, ll.267-270)

Robertson observes that the passage from *An Essay on Man* includes a reference to the Platonic concept of the "world-soul," which appears in the original *Consolation* but not in the translation Pope produced as a young man. This suggests that rather than simply reworking material that he had written earlier in life, Pope returned to the original text of *The Consolation* in order to allow it a renewed influence on his thinking (Robertson 1964, 507).

Furthermore, Robertson cites other passages from Pope which parallel parts of *The Consolation* beyond the small portion Pope chose to translate or the slightly longer passages marked with annotations in Pope's private copy of *Boece*. Consider, for example, the following quotation from Epistle IV of *An Essay on Man*.

Fortune her gifts may variously dispose,
 And these be happy called, unhappy those;
 But Heaven's just balance equal will appear,
 While those are placed in hope, and these in fear:
 Nor present good or ill, the joy or curse,
 But future views of better or of worse,
 Oh, sons of earth! attempt ye still to rise,
 By mountains piled on mountains, to the skies? (*Poems* 1963, pg. 538, ll.67-74)

Now compare it to the following two quotations from *The Consolation*.

You too, if you want

Clearly to see the truth
 And to walk the right road straight,
 Cast out joy,
 Cast out fear,
 Rid yourself of hope and grief.
 The mind is clouded, checked,
 Where these hold sway (I.met7, 173).

But he who trembles with fear or desire,
 Fickle at heart, nor master of himself,
 Has thrown away his shield, and left his post,
 And links the chain by which he can be led (I.met4, 145).

All of the above passages advance the idea (more or less explicitly) that fortune inclines men to place their hopes and fears in externals. Although neither these nor any of Robertson's quotations individually prove his case, they collectively suggest, in Robertson's words, that "Boethius may have a formative influence on Pope's thought" (Robertson 1964, 340).

But if the historical and textual evidence is sufficient to suggest that Pope drew on Boethius in his poetry at large, then why, in nearly three centuries, is there no record that anyone identified or commented on traces of *The Consolation* in *The Dunciad*? The answer is necessarily manifold and cannot be known with certainty, but there are a few probable contributing factors. The first is Pope's generalized antipathy toward the Medievals, which is even demonstrated in *The Dunciad* itself.

See Christians, Jews, one heavy sabbath keep;
 And all the Western World believe and sleep.
 Lo Rome herself, proud mistress now no more
 Of arts, but thund'ring against Heathen lore;
 Her gray-hair'd Synods damning books unread,
 And Bacon trembling for his brazen Head.
 Padua, with sighs, beholds her Livy burn,
 And ev'n th' Antipodes Vigilus mourn (III.99-106).

Although Pope himself was raised Catholic and remained at least nominally so throughout his life, in matters pertaining to the cultural and intellectual value of his Medieval

Catholic heritage, he largely bought into the Neoclassical, Protestant zeitgeist of his day which regarded the era with disdain (Schneider 1956, vii). As such, both Pope's verse and other biographical materials have likely done their part in dissuading Pope scholars from the notion that Boethius could have had any significant bearing on the poet's work aside from one, brief, juvenile translation. However, as evidenced in the first of the above quotations, Pope's antipathy arose from what he perceived as the era's overarching neglect toward and occasional suppression of classical learning and those who engaged in it, not from a blanket prejudice against all that transpired between the Fall of Rome and the Italian Renaissance. If Pope could find a kind word to say for Medieval scholars such as Roger Bacon and Virgil of Salzburg, it is certainly conceivable that Boethius, with his intimate knowledge of Homer, Aristotle, Cicero, and other luminaries of the Greco-Roman tradition, could have won his sympathy or even his admiration.

However, if we should entertain the notion that Pope might have found even Boethius's merits insufficient on their own, it should further be recalled that Boethius was recommended to Pope separately by two men, each of whom he highly esteemed. The first was Chaucer, whom Pope composed several imitations of in his youth, and whom he listed with Spenser, Milton, and Dryden as "the great landmarks" in the course of English poetry (Schneider 1956, 10). The second man (and likely the more critical influence on account of Pope's more personal relationship with him) was Sir William Trumbull. Although little is known about the friendship between the then-adolescent poet and the retired statesman, it is generally accepted that Trumbull had a formative influence on Pope's literary development, and Pope recounts regularly spending half of his week with Trumbull, riding together and discussing the classics. That *The Consolation* was among these classics is evidenced by the fact that Trumbull and Pope exchanged translations of III.met9 in 1703, Trumbull having evidently composed a version in response to Pope sending

him his previously-discussed translation first (Donaghey 1967, 72). Ergo, between the joint efforts of these two men, albeit one at the distance of several centuries, it is probable that Pope came not only to know but even to value *The Consolation*, despite his generalized misgivings about the era of its origin.

But why then did Pope remain silent regarding Boethius in his later works and letters? As a man eager to cement himself as his age's and country's chief heir to the classical tradition, why is there no record of Pope explicitly referring to Boethius outside of his adolescent translation? It seems unlikely that Boethius was too obscure of an author for Pope to reference in the eighteenth-century; at least two complete English translations of *The Consolation* were published in Pope's own lifetime, and at least five more were published between 1654 and 1785, to say nothing of incomplete translations such as Pope's own (Gunto 1985, 28). It also seems unlikely that any reason related to Boethius's Catholic connotations could be sufficient, as the historical evidence does not seem to suggest that Boethius was associated with Catholicism in the popular imagination of the time. As Gunto observes, Boethius was then primarily regarded as politically typological, more important for his biography as a noble-suffering, unjustly-accused statesman than for his moral and philosophical thought (Gunto 1985, iii). Insofar as Boethius's religion was salient in seventeenth and eighteenth-century culture, the predominant question was how to render him more generally Christian instead of vaguely deist, not more Protestant instead of Catholic (Gunto 1985, 29).

The only readily available argument is unfortunately intellectually distasteful as it involves arguing from an absence of evidence, but in other ways it is pleasingly parsimonious: Pope intentionally kept his engagement with Boethius secret, for his own amusement if nothing else. For a man whom Samuel Johnson cited as "never drinking tea without a stratagem," playing

“politician about cabbages and turnips,” and having a “general habit of secrecy and cunning,” this is a less speculative argument than it may seem at first glance (Middendorf 2021, 1168). It also helps explain at least one conspicuous absence of Boethius from Pope’s work: Settle’s description of barbaric and superstitious forces suppressing the spirit of classical study and inquiry during the Early Middle Ages in Book III. If one were searching for an image of Roman learning being overwhelmed by uncultured hordes, one would be hard-pressed to find a more suitable candidate than Boethius’s unjust persecution by Theodoric. Presumably, Settle should here glory in Dulness’s triumph over the Last Roman, yet he passes over it in silence. If the thesis of this paper is correct about the extent of Boethius’s influence on *The Dunciad*, it may be that Pope was unwilling to “give up the game” by naming the man in the poem itself.

A great part of the difficulty in observing the influence of *The Consolation* on *The Dunciad* is likely due to the thematic and philosophic rather than verbal influence of the former work upon the latter. Although *The Dunciad*’s notes and annotations have done much of the work for scholars in tracing its imitations and cultural heritage, in their absence it would not be difficult for a critic with an unexceptional degree of familiarity with Milton to see Satan’s struggle through Chaos in the lines “On feet and wings, and flies, and wades, and hops; / So lab’ring on, with shoulders, hands, and head” (II.64-65). Likewise, any Virgilian scholar who fails to pick up on the echoes of *arma virumque cano* in the opening lines of the 1729 version should immediately turn in his card. However, Pope makes no such obvious imitations of Boethius. Perhaps this is on account of the reason speculated about above: that Pope intentionally wanted to keep the Boethian elements of his work obscure for his own reasons. However, it might also simply be because unlike Milton or Virgil, the particular phrases of Boethius’s prose and meter, beautiful as they may be, have not wormed their way into the

collective lexicon of even the Western intelligentsia. The lack of any single culturally definitive translation of Boethius is partly to blame for this, but there also seems to have been a general sense among translators of *The Consolation* that Boethius's meaning was of more critical importance than his language. After all, even Chaucer, one of the most polyphonic and accomplished poets to ever grace English soil, decided to render Boethius's meter into prose.

One final note which may help explain the silence of scholars on Boethius in *The Dunciad*: by historical accident, the three men who have contributed significantly to establishing the influence of Boethius on Pope after his initial, juvenile translation have primarily been scholars of Boethius, not of Pope. As such, their essays have appeared in books and publications unlikely to be noticed by Pope scholars, and they themselves have had less incentive to dig for Boethian references in such obscure soil as *The Dunciad*. It is to be hoped that the following argument will be sufficiently persuasive and substantial to incite other scholars to continue the hunt, for it is certainly not an exhaustive treatment of its subject.

PART II: DULNESS AND THE HERO VS. LADY PHILOSOPHY AND BOETHIUS

Although *The Consolation* chiefly contributes to the moral and philosophical skeleton of *The Dunciad*, there are several key evocative visual elements in both works whose similarities (and direct contradictions) cannot escape those who consider the two works in tandem. These are most prominently displayed in the first books of each text, wherein Lady Philosophy first appears to Boethius in the former work, and the Goddess Dulness appears to Tibbald/Cibber in the latter. To begin with the noblest image, Boethius describes Lady Philosophy as follows:

While I was thinking these thoughts to myself in silence, and set my pen to record this tearful complaint, there seemed to stand above my head a woman. Her look filled me with awe; her burning eyes penetrated more deeply than those of ordinary men; her complexion was fresh with an ever-lively bloom, yet she seemed so ancient that none would think her of our time. It was difficult to say how tall she might be, for at one time she

seemed to confine herself to the ordinary measure of man, and at another the crown of her head touched the heavens; and when she lifted her head higher yet, she penetrated the heavens themselves, and was lost to the sight of men. Her dress was made of very fine, imperishable thread, of delicate workmanship: she herself wove it, as I learned later, for she told me. Its form was shrouded by a kind of darkness of forgotten years, like a smoke-blackened family statue in the atrium. On its lower border was woven the Greek letter Π (P), and on the upper, Θ (Th) and between the two letters steps were marked like a ladder, by which one might climb from the lower letter to the higher. But violent hands had ripped this dress and torn away what bits they could. In her right hand she carried a book, and in her left, a sceptre (I.pr1, 133-135).

Pope does not offer his readers the similar convenience of describing his goddess entirely at once, nor does everything in Boethius' description of Lady Philosophy answer to a corresponding point about Dulness. However, a careful comb can sift out a pictorial representation of the goddess from Pope's verses, from which an image resembling an anti-Lady Philosophy emerges.

In contrast to the lively, burning eyes of Lady Philosophy, Dulness is observed in the first few lines of the poem to be "Laborious, heavy, busy, bold, and *blind*" (I.15, emphasis added). Granted, from a strictly literal standpoint, this detail is contradicted repeatedly throughout the remainder of the work by frank descriptions of Dulness *seeing* things, including only a few lines later, when "She beholds the Chaos dark and deep," and "sees a Mob of Metaphors advance" (I.55; I.56). However, in the cosmos of *The Dunciad*, where "Wits, who like owls, see only in the dark," these apparent contradictions can be neatly reconciled. Dulness's blindness appears to be of a kind that operates as sight in "darkness visible," allowing her to "[behold] thro' fogs, that magnify the scene" her own domain of obscurity and stupidity, but not granting her vision of anything which might be revealed by light (IV.3, I.80). This interpretation is also supported by the words of Lady Philosophy that describe a similar phenomenon in the spiritual vision of the

wicked and of fools: “For they cannot raise eyes accustomed to darkness to the light of manifest truth, and they are like birds whose sight night enlightens but day makes blind.” (IV.pr4, 347).

The subject of Lady Philosophy’s vigor versus Dulness’s sluggishness is sufficiently self-evident to go without further commentary. Easier to miss but just as easy to understand, Dulness’s clothes of “her own fools-colours” are also described as “tinsel’d o’er in robes of varying hues,” denoting not only their flashy appearance but also their inferior quality, to be contrasted against Lady Philosophy’s skillfully constructed garments (I.84; 81). Both intriguing and deserving of further comment, however, is how Boethius and Pope describe the sizes of their respective goddesses. Unlike in Boethius’s description of Lady Philosophy, Pope never gives any indication that Dulness sometimes appears to be the size of an average human, but he does describe her immensity in terms evocative of Lady Philosophy’s sky-piercing figure. The most important passage with regard to this point is in Book IV, when “she mounts the Throne: her head a Cloud conceal’d,” wherein Dulness raises herself up to such an extent that her head is lost in the Heavens (IV.17). Taken on its own, the line might merely suggest that a mist or fog obscures Dulness’s visage from the gaze of her subjects despite her being of typical stature. However, when Dulness first appears to the Hero, the narrator notes that “Her ample presence fills up all the place; / A veil of fogs dilates her awful face” (I.262). The image which emerges from the confluence of these two passages is one wherein Dulness possesses superhuman size, to a level on par with Lady Philosophy’s. But note the key differences: whereas Lady Philosophy is described as breaking through the boundary of the firmament where she can gaze on things invisible to mortal sight, Dulness’s size only causes her to be further obscured, all while remaining within the terrestrial sphere. If Pope is consciously echoing Boethius in these

passages, he seems to also be subtly acknowledging that the two women are not equals. Dulness, then, is less exactly the opposite of Lady Philosophy, and more of an inferior echo of her.

Correlation is not causation, however, and the correspondences observed above do not suffice to prove that Pope consciously drew on the image of Lady Philosophy when dreaming up Dulness. At the very least, Boethius cannot be Pope's only source for the goddess, for others have more than sufficiently demonstrated Pope's reliance on the myth of the *Magna Mater*, herself already the composite of several other mythic figures, to say nothing of Pope's own admission of the fact (Faulkner & Blair 1980, 213). Likewise, there are key elements of Boethius's description of Lady Philosophy which are absent from Pope's descriptions of his dull deity. For example, Dulness is never described as having anything on her person which would correspond to the embroidered Greek letters on the robes of Lady Philosophy. However, the above observations are at least consistent with the hypothesis that Lady Philosophy is one of Dulness's many progenitors.

The proposed connection between Lady Philosophy and Dulness becomes more probable in light of the parallels between their respective interlocutors, the character-Boethius and the Hero of *The Dunciad*. When Lady Philosophy first appears to the character-Boethius, he is engaged in mourning his fortune with the aid of the poor Muses of Poetry, who dictate self-pitying verses to him to passively transcribe. Pope describes Tibbald/Cibber in so nearly the same state that his verses could almost be taken to describe the character-Boethius. As the 1729 and 1743 versions of *The Dunciad* differ substantially in this passage, both versions are respectively reproduced below.

She ey'd the Bard, where supperless he sate,
And pin'd, unconscious of his rising fate;
Studious he sate, with all his books around,
Sinking from thought to thought, a vast profound!

Plung'd for his sense, but found no bottom there;
Then writ, and flounder'd on, in mere despair (*Poems* 1963, pg. 360, ll.109-114).

Now (shame to Fortune!) an ill Run at Play
Blank'd his bold visage, and a thin Third day:
Swearing and supperless the Hero sate,
Blasphem'd his Gods, the Dice, and damn'd his Fate.
Then gnaw'd his pen, then dash'd it on the ground,
Sinking from thought to thought, a vast profound!
Plung'd for his sense, but found no bottom there,
Yet wrote and flounder'd on, in mere despair (I.113-120).

Tibbald and especially Cibber are each here in essentially the same psychological and spiritual condition as the protagonist of *The Consolation*, thinking it shameful that Fortune should have disgraced them, regarding mere chance as sovereign over the world, unable to come to their senses, and occupied in composing poor, despairing verses. The 1729 version leaves out the more explicit references to fortune and chance, and Cibber's fiery state of agitation is admittedly less similar to the morose condition of the character-Boethius than Tibbald's "mere despair," but neither image deviates so far from its original Boethian model as to render it unfaithful. In brief, a more perfect set-up for a comparison between the Hero of *The Dunciad* and that of *The Consolation* could scarcely be hoped for.

Shortly after being introduced, as though acting on the same cue, both the Roman and English characters offer an accounting of their service and friendship with their respective goddesses, and marvel to think that such devotion might be rewarded so poorly. For Boethius, his charge centers on the point that the just ought to remain in power in order to better pursue the aims of justice (I.pr4, 147). Tibbald/Cibber, in contrast, argues that dull men and their works ought to be maintained in fame and popularity in order to better make other men dull (I.190-214). However, although the complaints of the protagonists may be kin to each other, the reactions of their respective goddesses are distinctly and directly opposed. Whereas Lady

Philosophy commands that the Muses of (poor) Poetry be driven from Boethius's side so that she can begin her course of treatment, Dulness's first action is to prevent the pyre of poorly written books and plays composed by the Hero from being consumed by fire (I.pr1, 135; I.257-260). By extinguishing the light of the fire and preserving the poor verses, Dulness accomplishes both on a symbolic and literal level the opposite of what Boethius recounts spiritually occurs to him upon the arrival of Lady Philosophy: "Then was the night dispersed, and darkness left me; My eyes grew strong again." (I.met3, 139).

What follows in both works is a movement of homecoming on the part of the protagonists mediated by their respective goddesses, each framed in the language of recollection. However, there are important differences. For the Hero of *The Dunciad*, this moment occurs instantaneously and pleasantly, and no *metanoia* or sacrifice is required for him to acclimate himself to his rediscovered nativity. No sooner does he arrive at the Cave of Poverty and Poetry than "Well pleas'd he enter'd, and confess'd his home" (I.264). As any reader familiar with *The Consolation* knows, however, the same cannot be said for Boethius, for although Lady Philosophy quickly diagnoses the two-fold cause of her patient's malady — namely, that "how far from [his] homeland [he has] strayed" and that "[he has] forgotten what [he is]" (I.pr5, 163; I.pr6, 169) — it is only after a protracted period of intellectual and moral stripping and purgation that the long-suffering exile finally takes up residence in his native city again. This should not be surprising, for Dulness rules the mind's "native anarchy" where it resides by default, while Lady Philosophy lives in a city where a man may cease to deserve his citizenship by ceasing to desire it (I.pr5, 163).

Much of the remainders of both works may be considered further developments of these initial movements of homecoming. For the character-Boethius, this progress is expansive and

invigorating. From his initial pseudo-poetic stupor at the beginning of *The Consolation*, the character-Boethius becomes increasingly vocal up through Book V, when he becomes a full interlocutor with Lady Philosophy, challenging her arguments and thinking critically about her answers (V.prIII). In fact, Blumenthal goes so far as to argue that the authority and vision of the character-Boethius even rises so far as to eclipse that of Lady Philosophy, rising almost to the level of that of the author-Boethius (Blumenthal 1986, 28). Yet as David Sheehan has argued, Tibbald/Cibber becomes increasingly withdrawn and passive as the poem progresses.

By portraying the physical and intellectual isolation of Theobald in Book I, then the inward movement of the dunces in Book II, and finally a world of dullness created and projected in the mind of Theobald in Book III, Pope has described a state of cultural chaos, irrationality, and disintegration and traced responsibility for this condition back to the individual dunce (Sheehan 1977, 38).

The similarities and intentional contrasts between the initial encounter of Lady Philosophy and the character-Boethius compared to that of Dulness and Tibbald/Cibber are not only substantial, but in many cases immediate and clear, just as any admirer of Homer will be quick to see his patterns imitated in Virgil. While one might hypothesize that Pope and Boethius, both keen readers of the classical tradition, merely drew on similar tropes leading to incidental similarities between their works, it is difficult to dismiss the notion that the two works are in conversation not only because Boethius's influence on Pope in other works has already been established, but also because the domains of their chief goddesses are as radically opposed to each other as *Philosophy* and *Dullness*. By establishing these imagistic and thematic parallels, Pope signals to his readers that his satirical poem should be read as a mirrored inversion of Boethius's classic, tracing the causes of the Hero's contracting dullness in much the same way that *The Consolation* traces the character-Boethius's expanding understanding. Likewise, Pope communicates that he will be considering many of the same themes and arguments put forward

by his predecessor, as the remainder of this essay will show. Specifically, *The Dunciad* will investigate what kind of justice there can be in a world where fools are seen to prosper, just as *The Consolation* considers how any kind of ordered universe might allow a good man to suffer.

This priming is indispensable to the poem's effective communication of its theme, for akin to how Lady Philosophy starts Boethius off on "gentle and moderate applications" before moving on to more difficult medicines, so too do Pope's allusions to *The Consolation* become more difficult to catch as the poem progresses, even as they take on a greater significance to the meaning of the work (I.pr6, 171). However, once they are unveiled, *The Dunciad's* Boethian motifs neatly explain some of the poem's most notorious puzzles and reveal a strong organizing principle in a poem often considered chaotic and scattered.

PART III: THE MOCK-HEROIC GAMES

The Mock-Heroic Games find their thematic grounding in Boethius's understanding of what this paper will refer to as "Lesser Goods," i.e. those things which are pursued in the attempt to attain happiness but which ultimately fail to do so, such as what this paper will refer to as "bodily goods" (III.pr8), as well as pleasure (III.pr7), wealth (III.pr3), fame (III.pr6), honor (III.pr4), and power (III.pr5). Specifically, each of the six games in Book II is (A) symbolically structured as a game to evoke one of Boethius' six Lesser Goods, (B) includes a prize which further evokes the same Lesser Good as its corresponding event, (C) includes contestants who are at least implicitly condemned for their wrongful pursuit of the good in question, whether in particular or as a group, and (D) implies that the dunces are somehow frustrated in their enjoyment of the prizes they obtain, as this chapter will demonstrate.

The connection between the first game of Book II and Boethius' Lesser Goods is one of the clearer correspondences. The footrace is the only one of the six games that requires any

significant degree of athletic prowess, and therefore, it must refer to bodily goods. Pope follows Boethius in not simply treating physical ability under this heading, but also beauty and health, as will be seen. However, before continuing under this assumption, I must account for a detail that threatens to undermine my schema at the outset.

When the prospective contestants “gaze with ardour” on the Phantom More, whom Dulness has offered as the prize for the footrace, “Some a poet’s name, / Others a sword-knot and a lac’d suit inflame” (II.51-52). These desires appear to correspond better with fame and wealth than with bodily goods, but there are two points that correct this error. The lesser yet still substantive point is that these two lines far from drown out the litany of extremely physical descriptors the narrator has already used to praise the Phantom’s vigor and handsomeness, including “No meagre, Muse-rid Mope, adust and thin” and “All as a partridge plump, full-fed and fair” (II.37; 41). However, the better evidence is found at the end of Boethius III.met8, which immediately follows the philosopher’s criticism of bodily goods: “Let them strive for *wealth and honours*, and then / When they have gained false goods with labour great, / Let them recognize true goods.” (III.met8, 263, emphasis added). Rather than distracting from the theme of bodily goods, it is probable that Pope included the brief references to wealth and honor to more firmly root the footrace in Boethius’s discussion of bodily goods.

Having cleared that hurdle, we must now give attention to the dunces themselves. At first, only one of the dunces opts to compete, and Pope’s choice here is heavy with irony. “Huge Lintot” and his corpulence had been the subject of the Scriblerus Club’s mockery before (II.62). As Swift once quipped, “His character’s beyond compare / Like his own person, large and fair” (Swift 1768, 208). It is no surprise that Curl, Lintot’s only challenger, quickly overtakes him once the race commences, although ill-luck soon befalls him as well. A short way into the race,

Pope has Curl slip in a puddle of excrement which “Curl’s Corinna chanc’d that morn to make” (II.69-76). If the image of Curl drenched in human filth on account of his own misdeeds was not enough to evoke Pope’s *Full and true Account of a Horrid and Barbarous Revenge by Poison, on the Body of Mr. Edmund Curll*, the poet makes a point of quietly alluding to it in the footnote on the line (II.58n). In addition, there is the added irony that in his embrace of a beauty (for Pope seems to at least grant Elizabeth Thomas this much in referring to her by the name of Ovid’s mistress), Curl despoils his own physical appearance (II.70). Without athletic talent, health, or beauty to recommend them, it is a bit clearer why both of the racers should be plagiarists, willing to take on the “bodies” of those more attractive and capable than themselves.

Curl arrives triumphant at the finish line, but just as Boethius describes how the vicious discern the true only after grasping at the false good, so too does Curl grasp at the air which makes up the illusion. Afterward, Dulness, acting as a satyric inversion of Lady Philosophy, reveals how these false images were intended to teach him conduct more fitting for one of her devotees. As a “consolation” prize, she offers him a tapestry which “Display’d the fates her confessors endure [...] purgings, pumpings, blankettings, and blows” (II.146-154). Gneiting observes how the tapestry is “a grotesque caricature of religious paintings which depict the martyred saints of the Christian Church” that were commonly produced during the Renaissance (Gneiting 1975, 426). On a material level, the tapestry is a subversion of beauty as a good. Iconographically, by depicting numerous injuries and ailments which can afflict a body, Pope echoes Lady Philosophy’s concluding argument against bodily goods as a source of final happiness: “But you may over-esteem the body’s good qualities as much as you like, provided you realize that what you admire can be destroyed by the burning of a three-days fever.” (III.pr8, 261).

Having failed to acquire goods proper to the body itself, the next contest has the dunces compete for pleasures enjoyed by the body. As the dunces are predominantly male, Pope has at his disposal an image that is conveniently evocative of both licentiousness and drunkenness, and therefore the second game is a urination contest. For those who remain skeptical of the connection, Pope provides an even more direct (but thankfully less graphic) link between the second contest and the theme of bodily pleasure: the exposition of Scriblerus.

In this game is exposed, in the most contemptuous manner, the profligate licentiousness of those shameless scribblers [...] who in libellous Memoirs and Novels, reveal the faults or misfortunes of both sexes, to the ruin of public fame, or disturbance of private happiness (II.157n).

As this game treats both lust and gluttony, it has two prizes to crown both the first and second place winners. The first and most prominent is the poet Eliza Haywood, who is offered in the same manner as slave girls in *The Iliad* and *The Aeneid*. Pope's notes introduce her as the "authoress of those most scandalous books," and the text of the poem itself is no less subtle (II.157n). This is particularly true of the original 1728 version, which includes the lines "Pearls on her neck, and roses in her hair, / And her fore-buttocks to the navel bare" (Barchas 2008, 22). Furthermore, Gneiting suggests that Eliza is described in a manner which is evocative of paintings of the Madonna with the Christ Child and St. John, which would give "the word 'confess'd' [...] an additional religious note, with the ironic implication that a true Virgin would have nothing to confess" (Gneiting 1975, 427).

The inclusion of Haywood's children merits additional consideration. Aside from the historical fact that Haywood really did have two (likely illegitimate) children, their inclusion may also quietly foreshadow the failure of the dunces to obtain the pleasures they seek if read with an eye to *The Consolation* (II.157nR). In her discussion on the futility of pleasure for bringing happiness, Lady Philosophy remarks how "it was too well said, too truly to nature, that

someone invented children to be tormentors” (III.pr7, 257-259). Perhaps the children are Pope’s way of implying that the victor will not be able to indulge in his new mistress with as much abandon and as little remorse as he might hope.

The China Jordan is, of course, a chamber pot, which by alluding to the end of the digestive process suggests the whole of it. In the original *Dunciad*, the image may have been even more evocative of insobriety, for although Curl remained the champion of the contest through the years, the title of second-place winner was originally held by William Chetwood, who is recorded in *The Key to the Dunciad* as having actually been sent home with Jordan on his head following “a Drunken-Debauch” (Curl 1728, 13). However, as time went on, Pope sacrificed some of the structural integrity of his poem for the sake of indicting more relevant names. Yet whichever face he takes, the second-place winner perhaps has good reason to “[walk] contented home,” for he is invariably shorted in his efforts by a fault which likely would have prevented him from enjoying the prize had he won it (II.190). In Pope’s euphemism, “It rose, and labour’d to a curve at most” (II.172). Curl, however, is no better off. Although his reliance “on his vigour and superior size” wins him the day, Pope alludes to Curl’s venereal disease by describing his “stream” as “smoking” and “burn[ing]” (II.180; 184). Whether Curl truly suffered from a sexually transmitted infection may or may not be the case, but the rumor had currency in Pope’s own time, as Scriblerus testifies (II.183n).

The dunces then proceed to the tickling contest, which is a game less obviously connected to wealth than the previous two competitions are to their respective lesser goods. However, the key lies in a play on the word “feather.” Samuel Johnson’s *Dictionary* (published within thirty years of the original *Dunciad* and begun only three years after the appearance of *The Dunciad in Four Books* (Hitchings 2005, 53)), defines “to Feather” as “to enrich; to adorn;

to exalt;” and the idiom “to Feather one’s nest” as “to get riches together” (Johnson 2017). Furthermore, in his definition of “Feather’d,” he quotes Pope’s own *Windsor Forest*, in which he writes “Then ships of uncouth form shall stem the tide, / And feather'd people crowd my wealthy side” (Johnson 2017). It appears safe to claim that wealth and feathers would have been tangent concepts in the minds of Pope’s eighteenth-century readers. However, even were this not the case, the greater context of the episode links it indisputably to money.

The prize for this contest is a wealthy patron, who is unnamed in the text but is likely meant to be the Duke of Newcastle, known for fox hunting and throwing lavish parties (Browning 2011, 5). More important, however, are the dunces who attempt to win his favor. Among them is Paolo Antonio Rolli, “an Italian poet and writer of many Operas in that language” (II.203n). As he makes abundantly clear in Book IV, Pope considered opera to be a degenerate art form in of itself, but at least part of his antipathy toward it arose from the financial apparatus on which it depended (Rogers 1973, 21). Reliance on subscription and patronage is the common thread which links all of the dunces in this contest together, forcing them all to subordinate their artistic works to the end of monetary gain.

The contest is sabotaged, however, by a non-poet, who prostitutes his sister to secure the position. Scriblerus makes a point of spelling out the moral of the episode, which is that no matter how great the talents of the dunces may be, their patronage may be stolen away in a moment by vice and baseness (II.213n). This echoes Lady Philosophy’s admonition against relying on wealth for happiness, for “there is nothing in the nature of money which prevents its being taken away from those who possess it, against their will” (III.pr3, 243). The winner does not escape scot-free either, however, for just as Boethius reflects on how riches never deliver the self-reliance they promise, so too does the non-poet emerge not with the poetic freedom

promised by a generous patron, but reliant on a lord *and* indebted to his sister for his income (III.pr3, 243).

The fourth contest is one of noise-making and concerns fame. That the contest is won by whoever can draw the most attention to themselves is particularly evident in the monkey-sound portion of the contest where the dunces all compete at the same time. Their merits are not judged soberly by their skill as imitators, but on account of whoever can drown out the competition. The contestants are writers who were noted for publishing many works very quickly, i.e. without polish, aiming for quantity over quality. Chief among these is Blackmore, the clear winner of the braying portion of the competition and the author of six epic poems alongside numerous other pieces (II.268n). Mary Pix, who was included in an early draft of *The Dunciad* in which the connection between spectacle over substance was even more explicit, would have also fit the characterization, as her works were noteworthy for frequent errata and awkward phrasing (Rumbold 2001, 533). The implication is that the writers listed would prefer to have their names be known than their thoughts, preferring celebrity to the cerebral.

The prizes are a drum (for the braying competition) and three “cat-calls” (for the monkey-sound competition), the former being commonly employed in stage effects, and the latter being small (now obscure) instruments which produced high-pitched noises and which were employed to express the disapproval of the audience at the theater. Whoever wins these prizes will have additional ease in drawing attention to themselves in the future. Unfortunately, the dunces of the monkey-sound competition are each subject to a fate worse than defeat: universal victory. Dulness, unable to hear any of them over any of the others, grants them all a cat-call, and no one achieves any recognition. Even their names become lost in the cacophony of their rapidly (and by implication, poorly) formed syllogisms.

Now thousand tongues are heard in one loud din:
 The Monkey-mimics rush discordant in;
 'Twas chatt'ring, grinning, mouthing, jabb'ring all,
 And Noise and Norton, Brangling and Breval,
 Dennis and Dissonance, and captious Art,
 And Snip-snap short, and Interruption smart,
 And Demonstration thin, and Thesis thick,
 And Major, Minor, and Conclusion quick (II.235-242).

There is one dunce who manages to rise above all of the others in the second part of the noise-making competition: Blackmore, whose “sonorous strain” extends from its epicenter at St. Mary le Strand (II.28) to Tottenham Fields, the Court of Chancery, Westminster Hall, and Hungerford Market (II.261-266). Pope’s emphasis on the geographic extent of Blackmore’s Braying recalls Boethius’s discussion of fame in Book II (which he revisits in Book III), wherein Lady Philosophy reflects on the minuscule size of the earth compared to the heavens (II.pr7, 217; III.pr6, 255). Of this tiny dot, she continues, the human race occupies only a very small fraction, and if even the fame of the Roman Empire could not penetrate the Caucas Mountains, what kind of fame could any man expect to have? Perhaps appropriately, the true extent of Blackmore’s bray is usually lost on those who are not intimately familiar with eighteenth-century London’s geography, but a consultation with John Rocque’s 1746 *Map of London* reveals that as far as Pope informs us, Blackmore could be heard up to one mile away. As such, the greatest strains of the loudest dunce would not only have not reached the Caucuses, but they would not have even reached St. Paul’s Cathedral or any of the East half of London. Although an impressive feat on a physical level, Blackmore’s strains are dwarfed by the range of anyone with access to the postal service. Unsurprisingly, therefore, Pope’s note on line 268 informs us that “[Blackmore] has not for many years been so much as named, or even thought of among writers,” a fact which, if not for *The Dunciad*, would only ring truer today (II.268n).

The fifth event is the diving contest, wherein the dunces attempt to accrue honor to themselves by the ironic means of abandoning their high position. In Pope's phrasing, "but to sink the deeper, [they] rose the higher" (II.290). The structure of this game well parallels the pursuits of its contestants, the party-writers, who profit not so much from attaining honor themselves but from reducing the honor of others by the propagation of scandals (II.276n). There are three prizes offered for the diving competition, the first two of which are for the victor and the last for all of the other contestants: a bound copy of the *Weekly Journals*, a pig of lead, and a peck of coals. The first prize is both a way for the victorious dunce to continue to revel in the dishonor caused to others through past scandals and — assuming his own pieces are included in the volume — a more honorable way for the dunce's writings to be presented and preserved, especially in contrast to their usual format and fate: loose sheets of paper which are shortly consigned to the trash and oblivion. The pig of lead may be intended as a parody of a gold medal, especially considering the frequent juxtaposition of lead and gold throughout the poem (Brooks-Davies 1985, 143). The peck of coals does not have any immediately obvious connection to honor, but as Pope's footnote makes clear, it does allude to poverty (II.282n). As this prize is not for the winner, but the losers of the contest, it may conceivably be read as a means to add insult to injury, drawing attention to the dishonorable poverty of all but the victor. There is also a fourth, impromptu prize given at the end of the competition, but it will be addressed in the context of the subversion of honor.

The first dunce to claim the *Weekly Journals* and the pig of lead in the *Four-Book Dunciad* is William Arnall, who had prevailed on Pope to be removed from the poem but then proceeded to attack some of Pope's most eminent friends (II.315n). With characteristic irony, Pope honors his concern for his own reputation and his disregard for that of others by elevating

him to a more kingly status. When he emerges from the depths, “he brings up half the bottom on his head,” literally crowned with mud (II.321). However, as Lady Philosophy asks Boethius, “do they [honors] last constant?” (III.pr4, 249). Certainly not in Dulness’s empire, for Arnall’s moment of glory is almost immediately eclipsed as Smedley arises from the deep. Smedley, who had made virulent, profane, and direct attacks not only on Pope but on Swift as well, recounts his adventures in the deep before being lead “to the banks where rev’rend Bards repose” in parody of Virgil’s account of how the Muses honored his friend Gallus (II.347nR).

There on the banks, Smedley is wrapped in the old clerical vestments of Luke Milbourne, a clergyman who was disgraced for publishing libels of his parishioners (Scott 1834, 336). From a Boethian perspective, nothing could be more obviously indicative of the emptiness of honors than for them to be conferred by a dishonorable person (III.pr4, 245-247). The particular fact that these honors are conferred in the form of clothing is especially reminiscent of *The Consolation*.

As Boethius remarks:

Though in his pride he decked himself
 In Tyrian purple and in snowy pearls,
 Nero for all his pomp was hated by all
 For his self-indulgent cruelty.
 Shamelessly once he gave the reverend Senators
 Unworthy consuls to elect:
 Who could then think such honours blessed
 Granted by such miserable men? (III.met4, 249)

The episode concludes with Smedley surrounded by an army of clerics, who are described as “Heav’n’s Swiss, who fight for any God, or Man,” a parody of the soldiers who fight for the honor of king and country (II.358).

Finally, Dulness proclaims the last of the games. Having subverted the dunces in their attempts to attain bodily goods, pleasure, wealth, fame, and honor, all that remains is to frustrate their desire for power. As such, it is only fitting that Pope makes the last contest a wakefulness

competition: a struggle for mastery over the self. Specifically, the critic-dunces must remain awake for as long as possible while listening to “My H—ley’s periods, or my Blackmore’s numbers” (II.370). While the drudgery of these works has been frequently observed, little critical attention has been given to which specific works are being read. As the text later makes clear, the works are Bishop Hoadley’s *The Nature of the Kingdom of Christ*, mockingly referred to by Pope as “Christ’s No kingdom here,” and Blackmore’s two Arthurian epics: *Prince Arthur, an Heroick Poem in X Books* and *King Arthur: an Heroick Poem in Twelve Books* (III.400; III.398nR). The former argues that the Christian church ought to have no temporal power on earth (i.e. that the government ought to have uncontested power), and the latter are thinly veiled allegories for the triumph of the Whig-partial William III over King James II in the Glorious Revolution and over King Louis XIV in the Nine Years’ War. In short, both are uninspired government apologetics written by those attempting to curry the favor of the powers that be.

The prize for this final contest is unusual in that it appears at first glance to be something the critics already possess: the office of critic. However, the specific way the prize is phrased by Dulness makes it clear that the position is not so much literary as it is judicial. The prize is not the faculty of criticism, but the position: “To him we grant our amplest pow’rs to sit / Judge of all present, past, and future wit; / To cavil, censure, dictate, right or wrong, / Full and eternal privilege of tongue” (II.375-378).

Even apart from Pope’s conflation of the two images, the position of a critic is not unlike that of a judge in that both exercise similar powers: the former offers judgments of *literary* life and death, while the latter *literally* judges between life and death. Furthermore, in Book IV of *The Dunciad*, Pope again links the images of critics with governmental power in the figure of Aristarchus, who “kingly, did but nod” while the other dunces perform deep bows before the

throne of Dulness (302). The images of bowing and nodding, of course, feature heavily in this episode both as a figurative acknowledgment by the dunces of the power of Dulness and as the literal inability of the dunces to maintain sufficient power over themselves to stay awake. Here, more than anywhere else, the subversion of the desires of the dunces is obvious: there is no victor. Not one of the dunces has sufficient self-command to claim the prize, and the games end as darkness covers their eyes in prefiguration of the “universal darkness” which will ultimately conclude the poem. The connection between self-mastery, authority over the head and neck, and encroaching darkness is further reminiscent of the poem with which Boethius concludes his discussion of sovereignty:

The man who wants to be powerful
 Must tame his high spirits,
 Must not submit his neck, conquered by lust,
 To its stinking halter;
 For indeed though far-off Indian soil
 Tremble under your sway,
 And furthest Thule serve you,
 Yet not to be able to dispel black care
 Or put complaining misery to flight
 This is no power at all (III.met5, 253).

PART IV: THE PROBLEM OF THE IVORY GATE

The question of the Ivory Gate has proved nearly as divisive and puzzling for scholars of *The Dunciad* as its progenitor image has been for readers of the *Aeneid*. The problem was less troubling when *The Dunciad in Four Books* was not yet a twinkle in Pope’s eye. In those early days before any reader heard reference to “the deep intent,” one might have feasibly agreed with Scriblerus, who remarked at the beginning of Book III that “the following Vision is no more than the chimera of the dreamer’s brain,” and that Pope’s vision was intended to be more playful than prophetic (III.5n). But with the addition of the Fourth Book, scholars are obliged to grapple with the paradox: how can the Hero’s vision proceed through the Gate of False Dreams and yet be

fulfilled? In light of other inconsistencies between the 1729 and 1743 versions, it is initially tempting to think of this inconsistency as yet another oversight, but this is inadmissible. No poet of Pope's caliber, or even one six degrees worse, could overlook what once stood as the last line of his poem. Furthermore, Pope even added additional commentary on the discrepancy, having Bentley express "How much the good Scriblerus was mistaken" in his original interpretation (III.5n). Nonetheless, all that has been definitively concluded about the line has been expressed by Deneau:

It is quite possible that Pope realized the disparity but thought it functional in some way. We cannot be sure that Pope, with a characteristic sprightliness, did not leave the reference to the "Iv'ry Gate" in the final version of his poem to add a curious (and puzzling) tension — in order to mix "true visions" and "deluding lies." (Deneau 1959, 211)

Such a non-committal assertion after centuries of scholarship is discouraging. However, when one reads Book III through the lens of Boethius, a "ray of Reason [steals] half thro' the solid darkness," and a potential resolution emerges that has not heretofore been considered and which remains consistent with the 1729 edition. In brief, the falsity of the Hero's vision is not in regard to the *fulfillment* of the events, *but in the Hero's understanding of their nature*.

In Book IV of *The Consolation*, having demonstrated previously that the wicked cannot obtain the happiness they seek through Lesser Goods, the character-Boethius nonetheless maintains that Lesser Goods are still Goods, and that something seems amiss in the governance of a God who sometimes bestows even these Lesser Goods on malefactors while the just are made to suffer Fortune's slings and arrows. Lady Philosophy must therefore demonstrate that Boethius has an incomplete view of the cosmos which prevents him from seeing the manifold ways that God employs both good and bad fortune alike on both the wicked and the just to encourage virtue and drive away vice. In Book III of *The Dunciad*, Pope encounters a similar philosophical snag. The dunces who overrun the world might be ludicrous and incompetent, but

he must still struggle to understand how there can be justice in a universe where the conditions described toward the end of Book III can exist:

See, see, our own true Phoebus wears the bays!
 Our Midas sits Lord Chancellor of Plays!
 On Poets Tombs see Benson's titles writ!
 Lo! Ambrose Philips is prefer'd for Wit!
 See under Ripley rise a new White-hall,
 While Jones' and Boyle's united labours fall:
 While Wren with sorrow to the grave descends,
 Gay dies unpensioned with a hundred friends,
 Hibernian Politics, O Swift! thy fate;
 And Pope's, ten years to comment and translate (III.323-332).

However, rather than employ the positive cure of Lady Philosophy which presents the correct understanding of such events, *The Dunciad* utilizes the negative method wherein the erroneous view is presented in its full mock-splendor to be ridiculed and shamed. The following chapter shall elucidate at least a few ways in which the philosophy of the dunces espoused in Book III is presented as ineffectual and ludicrous from a Boethian standpoint.

This project will first require a brief review of the mechanics of the Boethian universe in order to understand the dunces' ineffectual parody of it. In *The Consolation*, Lady Philosophy distinguishes between *providentia* (or "providence"), the unchanging divine plan as it exists in the mind of God, and *fatum* (or "fate"), which refers to the mutable manner in which providence is realized in time. The word "fate" and its derivatives appears nine times in *The Dunciad Variorum*, and eleven times in *The Dunciad in Four Books*. The word "providence" does not appear in any edition of the poem, and at first glance, Pope seems to use "fate" to refer to both *fatum* and *providentia* interchangeably. On the side of "fate" meaning *fatum*, there are lines such as the aforementioned "Blasphemed his gods, the dice, and damn'd his fate," in which fate is intimately tied to the images of dice and chance, and "From the strong fate of drams if thou get free," implying that fate is not destiny, but merely a tendency that a person might escape

through his own volition (III.116; 145). On the side of “fate” as *providentia*, the most significant lines are “Called to this work by Dulness, Jove, and Fate,” and “These Fate reserv’d to grace thy realm divine,” both of which seem to ascribe a degree of intelligence and volition to “fate” which is only found in *providentia* (I.4; III.275). In a Boethian understanding, the ambiguity of the two terms tips the scale toward *providentia*, for according to Lady Philosophy, everything subject to *fatum* is subject to *providentia*, but some things under the immutable governance of *providentia* are not subject to the caprices of *fatum* (IV.pr6).

But what (or who) in the internal cosmology of *The Dunciad* is “fate” as *providentia* ascribed to? Although Dulness or the Christian God immediately spring to mind as candidates, there are those who argue that the dunces have trust in another, third “deity.” For example, R. G. Peterson argues that Apollo is the god of the dunces, which is consistent with Settle’s description of the dunce’s god inspiring geniuses such as Newton, Locke, Bacon, and Milton (III.215-216). However, Peterson goes on to suggest that by recognizing Tibbald/Cibber as their “own true Phoebus,” the dunces *ultimate* god is the Hero of *The Dunciad* himself, whom the dunces install in usurpation of Apollo (Peterson 1975, 440). Without discrediting Peterson’s reading, it will be argued that Pope’s image of the dunces idolatrous usurpation is multifaceted, and that in addition to supplanting Apollo, the dunces also attempt to install Tibbald/Cibber as their idolatrous (and woefully inadequate) substitute for the Boethian God.

Consider the following passage from Boethius, in which Lady Philosophy establishes an analogy for the relationship between *fatum* and *providentia*:

For just as, of a number of spheres turning about the same centre, the innermost one approaches the simplicity of middleness and is a sort of pivot for the rest, which are placed outside it, about which they turn; but the outermost one, turning with a greater circumference, the further it is separated from the indivisibility of the central point, the wider the spaces it spreads over; and if anything is joined or associated with that centre, it is

gathered into its simplicity and ceases to spread and diffuse itself: in a similar manner, that which is furthest separated from the principal mind is entangled in the tighter meshes of fate, and a thing is the more free from fate the more closely it moves towards that centre of all things. And if it should cling fast to the firmness of the supernal mind, then being without motion it is also superior to the necessity of fate. Therefore as reasoning is to understanding, as that which becomes is to that which is, as time is to eternity, as the circle is to its centre, so is the moving course of fate to the unmoving simplicity of providence (IV.pr6).

In Book III of *The Dunciad*, Settle employs circular imagery reminiscent of Lady Philosophy's to describe Tibbald/Cibber's place and function in the cosmos of the dunces, effectively asserting that the Hero occupies the same position and office as God in the Boethian chain of causality.

As man's Meanders to the vital spring
 Roll all their tides, then back their circles bring;
 Or whirligigs, twirl'd round by skillful swain,
 Suck the thread in, then yield it out again:
 All nonsense thus, of old or modern date,
 Shall in thee center, from thee circulate (III.55-60).

At first glance, Settle's two images appear to be straight-forward, albeit highly original and evocative, depictions of circular motion, and doubtless that is the sense in which Tibbald/Cibber receives them. However, a careful examination of the images reveals that they are both somewhat ill-suited to communicate Tibbald/Cibber as the source of all ancient and contemporary duncery, and what is more, they are both ill-suited in the same way. Man's "Meanders," or blood vessels, are not the active cause of the circulation of the blood, but rather the passageways and conduits of its circulation. Likewise, as directly stated in the verses, a whirligig is the thing "twirl'd," not the twirler. The spinning motion is communicated from the hands of the player to the toy, not vice versa. The passivity of these images upon close inspection casts doubt on Settle's assertion that Cibber/Tibbald shall be the active font of duncery.

The success of the dunces' symbolic attempt to install Cibber/Tibbald as a substitute for the Boethian Divine Mind becomes further suspect when the feeble powers of that mind are

compared with its omniscient counterpart. A hallmark of Boethian theology is that divine omniscience is rooted in God's eternity; because God exists outside of and beyond time, he is able to observe all things in the immediate and eternal present (V.pr6, 431). Cibber, in contrast, is not only woefully bound by the ignorance of temporality, but is also constantly in the process of forgetting himself, cyclically being reintroduced to the waters of Lethe:

Thou, yet unborn, hast touch'd this sacred shore;
 The hand of Bavius drench'd thee o'er and o'er.
 But blind to former as to future fate,
 What mortal knows his preexistent state?
 Who knows how long thy transmigrating soul
 Might from Boeotian to Boeotian roll?
 How many Dutchmen she vouchsafed to thrid?
 How many stages thro' old monks she rid?
 And all who since, in mild benighted days,
 Mix'd the Owl's ivy with the Poet's bays? (III.44-54).

It may be objected that Dulness immediately corrects this deficiency in her Hero by granting him supernatural vision of all things. However, let us consider Pope's phrasing carefully, and understand specifically what kind of sight the Hero is endowed with. For the sake of contrast, it should first be observed that the lines from *Paradise Lost* on which these lines are based, as quoted in the footnotes to the couplet, read "To nobler sights from Adam's eye remov'd / The film; then purg'd with Euphrasie and Rue / The visual nerve — *for he had much to see*" (III.61n, emphasis Pope's). The significant point in these lines is that Adam's eye is specifically observed to have a deficiency which must be cured before he can receive his vision of salvation history. In contrast, Pope's couplet reads "For this our Queen unfolds to vision true / Thy mental eye, for thou hast much to view" (III.61-62). The conventional reading of this couplet is that Dulness is unfolding a true vision of history, past and future, to the eye of Tibbald/Cibber. However, there is another possible grammatically-precise reading. If the direct object of "unfolds" is understood to be "thy mental eye," and "vision true" is taken as the

indirect object, then rather than Dulness unfolding a true vision to the mental eye of Tibbald/Cibber, the goddess can be understood as unfolding *the mental eye of the Hero* to those who have “vision true,” i.e. a correct understanding of things. This explains why Pope removes Milton’s notion of purification and correction from his couplet: the Hero’s vision needs no correction because what is being revealed is not distinct from the Hero.

This reading receives significant support from the later and more direct passage: “Joy fills his soul, joy innocent of thought; / What pow’r, he cries, what pow’r these wonders wrought? / Son; what thou seek’st is in thee! Look, and find / Each Monster meets his likeness in thy mind” (III.249-252). Settle does not tell this to the Hero because the Hero will actively bring these things about from his intellect, like Zeus giving rise to Athena from his fusion with Metis. Tibbald/Cibber is too passive and powerless for that. Instead, Settle is affirming that everything which has been shown to the Hero is simply a portrait of his own imagination and understanding, which, as has been previously established, is severely deficient. In other words, when Settle declares that the Hero “hast much to view,” it is not a remark on what the Hero himself must see, but on what other viewers (i.e. readers) will be able to see in the Hero. Book III, therefore, ought to be read as a vision of how a fool comprehends (or more accurately, fails to comprehend) the world around him. This also helps explain the confusion of *fatum* and *providentia* under the title of “fate.” Pope is presenting us with the vision of a man who regards his own poor, fickle judgment as the decisive measure of things, allowing us to see precisely how it is disordered. As will now be demonstrated, this “fool’s-view” is specifically an anti-Boethian vision of reality.

The first point on which Tibbald/Cibber’s vision stands in direct contrast to the Boethian understanding is in his assessment of the vastness of Dulness’s reign. It may be true that the Empire of Dulness extends to include every nation and people on the surface of the earth, yet if

Lady Philosophy were to look upon it, she would think it laughably small. In II.pr7 (previously discussed in the context of the noise-making contest), she remarks that when considered in contrast to the extent of the universe, the earth might be considered to take up no space at all, and of this miniscule point, only a quarter is inhabited by men (II.pr7, 217). Although Settle might confidently proclaim “How little, mark! That portion of the ball, / Where, faint at best, the beams of Science fall” (III.83-84), Lady Philosophy would not lose her self-composure, knowing that the vast intelligence ingrained in the governance of the cosmos dwarfs any and all of the follies of men.

Of course, the dunces make their assault not merely within the human domain, but upon the natural order as well. Perhaps no moment in the entire *Dunciad* is so blatantly contrary to the Boethian worldview as Tibbald/Cibber’s vision of the upheaval of nature.

Thence a new world, to Nature's laws unknown,
Breaks out refulgent, with a Heav'n its own:
Another Cynthia her new journey runs,
And other planets circle other suns.
The forests dance, the rivers upward rise,
Whales sport in woods, and dolphins in the skies:
And last, to give the whole creation grace,
Lo! one vast egg produces human race (III.241-248).

This image of the laws of nature thrown into total disarray almost seems designed to directly parody Boethius’s own verses on the intrinsic order of the cosmos, such as I.met6.

When heavy Cancer burns
Under the rays of the sun,
He who then sows his seed
In unreceiving furrows
Must, cheated of grain, go look
For acorns under oak trees.
Never would you seek in reddening woods
To gather violets,
When grasses shake their rustling spears
Under the fierce north winds.
Nor if you want full grapes would you greedily seek

To prune the vine in spring:
 Bacchus confers his gifts
 In autumn rather.
 God marks out the seasons
 Each for its proper duty;
 Nor does he suffer the order he has fixed
 To be disturbed.
 So, whatever deserts that order
 Rushing headlong
 Comes to no happy ending (I.met6, 165-167).

This emphasis on God's perfect orchestration of the universe and the consistency of natural laws can also be found in II.met8, III.met8, IV.met5, and IV.met6. Yet we must recall that under the proposed lens, this "victory" of the dunces over nature is not a vision of what shall be accomplished, but rather an exposition of the manner in which dunces encounter the world. As the passage quoted above makes plain, those who do not observe and respect the intrinsic order of the cosmos are not only offensive to the wisdom and justice of God but are also self-defeating in their endeavors. To the extent that the dunces are "victorious" over nature, so much do they frustrate their own enterprises.

This failure to achieve what they seek, which Pope treated at greater length in the Heroic Games of Book II, is briefly recapitulated in the Hero's vision of the bathetic "grandeur" of the dunces who shall adorn his reign. Although described by Settle in praiseworthy language, the overarching theme between the images of the dunces-to-come is discontentment, strife, and sadness. Ward's alcoholism, Roome's "funereal frown," Goode's "sneer," Dennis and Gildon's "ill-starr'd rage," and Wormius's "sober face," betray the realities behind Settle's gilded laudations (III.145; 152; 153; 173-174; 186). Tibbald/Cibber, however, not merely being a dunce but also a anti-Boethian, cannot observe how such men are punished by their own failures and vices, and thus maintains the view that such states and circumstances would be desirable. Lady Philosophy, in contrast, assures her patient that evil men endure the worst punishments by

dwelling in their vices, refusing to participate in the virtues which would bring them true happiness and satisfaction (IV.pr2, 321).

If the cultural and natural spheres were insufficient grounds for the dunces to wreak ignorant violence, Pope also presents their perverted view of the divine realm in a parody of *The Consolation's* theodicy:

'T is yours a Bacon or a Locke to blame,
A Newton's genius, or a Milton's flame:
But, oh! with One, immortal One, dispense,
The source of Newton's light, of Bacon's sense.
Content, each emanation of his fires
That beams on earth, each virtue he inspires,
Each art he prompts, each charm he can create,
Whate'er he gives, are giv'n for you to hate.
Persist, by all divine in Man unaw'd,
But, 'Learn, ye Dunces! not to scorn your God.' (III.215-224)

In the philosophical view of the dunces, the existence of luminaries such as Bacon, Locke, Newton, and Milton represent disruptions to the divinely ordained disorder which is destined to overwhelm the world. Just as the existence of evil upsets Boethius's understanding of the universe, so too does the existence of such geniuses pose a serious threat to the metaphysical framework of a cosmos supposedly governed by Dulness. The answer offered by Settle — that such men and their works exist so that the dunces might have material on which to exercise their idiocy — is strongly reminiscent of Lady Philosophy's suggestion that even ill-fortune works not only for the reformation of the wicked, but for the benefit and strengthening of the virtuous (IV.pr6, 367-371).

This passage is famously followed by the narrator's remark that "Thus he, for then a ray of Reason stole / Half thro' the solid darkness of his soul" (III.225-226). Although this couplet might be sufficiently explained as a commonplace assertion of the wisdom of piety and reverence toward the Christian God, a Boethian reader might further observe that the

aforementioned advice can be considered half-reasonable in that the dunces are advised to treat blessings and misfortunes (as they appear in their distorted view) as like gifts of providence issued for their benefit. To enact this advice would amount to something like the detachment from fortune advised by *The Consolation*, in which one recognizes that there really is no such thing as “bad fortune,” but only occasions for greater good. In other words, the dunces are being encouraged to practice a specifically Boethian virtue, albeit toward a perverted end. This stands in contrast to other inversions of the Boethian schema that appear in the Hero’s vision, which are more directly opposed to their classical counterparts.

Nonetheless, the dunces do not receive the wisdom implied in Settle’s admonishment, including Settle himself. As Pope remarks in the Argument to Book III, Settle is unable to fully accept that his own accomplishments are to prove mere types of Tibbald/Cibber’s reign, especially in light of the change in fortune which marked the latter part of his life (III.arg). Yet from a Boethian perspective, Settle’s misfortunes may be the very reason that he is unfit to be the predestined king of the dunces, and what is more, Settle seems to implicitly recognize this. As Lady Philosophy observes, so-called “evil fortune” is actually more beneficial to mankind than “good fortune,” because it teaches men not to put their hopes in her ever-turning wheel (II.pr8, 225). Settle, a dunce of high esteem and position “reduc’d at last to hiss in [his] own dragon,” has seen too much adversity to be adequately preserved in stupidity, which would help explain why he is the most active of the characters in the poem, having more speaking parts than even the Hero himself. In his prayer that Tibbald/Cibber should be spared from misfortune in order to remain dull, Settle indirectly acknowledges that suffering and adversity degrade Dulness’s influence on the human soul.

Avert it Heav’n! that thou, my Cibber, e’er
Shoulds’t wag a serpent-tail in Smithfield fair!

[...]
 Happier thy fortunes! like a rolling stone,
 Thy giddy dulness still shall lumber on,
 Safe in its heaviness, shall never stray,
 But lick up ev'ry blockhead in the way (III.287-288; 293-296).

Before 1743, the problem of the Ivory Gate read in a Boethian framework would have resolved as such: Although it is true that there is real cultural, political, and social decline in the world, Tibbald's vision is indicative not of the present or future reality in its fullness, but of how fools perceive that decline, unaware of the greater providence of God in all things which works for the benefit of the just. With the addition of the Fourth Book to *The Dunciad*, however, this resolution seems muddled. Cibber's vision ostensibly ends at the conclusion of Book III, and as he is seen reclining on the lap of Dulness, either still dreaming or sunk into a deeper sleep, the events of Book IV would appear to occur beyond the bounds of the fallacious vision of Book III. However, merely because the vision is over, one should not assume that its wisdom no longer holds. The reasonable thing to assume is that, having been warned that only fools will understand Dulness's conquest as complete and entire, we should now be prepared to seek evidence that is not, in fact, complete and entire.

The optimal course to pursue at this juncture would be to examine how *The Consolation* informs Book IV of *The Dunciad*, hopefully confirming the above hypothesis that Book IV contains further hints of a fool's vision of a disordered cosmos when compared against a Boethian perspective. However, the constraints of this essay preclude that investigation at this time. My occasional tangential observations on Book IV will hopefully provide some starting points for future investigations, and one may even speculate that as the First Book of *The Dunciad* draws chiefly from first and second parts of *The Consolation*, the Second Book mostly from the third part, and the Third book primarily from the fourth part, that the final parts of each

work should have the most bearing on each other. It may even prove that the disjunction of Book IV of *The Dunciad* with the earlier parts of the work is thematically appropriate in light of the influence of *The Consolation*, for the final part of Boethius's work begins by explicitly acknowledging itself to be a digression from the earlier conversation (V.pr1, 385). If this is true, it might also explain why *The Dunciad* was not originally composed with a book corresponding to the fifth part of *The Consolation*; the final portion was not, in the late 1720s, relevant for Pope's purposes, and only later did he conceive of how to integrate it into the larger whole.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The above is speculation, of course, as is nearly all of the preceding argument. However, I not only believe that the quantity of the collected evidence makes a compelling case in the arguments's favor, but that the explanatory power of the hypothesis is simultaneously so extensive and so parsimonious that its admission greatly increases the pleasure a reader might derive from the work. In addition to all that has been said, the Boethian Hypothesis further resolves what Dennis Todd refers to as "The Problem of Power" in *The Dunciad*:

"The problematic issue in the *Dunciad* is the question of power. The Dunces are said to be powerful enough to destroy civilization; more often than not, they are shown to be impotent, their acts trivial, themselves beneath contempt." (Todd 1982, 178)

This paradox has largely divided critics into two camps regarding the gravity of *The Dunciad*: those who prefer a tragic reading tend to emphasize the demonic images the dunces invoke and the cataclysm which concludes the mock-epic, while those who argue for a comic reading point out how consistently self-defeating the dunces are (Siebert 1976, 212). Yet in a Boethian reading, such tendencies are not only reconcilable, but their conjunction is expected. It is precisely those most embroiled in evil and sin who are the most powerless, as they have the least ability to obtain true happiness. By following Boethius, Pope is able to philosophically make

“Tragedy and Comedy embrace,” dwelling seriously on the problem of evil while simultaneously regarding the whole matter as comically and cosmically inconsequential.

As an aside and a spur to future research, this investigation has not only neglected to evaluate the relationship of Book IV of *The Dunciad* to *The Consolation*, but has also only occasionally considered Pope’s many footnotes, appendices, letters, and other materials without which *The Dunciad* is incomplete. Here Chaucer’s translation again becomes specifically relevant, as his *Boece* includes several glosses not present in the Latin, clearly demarcated in the text yet also seamless with Boethius’s content. Practically, this causes the reader to encounter both Chaucer’s and Boethius’s voices in a temporally congruent stream, in contrast to the jumbled interruptions characteristic of the footnotes to *The Dunciad*. Whether or not this alternative method of critical notation had any influence on Pope’s opinions on the editorial practice of his day has yet to be determined, and may prove fertile ground for a more subtle scholar than me.

Finally, if it is granted that both *An Essay on Man* and *The Dunciad* were significantly influenced by Boethius, little stands in the way of hunting for the influence of *The Consolation* throughout Pope’s entire corpus. It is to be hoped that such discoveries will significantly aid in interpreting Pope’s work, but the task is clearly too momentous for any one individual to undertake alone, and certainly too great for the constraints of this essay. Faced with the prospect of sifting through such a mass of material, it seems fitting to conclude this discussion where it began: with a young poet’s translation of an ancient philosopher who was himself seeking clarity in the dark.

Oh quicken this dull mass of mortal clay
Shine through the soul, and drive its clouds away!
For thou art Light. In thee the righteous find
Calm rest, and soft serenity of mind
(*Poems* 1963, pg. 115, ll.3-4; 7-8).

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