

## The Contested Charm of *Dunciad Minor* by A. D. Hope

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### Abstract

How literature is made from literature, what kind of *procédés* are used in expressing or covering a text with the fabric of quotations in it, how a meta-text regulates the reception of the original text and to what degree it is part of the latter, how a palimpsestic superscription unveils the reading and the understanding of tradition? All these questions pertaining to intertextuality (e. g. citations, allusions, parody, literary travesty, pastiche, etc) are addressed in the article. This is not done purely theoretically, but is applied in the examination of literary affiliations between two poets and their satirical works, the English Augustan poet of the 18th century Alexander Pope and a major twentieth-century Australian Augustan poet A. D. Hope.

**Keywords:** intertextuality, Alexander Pope, A. D. Hope, Australian poetry, English 18th century poetry

Two verse satires are contrasted here, written more than two hundred years apart. The analysis employs intertextual reading strategies in relation to Alexander Pope's mock-epic *The Dunciad* (1728, 1742), which serves as a pre-text, and A. D. Hope's *Dunciad Minor* (1950, 1970) that represents a meta-text. Intertextual phenomena cannot be viewed solely from the point of view of chronologically earlier texts (e. g. *The Dunciad*), which are (often) an active impetus for later, accommodating works (in this case *Dunciad Minor*). On the contrary, particularly interesting are the affiliating strategies and the procedures of accommodation of the secondary text that somewhat adapts and changes the original's signifying literary material and codes, thus changing also its role and significance and ultimately emerging as a new, original text.

Alexander Pope (1688-1744) was a master of the heroic couplet, which he used to satiric and philosophical ends and one of the main representatives of the Augustan age in Great Britain as a central figure in the Neoclassical movement of the early 18th century. His mock epic *The Rape of the Lock* (1714) derides elite society, while *An Essay on Criticism* (1711) and *An Essay on Man* (1733-34) articulate many of the central ideas of 18th-century aesthetic and moral philosophy. Pope was known for his involvement in public feuds with the (hack) writers and publishers of the low-end Grub Street in London, which led him to write *The Dunciad* (1728), a powerful satirical criticism of what he saw as an English cultural decline.

On the other hand, a powerful sign of the Australian poet A. D. Hope's (1907-2000) unabashed admiration of the neo-classical poetic ideal, notwithstanding his strong Romantic streak, is the satirical work *Dunciad Minor* (Hope 1970), directly modelled on Pope's original text. Its prose summary can be found in Hope's programmatic essay "Literature Versus the Universities," published in his book of criticism *The Cave and the Spring: Essays on Poetry* (Hope 1965). Exaggerated assertions of Hope's exclusive dependence on the English neo-classical Augustan tradition are, however, misplaced, despite his clear strong literary interest in the 18th century poets. A. D. Hope's satirical pieces, to be sure, are usually not directed against specific individuals or contemporary events. *Dunciad Minor* is an exception to the rule, insofar as it begins as a sharp attack on the then influential literary critic and Melbourne school teacher Arthur A. Phillips (1900-1985), but later takes on a more general significance, ridiculing the entire academic literary criticism principle *sui generis*. It can be argued that Hope's satire overtly and deliberately follows the pattern that had been set by Pope in his famous mock-epic verse satire *The Dunciad* first published in 1728 (Pope).

It should be pointed out from the outset that it is ironical that Hope, an influential Australian poet and critic, should, in some way or other, draw inspiration from Pope's satire, which in its turn mocks the then literary life in London and

England, namely the decline of its intellectual values and art, employing most of Pope's poetic "machinery". For A. D. Hope, to be sure, values most highly the traditional, Augustan characteristics of poetry. However, in this satire he, with great intellectual wit and gusto, attacks the "exaggerated" increase of literary criticism in English and its influence. In other words, he aims at the academic „sterility“ of the post-World War Two era, as embodied in the critical contentions of A. A. Phillips (Arthur Angell Phillips).

For Hope himself is an active literary persona, as well as an important literary critic. He knows both worlds well, because he is an integral part of them. Hence, his condition somewhat sets him asunder, for he makes fun of himself, of his *alter ego*. He mocks, not his poetic vocation, but rather his professional career as a university teacher and an influential literary critic. The conflict between the "academic" and the "creative" literary principle, in his view, is deftly depicted in the form of the attack on, in his view, irrational contemporary academic criticism and its pedantic pettishness, as well as self-projection.

It is noteworthy in this regard to examine Hope's Preface to the verse satire.

After pointing out what he considers the besetting sin of all academic critics – that they regard themselves as "judges standing above the storm," he continues:

Having spent most of my life in this academic pursuit, I suppose in the last resort my poem is the protest of a poet against the arrogance of the professor who shares his body. (Hope 1970, Preface x)

Like any satire, Hope's *Dunciad Minor* too, achieves its paradoxical effect of ridicule through the emergence of a sort of "humbleness" on the part of the reader, who is supposed to come to terms with and to consequently accept the human (and possibly his or her own) limitations. The poet bitterly describes the reasons for his decision:

If I had any choice I should not be a professor but a poet  
But the damn truth is that if I tried to earn my living at poetry ...  
should sumolv starve to death there is something uncommonly odd about a world in which thousands of academic persons are able to make more or less comfortable livings out of unsaleable verse. (Hope 1952, 3)

In the Preface to his verse satire A. D. Hope gives an exhaustive account of the cause which gave rise to *Dunciad Minor*, of its genesis and intentions. Both Hope and A. A. Phillips (in the text appearing as Ambrose Philips), in 1950 took part in literary talks on the Australian radio, entitled "Standard Works I'd Like to Burn." A number of other well-known literary critics were also invited to express their opinions. A. A. Phillips was then known as an outstanding

teacher of English literature at Wesley College in Melbourne, while A. D. Hope lectured at the University of Melbourne. Hope chose Matthew Arnold as his butt, Phillips, on the other hand, the works of Alexander Pope as the Object of his ridicule, particularly certain passages from Pope's "An Essay on Man". Since Hope regards Pope as one of the greatest English poets, his "blood very naturally began to boil," as he writes, especially after hearing the opening passages describe Pope as:

an industrious enough craftsman, if not always a very good one, who chose to earn his living in one of the only ways open to an educated English century ... a moderately skilful purveyor of Catholic in the early eighteenth spite and platitudes.... (Hope, 1970, Preface, v)

Indignant, Hope immediately sent to Phillips by mail the following couplet.

Phillips, I heard you talk on Pope tonight,  
O that *The Dunciad* were again to write! (Preface, vi)

A jeering reply brought the final decision. Hope further admits in the Preface that he had long felt the desire to try his hand at the art of mock-epic. And so he embarked on the forbidding project. The four books of the work, originally titled *Dunciad Minimus*, published in the *University of Melbourne Magazine* in 1950, were later revised by the author, because the satire was primarily directed to answer the attack on Pope and was mainly concerned with Phillips as a critic of Pope. It seems that Hope still did not want to go too far in his ridicule of Phillips, because, he admits, he generally appreciated him as a critic. Hope stresses that he added the two books of Funeral Games, published as *Dunciad Minor* in 1970 together with the earlier written books from 1950, in order to turn the main attack against certain famous literary critics of our time. Their influence on literature has been, in his view, pernicious indeed (Preface, viii).

To be sure, the nature of a mock-epic as a variant of satire is not essentially the holding of individual persons up to ridicule, but aiming at ideas and various theories. Because of its comic and narrative mode, however, it has to make its point through persons and their actions by exaggeration and burlesque. Hope achieved all that, and more. It is appropriate to give a short outline of A. A. Phillips's critical standpoints (1901-1986) in order to be able to understand Hope's attack on him. Phillips was one of the central figures of the "nationalist" tradition in contemporary twentieth-century Australian literary Criticism. His essay "Provincialism and Australian Culture" (Phillips 1958) is indicative and epitomizes the aspirations of this tradition/school. In it he set up an opposition

between the "metropolitan" centres of culture and "provincial" communities, and furthermore asserted:

... I am advocating the acceptance of the provincial status  
typical gadfly statement, aimed at stinging orthodox notions of the necessary  
superiority of metropolitan culture. (qtd in Bennett 39)

Arthur A. Phillips was a teacher by profession and conveyed his interest in English literature to the generations of schoolboys at Wesley College Melbourne. Schoolmastering was Phillips's prime activity, and much of his early published work consisted of anthologies and textbooks. His 1932 anthology with Ian Maxwell, *In Fealty to Apollo*, was the first that added Australian verse to the standard English poetry selections. When Clem Christesen arrived from Brisbane in 1945, bringing *Meanjin* with him, Phillips helped to give the magazine a distinctive Australian voice. The short essay was his *métier*: erudite, terse, and enlivened by a wry wit. Over the years *Meanjin* published most of his important pieces, including "The Cultural Cringe" (1950), a term which was quickly taken to summarise Australian deference to English taste. Literary criticism, however, remained incidental to his teaching. He also reviewed new books in newspapers and for the Australian Broadcasting Commission. *The Australian Tradition*, Phillips's first published collection, was widely acclaimed when it appeared in 1958. "I was deliberately flying a skull-and-crossbones", he said of the title, challenging the view that no such heritage existed. In 1970 his monograph on Henry Lawson appeared—an author for whom he held no particular esteem, but whom he saw, along with Joseph Furphy, as best expressing a distinctively Australian democratic, egalitarian, even proletarian perspective. According to John McLaren (McLaren 23-4), his essay "Three Schoolmasters" is both a notable piece of autobiography, and the record of his own career as a teacher. It is also significant that Phillips always worked on the margin of "professional" literary activity in Australia, but he was published and broadcast as a freelance critic, receiving some academic recognition only after his retirement. Hope, to his satirical ends, has taken full advantage of his position as an "outsider", although he retained enough respect for Phillips as a critic, apart from his (to Hope's mind) unjustified sharp attack on Pope.

The main fabula of A. D. Hope's *Dunciad Minor* is in the desire of Arthur Angell Phillips (also called Great Arthur) to succeed Ambrose Philips at the throne of Dullness, which is in Pope's *The Dunciad* occupied by the poet-laureate Colley Cibber. Phillip's request is considered by the "immortals" Pope, Swift and a few other literati. Phillips's success depends largely on his capacity to prove he is dull enough that he deserves mentioning in *The Dunciad*. Since he is inspired by the

Goddess Dullness herself, he succeeds and is granted the right to ascend the throne. Before that, however, the Goddess decides that Funeral Games be held in his honour at which his successor shall be chosen. These "games" were, as we have already pointed out, added by Hope later in books IV and V. Among the main figures of the critics attacked can be found, for example, G. W. Knight, F. R. Leavis (Leavisites are under attack here), R. P. Blackmur, W. Empson, D. Daiches, etc., who in turn all express their claims to the throne of Dullness. The abstract notion of "Pure Criticism" finally becomes Phillips's heir-apparent. The following lines are indicative enough of Hope's bitter scorn for the academically sterile modern critical stance:

Pure criticism triumphs over all  
Without resort to Raw Material.  
The last Age, primitive although it was  
Produced Pure Poetry, eschewed the dross  
Of subject, narrative, connective themes;  
Now ours at last evolves the Dream of Dreams:  
Pure Criticism, without thought or fuss;  
Pure Theory formed, with nothing to discuss! (Hope 1970, 76)

Comparing these events with Alexander Pope's satire, it can first be noticed that in Book I the poet Bayes is chosen by the Goddess Dullness as her *poeta laureatus*, Book II brings the depiction of the ancient Greek Olympic Games (like Hope's Funeral Games), and in Book III the poet falls asleep in the lap of Dullness, who has visions of her future "empire." These are only realized in the final Book IV. Pope also uses Dunce (a jester/fool) as the embodiment of Foolishness and four guardian Virtues: Fortitude, Temperance, Prudence and Justice:

Still Dunce the second reigns like Dunce the first;  
Say how the goodness made Britannia sleep, ..  
Thou Cibber! thou, his laurel shalt support,  
Folly, my son, has still a friend at court. (Pope 330)

Pope attacks everyone in a row, regardless of literary or critical chronology: Cowley, Wycherley, Fletcher, Shakespeare, Congreve, Addison, Milton, etc. Book IV is the most biting of all. It shows a contemplation of the vision and prophecies expressed in the preceding book. It shows the Goddess Dullness in all her majesty, coming to destroy art, science and order in general. The first to speak in Book IV are the "Geniuses of the Schools" (in Hope's case literary critics). They try to assure the grateful Goddess of their support in her advancement. Then the universities appear, confirming that the method of "keeping the real knowledge of

words from the young people“ shall be observed in education too. The restoration of Night and Chaos conclude the poem with grim echoes of Milton:

Indulge, dread Chaos, and eternal Night!  
Of darkness visible so much be lent. ...  
Tyrant supreme! shall three estates command  
And make one mighty Dunciad of the Land! (Pope 373, 391)

The ending of Hope's *Dunciad Minor* is decidedly less majestic. Moreover, it does not have the same Popean undertone of tragic horror, which probably was not Hope's intention in the first place.

Looking at *Dunciad Minor*, one cannot but first note that Hope's satire is more (structurally) self-contained than Pope's. It is also more self-explanatory, since the helpful footnotes form an integral part of the humorous and comic effects. Pope uses too many obscure references in which, quite clearly, contemporary readers do not take the slightest interest and his footnotes are far from being helpful to understand them. And, of course, there is a big cultural horizon gap between the twentieth and eighteenth century readers. A. D. Hope's deft usage of the heroic couplet deserves to be praised. Sometimes, even, the idea comes with the rhyme itself. Satire is at its best in Book V, which, unlike Pope's commences with an invocation of the Muse of the Southern Seas (for the Muse, too, according to Hope, has her Antipodes)

Now Muse assist me, aptly to describe  
Mechanic contrasts of the Critic tribe;  
Let me shed light on things both dark and dense  
Yet never move them into common sense. (Hope 1970, 58)

The first one to feel Hope's biting epigrammatic arrows in view of his analysis of *The Tempest* is the famous Shakespearean scholar G. W. Knight, "a double boiler fixed on fiery wheels," who "hisses hysteric or ecstatic squeals:"

Where are the plot, the actor and the stage?  
These are irrelevant, explains the sage;  
Damn action and discourse; the play's no more  
Than drifts of an extended metaphor  
Who think *The Tempest* tells a tale perhaps  
And not a long-drawn metaphor, poor chaps;  
In three Did simple Shakespeare think: "The play's the thing?"  
short hours how could they hope to judge.  
What takes a critic twenty years of drudge? (Hope 1970, 58-9)

It is at this point that F. R. Leavis takes over and cries out in an appropriating and most uncourteous fashion:

What, infringe my patent, thievish swine!  
The "extended metaphor" conceit is mine,  
Mine the "dramatic poem" device, I say,  
By which I demonstrate a play's no play. (Hope 1970, 60)

Further, the "psychoanalytic" critical attitudes become the objective of Hope's ridicule:

Ur-hamlets? Fudge! Old Saxo? Tush and Pish!  
Castration Fantasies, the dark Death Wish,  
Oedipus Complex, narcissistic blocks:  
This Key and this alone his heart unlocks. (Hope 1970, 64)

Shakespearean scholars do not get away with it easily in the satire. A. D. Hope in the following lines masterfully and with great humor directs his satirical attack on them:

Now fetch me Hamlet - handle him with care  
Now press this button and let in your clutch:  
The play which Shakespeare wrote in Double Dutch,  
Which lay dissolved in endless Wilson Knight,  
Behold! Let Freud appear and all is light!  
Was Hamlet mad or indecisive? Come,  
He simply longed to go to bed with Mum;  
And so did Shakespeare:  
"to avoid worse rape."  
He found this mechanism of escape  
Good-night, Sweet Prince; to dream, perchance to skid  
Between your Super-ego and your Id! (Hope 1970, 65)

Hope freely moves back and forth in time in choosing his literary (critical) targets. Among them are, for instance, David Daiches, William Empson, Northrop Frye, R. P. Blackmur, Herbert Read, Christopher Caudwell, Maud Bodkin, and scores of other critics. Occasionally he goes so far as to directly borrow the names of A. Pope's *The Dunciad* in order to establish a greater degree of satirical "inter-textuality" between the two works and a greater emphasis. He uses, for example, Pope's names of Merdament and Cloacina, who are two "nymphs" but whose etymological origin speaks for itself, thereby creating a comic effect in contrast. Pope wrote:



In office here fair Cloacina stands,  
And ministers to Jove with purest hands ... (Pope 331)

Hope, in turn, writes:

An altar of the critic's works she builds  
Which Merdament with bilge-and-bitters gilds;  
Sweet Cloacina lights the sullen flame, ... (Hope 1970, 78)

Apart from literary issues, Hope's *Dunciad Minor* also picks at certain typical Australian features, such as, for example, the importance of horse-racing in Australian everyday life. It describes the inhabitants of New Holland in Book I as Swift's "Yahoos," who are slaves to the horse:

For in the South, beyond the burning line,  
Where Gulliver that much-wrecked mariner  
Described their customs, such as they were,  
And found them, like their manners, somewhat coarse,  
The Yahoos live in slavery to the horse. (Hope 1970, 50)

The readers' enjoyment of the superb comic effects and technical virtuosity of *Dunciad Minor* seems indisputable. Nevertheless, in the first books there is a certain academic aloof "superiority" of A. D. Hope and his Augustan poetic credo (of a critic) over the Romantic principles (of an artist) that he satirizes. Dorothy Green in her review points to the fact that, although ridiculing them, Hope made the same "mistakes" himself, which is in keeping with the already mentioned contention of the author's precarious paradoxical position of a critic and artist in personal. Green writes:

Delightful as these speculations may be in themselves, they provide a particularly clear example of scholarly criticism making use of poetry for its own end. (Green 429)

However, Hope's intentions are perhaps more complex and complicated than they appear, but such complexity is a general problem of satirical works and cannot be the subject of this study. The object of ridicule in Hope's satire *Dunciad Minor*, A. A. Phillips, in his reply to Hope "Popeful Hope" published in *The Bulletin* (December 5, 1970) stresses the fact that his view of modernist critics is close to Hope's, namely that he loathes their pedantries, their "abominable" vocabulary, "with its indigestible lumps of abstract verbiage." However, he concludes by defending himself and saying it is "a pity Hope should have wasted so much ammunition against the invulnerability of one of the Goodies" (Phillips 1970).

The visionary quality of Alexander Pope's satire *The Dunciad* arises from his conception of the desolation of English culture of the period, which saw the triumph of low aesthetic literary standards, corrupt personal ambitions and general deterioration of the mind. In this connection, Hope's often anthologized poem "Australia" that has become something of a myth comes immediately into mind. In the poem he criticizes the Australian cultural scene, but likewise expresses his dissatisfaction with the European "chatter of cultured apes", whereas in Australia "second-hand Europeans pullulate/timidly on the edge of alien shores." However, using a Biblical parallel, he feels that from Australian deserts a new "prophet" and culture may emerge. The effect of his mock-epic satire, in which contemptible objects or persons are endowed with majestic and heroic qualities, is one of a powerful caricature. The wit, subtle humour and the liveliness of his literary allusions make an interesting reading. The satire is certainly underrated within the extant Australian literary criticism and it has remained practically unknown to the general readership. Patrick Deane wrote in his monograph on Hope about the objects of attack in the following manner: "The attack that is mounted has, beyond the person of A. A. Phillips, an unclear object – the assault is dispersed and generalized – and it seems to be waged in the name of nothing so much as a system of exclusively literary or poetic values embodied in the style of the piece" (Deane 145). Kevin Hart believes Hope may have had more propagandistic and political concerns behind writing his satire, however, "when one looks at the objects Hope chooses or commends for satire they turn about to be not as straightforwardly political .... Rather, one finds attacks on contemporary literary criticism, marriage, psychoanalysis, radio, sport, suburban life and tourism" (Hart 51).

In examining the genesis and the critical mixed response to *Dunciad Minor* which has been insufficient and unsatisfactory, we have shown Hope's literary affinities and possible models of literary influence through his attitudes and the treatment of individual literary and cultural figures. In this case, the direct model was Pope's satire *The Dunciad*, with which some parallels were established here: Hope's meta-text is undoubtedly very witty and humorous, but less sharp and direct than Pope's pre-text, because the mock-epic element is more unobtrusive and its subject at times somewhat unclear. This mock-epic satire in the eighteenth-century manner is really a comic burlesque upon the pretentious pedantry of contemporary literary criticism during much of A. D. Hope's lifetime. It was provoked by a contemporary critic's attack on the poetry of Alexander Pope. In his fable, Hope shows the Goddess Dullness urging the critic on to his attack, inspiring him by the promise of elevation to the Throne of Dunces. Many leading critics make an appearance, among them David Daiches, F. R. Leavis and Northrop Frye etc. This polished, entertaining poem attacks the barren "absurdities" of Leavisite criticism

under which literature is, in his (today somewhat dated) view, buried ever deeper, until finally "one vast snore seals the eclipse of mind".

If it were true that from deserts prophets come (cf. Hope's famous poem "Australia"), then Alec Derwent Hope with his poetry, which deals not only with purely Australian issues but with literary, cultural, philosophical and aesthetic considerations of literary art at large, can, indeed, be hailed as a prophet himself.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author acknowledges the financial support from the Slovenian Research Agency (research core funding No. P6-0265).

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### **Kontroverzni šarm satire v verzih satire *Dunciad Minor* A. D. Hopa**

V članku je intertekstualna metoda uporabljena na primeru literarnih povezav med dvema pesnikoma, Angležu Alexandru Popu iz 18. stoletja ter Avstralcu A. D. Hopu iz druge polovice dvajsetega stoletja. Slednji je napisal sodobno verzijo Popove znamenite satire v verzih in jo naslovil *Dunciad Minor* (1970).

**Ključne besede:** intertekstualnost, Alexander Pope, A. D. Hope, avstralska poezija, angleška poezija 18. stoletja