

Critical Ideology: Pope's *Epistle to Burlington*

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Well, it had to happen — Pope has been ‘recuperated’ for the modern reader. The word is not mine but is taken from the most recent general survey of Pope’s work, that of Brean S. Hammond in the Harvester ‘New Readings’ series. Pope, it seems, can be recuperated because he can be shown to have that indispensable requirement for some current criticism — an ideology:

. . . the character of Pope’s ideology is that of a family-based, Christian aristocrat or landed gentleman, implacably opposed to the elite of, as he believed, corrupt financiers, bankers and brokers who governed the country. Pope himself did not experience his ideology *as* an ideology, however.¹

There is an irony in that last sentence which, I think, escapes the writer of it.

As Hammond “reads” it, the *Epistle To Burlington* is to be seen as an early example of the politicization of Pope’s ideology, a preaching of the *via media* in which all extremes are to be eschewed. Through exemplary figures such as Burlington and Lord Bathurst, an ideology of aristocratic restraint is offered for adoption by the British voting public, especially the squirearchy and the lesser landed gentry.

If this is all that current critical approaches can find to say about the poem that is worth saying, I would suggest that such a Procrustean approach does little to illuminate the *poetry* of *To Burlington* and, to a fair extent, falsifies the text.

The matter of *Epistle to Burlington* is drawn from the aesthetics of landscape-gardening and architecture, areas of the Arts in which Pope and Burlington were both practitioners and theoreticians. Before going on to look at the poem a general survey of Pope’s (and to a lesser extent Burlington’s) involvement in painting, landscape, architecture might be useful: to see whether extremes *were* shunned, or whether there was more eclecticism allowed for in their critical taste than

1 Brean S. Hammond, *Pope* (Harvester, Brighton, 1986), p.3.

Hammond's doctrinaire approach necessitates.²

Pope's involvement in landscape-gardening has become one of the commonplaces of English cultural history, and has already been sufficiently recounted in detail in Christopher Hussey's intensive study of early eighteenth-century English gardens, while his close connection with Burlington's designer protégé William Kent has been studied by Margaret Jourdain in her definitive work on Kent.³ It is generally agreed that Pope was one of the earliest movers towards the shaping of 'natural' gardens in contradistinction to the formal Dutch gardens favoured by the previous generation, best exemplified by the gardens laid out for William III at Hampton Court, and the rigidly formal French *tapisserie* effects of le Notre at Versailles. The idea of the 'natural' garden was not unique to Pope, but he was certainly one of the first to promulgate the new theory with his wellknown *Guardian* essay (No. 173, 29 September 1713) and to put it into practice a few years later; in 1719 or in 1720 he began what was to become his lifelong interest, the garden behind his house at Twickenham: 'if it was not the earliest landscape-garden,' writes Hussey 'he was the first of the theorists, with the possible exception of Addison at Bilton, to put these ideas into practice' (p.41).

Pope's *Guardian* essay 'On Gardens,' followed — with an almost fully-formed theory of garden aesthetics — closely (September, 1713) on his apparent recognition (as revealed in the rueful tone of his letters from that period) of his inability to become a serious painter.

It is now another commonplace of cultural history that many English landscape gardens in the 1730s and 1740s strove to imitate the 'amphitheatrical' effects of Claude Lorraine paintings, and that the ideas of Pope and William Kent were greatly responsible for this. But it is probable that for Pope at least there was not only a desire to imitate Claudian effects but also to find in landscape-gardening an outlet for his thwarted desires as a painter.

'All gardening is landscape-painting' observed Pope to Spence in 1734, while looking at the background of a portrait of Inigo Jones, 'just like a landscape hung up'. Discussing his own Twickenham garden

2 This survey is based upon material included in my Ph.D. thesis 'Pope and the Visual Arts' (University of Sydney, 1972), where full documentation may be found. Additional material can be found in Morris R. Brownell, *Alexander Pope and the Arts of Georgian England* (Oxford, 1978). All quotations from Pope's verse are taken from the *Everyman* text, edited by Bonamy Dobrée (London, 1924) unless otherwise noted.

3 Christopher Hussey, *English Gardens and Landscapes 1700-1750* (London, 1967). Margaret Jourdain, *The Work of William Kent* (London, 1948).

with Spence in the summer of 1739, he remarked that 'those clumps of trees are like the groups in pictures', and, of garden-layouts: 'you may distance things by darkening them and by narrowing the plantation more and more towards the end, in the same manner as they do in painting.' If one regards these reports of Spence as representing the correct gist of Pope's remarks, then it is clear that, however much he was interested in it for itself, Pope found landscape-gardening to some extent an outlet for his interest in the visual arts of painting and sculpture for which he lacked the requisite skill.

In each of these remarks the thought moves not only from Nature to Art, but also from art of one kind to art of another, as Pope observes the natural world and sees its pictorial possibilities. A garden is 'just like a picture hung up', and his own, and others he helped to design, were sometimes the canvasses he lacked the technical ability to paint: Nature is manipulated in accordance with a rule from painting, to achieve a sense of depth; painting no longer imitates Nature, nature imitates painting. Pope did not always look at a Claude and see a representation of ideal Nature; he sometimes wanted to look at Nature and see an ideal Claude (painted by Pope).

Nor did this pursuit with Kent of the Claudian ideal, through the landscape-gardens of the 1730s, prevent Pope, late in life, viewing with the highly appreciative eye of the painter the wild Salvatore Rosa landscape of the Avon Gorge near Bristol. It was a scene, he told Martha Blount, which nothing could convey accurately, but a picture:

... a vast Rock of 100 foot high, of red, white, green, blue and yellowish marbles, all blotch'd and variegated strikes you quite in the face, and turning on the left, there opens the River at a vast depth below, winding in and out, and accompanied on both sides with a continued Range of Rocks up to the Clouds, of a hundred Colours, one behind another, and so to the end of the Prospect quite to the sea. but the sea nor the Severn you do not see, the Rocks and Rivers fill the Eye, and terminate the View, much like the broken Scenes behind one another in a Playhouse.⁴

On the sides of these rocks were

Buildings, some white, some red . . . mud with Trees and Shrubs, but much wilder, and huge Shaggy Marbles, some in Points, some in Caverns, hanging all over and under them in a thousand shapes.

The sharp visual perception of geological forms which the description also displays, is related closely to Pope's active improvements in the

4 Pope, *Correspondence*, 5 Vols., ed. George Sherburn (Oxford 1956), IV. 201, (Pope to Martha Blount, 17 November 1739). All further citations will be incorporated into the text.

1740s to his famous grottoes; which, as Marjorie Nicholson observed, 'have been discussed so frequently and competently that it would be a work of supererogation to attempt to repeat much of which has been said.'

It is highly improbable that Pope became acquainted with Burlington before May of 1715. The disparity in their ages would be sufficient to account for this, for Burlington was six years younger than Pope, and was, for example, no more than seventeen when the *Essay on Criticism* was published in 1711, and nineteen when the twenty-five-year-old Pope brought out his *Windsor Forest* two years later; nor is there any mention of Burlington among Pope's circle of friends and patrons at this time. Two months after the publication of *The Rape of the Lock* Burlington set out, on 17 May 1714, on that increasingly indispensable part of every young gentleman's education, the Grand Tour of France and Italy, remaining on the Continent for twelve months, until 30 April 1715.

A skeleton-outline of the tour has been preserved in an account-book detailing the daily expenses of the tour-party.⁵ It shows that while on the Continent Burlington exercised his taste in art by purchasing pictures by artists already fashionable in England, among them Carlo Maratta, Domenichino and Pietro da Cortona. It also shows that at this period of his life he had little or no knowledge of, or interest in, Palladian architecture; his journey from Padua to Venice by boat down the river Brenta, during which he must have passed the great Pisani palace at Stra, the villa Malcontenta, and many others built by Palladio and his followers, was done with rapidity occupying no more than four days.

He arrived in Venice on 1 March 1715, and left on 8 March 1715, for England where he arrived at Dover on 30 April. From this tour it may be deduced that Burlington's interest in the arts at this time was eclectic and conformed to already established conventional tastes in England. Architecture was almost certainly not among his interests, though he purchased pictures and *objets d'art*; and arranged for the lengthy visit of the Baroque sculptor, Giovanni Guelfi. Arrived back in England, the young Burlington, who turned twenty-one in August 1715, began to exercise a general patronage of the arts, taking under his wing the composer Handel, then out of favour in court circles, interesting himself in music generally, and accepting, early in 1716, the dedication of Richard Graham's new and enlarged edition of

5 Preserved in the unpublished Burlington MSS. in the Devonshire collection at Chatsworth.

Dryden's translation of Du Fresnoy's *De Arte Graphica*. Two folios of architectural engravings, Colin Campbell's first volume of *Vitruvius Britannicus* and Giacomo Leoni's *The Architecture of A. Palladio*, which appeared in 1715, seem to have provided the inspiration for Burlington's turning to Palladianism.

The extant correspondence between Pope and Burlington contains many proofs of their sincere friendship and respect for one another's judgement. But by 1717 when the twenty-three-year-old Burlington was making his first forays into Palladianism, the twenty-nine-year-old Pope was already a major poet with his *Works* of 1717; and it is more than probable that at this date at least Pope saw in Burlington an enthusiastic and reasonably knowledgeable patron of the arts rather than an informed mentor or guide.

Pope's strictures on the excessiveness of Vanbrugh's Blenheim Palace in an undatable letter he published in his own *Correspondence* of 1735 (*Corresp.* I, 431) are well known, as is his quoting the Duke of Shrewsbury that Blenheim was 'a great Quarry of Stones above ground'. Much of the animus in the letter however appears to be directed not so much towards the architecture itself as to the Duke and Duchess of Marlborough, for Pope had been a very minor member of the anti-Marlborough party at the time of the Peace of Utrecht, and, in summarizing his impressions of Blenheim he wrote:

I never saw so great a thing with so much littleness in it: I think the Architect built it entirely in compliance to the taste of its owners: for it is the most inhospitable thing imaginable, and the most selfish: it has, like their own hearts, no room for strangers, and no reception for any person of superior quality to themselves.

These remarks are directed not so much at the Baroque exuberance of Vanbrugh's design, as at the characters of the Duke and Duchess themselves.

His censures on Blenheim as a house of 'entries and passages', 'inferior' apartments, and 'common staircases' is in direct contrast to his enthusiasm for the 'Gothick' atmosphere of nearby Stanton Harcourt where he stayed, translating Homer, in 1718. His two almost identical letters to Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and the Duke of Buckingham (*Corresp.* I, 505-11) show a delight in the mediaeval architecture, the jumble of rooms and passages:

You must excuse me if I say nothing of the Front, indeed I don't know which it is. A stranger would be grievously disappointed who endeavour'd to get into this house the right way: One would reasonably expect, after the entry through the Porch, to be let into the Hall; alas nothing less! You find yourself in the

house of office. From the parlour you think to step into the drawing-room, but upon opening the iron-nail'd door, you are convinc'd by a flight of birds about your ears and a cloud of dust in your eyes, that it is the pigeon-house.

After exclaiming over the baronial Hall, 'a true image of ancient hospitality', the stained glass of 'one vast window beautifully darken'd with divers scutcheons of painted glass', the many sets of stairs in unexpected places, and the upstairs rooms 'very long and low, of the exact proportion of a Band-box', the letter to Buckingham continues:

I must needs have tired you by this long description; but what engaged me in it was a generous principle, to preserve the memory of that, which it self must soon fall into dust, nay perhaps part of it before this letter reaches your hands.

The liking for the architecture of the past which he displayed at Stanton Harcourt was still with him in the mid-1720s when he visited Lord Digby's family seat at Sherborne. This Jacobean mansion, Pope told Martha Blount (*Corresp.* II. 236) was 'one of those fine old Seats of which there are Numbers scattered over England'. Moving from the house into the grounds, he praised the 'venerable Ruins' of old Sherborne Castle, demolished in the Civil War, not only as being picturesque but as having a moral significance:

What should induce my Lord D. the rather to cultivate these ruins and do honour to them, is that they do no small honour to his Family; that Castle, which was very ancient, being demolished in the Civil wars after it was nobly defended by one of his Ancestors in the cause of the King. I would sett up at the Entrance of 'em an Obelisk, with an inscription of the Facts which would be a Monument erected to the very Ruins.

This perhaps somewhat romantic reverence for the past was still present in 1739 when he visited the City of Bristol, an 'unpleasant' commercial port, but one in which he found 'a very fine Old Cross of Gothic curious work . . . but spoild with the folly of new gilding it, that takes away the Venerable Antiquity' (*Corresp.* IV. 205).

However much Pope might approve the rules of Palladianism and an ordered diversity in garden-layout in his *Burlington*, it is quite clear that he felt himself perfectly free at all times to admire the different architecture of a 'gothick' ruin, or the wildness of a picturesque landscape.

An inventory of the contents of Pope's house taken, possibly for probate purposes, soon after his death is yet another guide to his taste in the visual arts.⁶ It discloses that Pope's own art-collection in his Twickenham villa contained not less than one hundred and seventy-

6 See *Notes and Queries*, 6th series, V, (1882) 363-65.

one paintings and prints, numerous busts in marble and plaster-of-Paris, as well as seventeen of his own drawings in the garret, tucked away in 'the room next to the leads'. The collection included at least thirty-eight portraits of his friends, his family and himself; a set of seven engravings of the Raphael Cartoons; eight animal-paintings and still-lives in the Dutch manner ('Goose with Gulls', 'Large Flower-piece', 'A Duck piece', 'one small Fruit-piece', etc.); and nine landscapes, two (possibly sketches) of Twickenham and Richmond, but at least one by Peter Tillemans and another a 'Ruin' by John Wootton, while still others are classed as 'fine' or 'small'. In addition there were at least eight pictures whose subject is not identifiable, and there were about sixteen 'heads' and miscellaneous sketches, some of them doubtless Pope's own work. In all, about twenty paintings, apart from the portraits, appear to have been substantial, being labelled 'large' or 'fine'. There were also eighty-five framed prints hanging on the walls, whose subjects are not identified. From the inventory it seems that, apart from the numerous portraits of his friends, his collection of oil-paintings was fairly small and consisted largely of landscapes and still-lives, the less costly kinds of paintings. The more expensive paintings, history-paintings, were probably represented by a considerable number of the eighty-five unnamed prints.

The eclecticism displayed by Pope's collection as far as it can be determined (Dutch-style still-lives, the Raphael Cartoons, a 'prospect' by Tillemans, a classical 'Ruin' by Wootton) is much the same kind of eclecticism displayed by his friends who were collectors. His friend and physician Dr Richard Mead's collection, for example, contained works of both Baroque and classical art in the Italian manner, and Dutch genre-painters: Giulio Romano, Rembrandt, Rubens, Claude, Van Dyke, Holbein, Franz Hals and David Teniers. Even the collection of the Palladian Lord Burlington found room for all classes of painting and most schools.

The contents of Burlington's collection at Chiswick Villa are listed in a contemporary guide-book published by R. & J. Dodsley in 1761. Dodsley lists works at Chiswick by eighty-two painters, more than half of whom are Italian painters of the seventeenth century, and Dutch and Flemish artists painting in the Italian style. They range from the classicism of Domenichino and Andrea Sacchi to the Baroque exuberance of Luca Giordano and Pietro da Cortona. In general, however, this part of Burlington's collection favours the modified Italian Baroque style in which exuberance is moderated and both colour and form play an equal part. Burlington also owned works by a number of English painters and a sprinkling of French and Spanish painters,

notably two portraits by Diego Velasquez. At least fourteen of the painters in Dodsley's list, however, are Dutch and Flemish painters in the native tradition who are represented by genre-scenes, landscapes and church interiors. Burlington's Chiswick collection contained several paintings identifiable as still-lives; at least thirty landscapes (most, though not all, in the tradition of Claude and Poussin); about fourteen genre-paintings of everyday scenes done in the Dutch 'realistic' manner; between thirty and forty portraits, many of them family and friends; and at least fifty History-paintings of subjects drawn from Classical mythology and the Bible.

It seems clear that, though his ideas on architecture were ultimately concentrated exclusively on one particular style, the Palladian, in paintings at least Burlington had a wide, rather than narrow, range of interest, covering not only Italian Baroque and Classical art, but Dutch realism as well. Nor, as a collector of paintings, was he altogether an arbiter of taste — at least twenty-five percent, by number, of the paintings in his Chiswick collection were by artists whose work was being imported, and presumably selling well, in 1711.⁷

Pope's correspondence and general conversation contain many direct references to painters, his poetry contains relatively few. In his poetry he mentions only sixteen painters and architects of artistic significance or historical importance, contemporaries excepted. Two painters (Verrio, La Guerre) and four architects (Le Notre, Palladio, Vitruvius, Inigo Jones) are named in *Epistle to Burlington*; six painters (Annibale Carracci, Guido Reni, Correggio, Paulo Veronese, Raphael and Titian) are named in *Epistle to Mr Jervas*; two painters (Lely and Kneller) and the architect-sculptor Bernini are named in *To Augustus*. The architect Christopher Wren is named once in *The Dunciad*, as is Inigo Jones. Kneller is named again in the minor *Epitaph on Sir Godfrey Kneller*. Raphael is also named once in *Essay on Criticism*, and Verrio is named in *Windsor Forest*.

The use made of these names in Pope's verse varies. One expects to find the names of Jones, Vitruvius, Palladio, those cornerstones of Palladianism, in *Epistle to Burlington*, but it is at first odd to find there that of Le Notre (l.45) apparently used as a standard of excellence; 'the designer of the best Gardens of France' Pope called him, in a footnote to this line. Le Notre's garden-style, according to Christopher Hussey (p.22), was the fullest and grandest expression of Baroque style, a 'magnificent unified scene extending as far as the eye could see, . . . stylised . . . , its parts clearly defined'. Coloured earths and bedded flowers were worked into *parterres de broderie*, large

7 See advertisement in *The Spectator*, 14 May 1711.

reflecting-pools and *jets d'eau* were conceived architecturally, while the parts of the garden 'must be massively geometrical; the trees of avenues and alleys pleached to appear green walls, the groves or bosquets similary trimmed, hedged or trellised to be outwardly architectural forms'. The rules for gardening put forward in this description are in almost direct opposition to those which Pope puts forward as the 'correct' rules for gardening in *Epistle to Burlington* (ll. 57-70) and Hussey's description approximates very closely to the relevant parts of the lines on 'Timon's Villa' (ll. 99-126). Grand though they might be, Le Notre's gardens lack 'sense, of ev'ry Art the Soul', and 'Without it, [sense] proud Versailles! thy glory falls' (ll. 65, 71). It is clear that Pope had a more than passing knowledge and understanding of Le Notre's theories and practice, and that in *Epistle to Burlington* his name carries every bit as much significance as those of Jones, Palladio and Vitruvius. Pope makes slighter use of Bernini and Kneller in *To Augustus* (ll. 381-2), but they are there used as standards of real excellence, as the greatest possible contrast to Blackmore and Quarles. Bernini's excellence was apparently sufficiently high in Pope's estimation for him to make 'a bust of *Homer* by Bernini' one of the few named bequests of special significance in his will. Pope would have been familiar with the equestrian portrait of William III by Kneller (now at Hampton Court) painted in 1701, and in *To Augustus* he specifically mentions the Baroque quality of movement (for which Bernini was renowned) with which Kneller endowed the painting and the king 'graceful on the *bounding* steed'.

Pope's one reference to Sir Christopher Wren (*Dunciad*, III, 1.329: 'Where Wren with sorrow to the grave descends') is rather puzzling. In elevating Wren as a figure almost of tragedy and decrying his supplanter Benson so strongly, Pope seems to be taking an anti-Palladian, even to some extent an anti-Burlingtonian, line. He can scarcely have been unaware that Wren's deposition from public office in 1718 was more than partly due to the influence of that circle of young Whigs who opposed Wren's Baroque style and favoured Palladianism — a circle in which the young Lord Burlington was one of the prime movers. Nor could Pope have forgotten that Benson espoused Palladianism so strongly that, in the opinion of a recent architectural historian John Summerson, Benson, together with Colin Campbell and the translator of Palladio, Nicholas Dubois, 'initiated both the Palladian movement and its counterpart, the Inigo Jones revival'.

The only other poem in which Pope mentions specific painters at any length is his *Epistle to Mr Jervas* (ll. 35-38). To the extent that these couplets show an informed choice, they show Pope admiring

both painters noted for their formal design and painters noted, even renowned, for their colouring. To some extent, however, Pope is re-expressing opinions ready-made in Du Fresnoy's 'Judgement' which is attached to his poem *De Arte Graphica*, and is included in Dryden's translation of the work. The only entirely private reference in Pope's couplets is to Jervas's particular preference for the work of Guido Reni, a painter whose sentimental 'heads' Jervas was fond of copying.

In choosing these particular painters for note Pope reflects very much common and conventional opinion, an opinion ready to approve both the 'painterly' qualities of Correggio and Titian, and the 'sculptural' formal qualities of Raphael and Carracci — ready to approve both colour and form.

Pope's interest broadened into the areas of architecture and landscape-gardening partly through friendships with Burlington and his protégé William Kent; but the influence on Pope of Burlington, whose own influence on English architecture did not reach maturity until the late 1720s, should not be exaggerated.

Pope's own taste in the visual arts was fairly eclectic. He admired not only the classical landscape of Wootton, but the naturalistic landscape of Tillemans, 'the two best landscape-painters in England', as he advised Spence; the Claude-like repose of the landscape gardens of Kent at Stowe and Rousham and the wild irregularity of the Avon gorge near Bristol. His taste in architecture could encompass both the Palladian regularity of Lord Burlington's Chiswick Villa and Marble Hill, and the older, more 'Gothick' style of Sherborne and the rambling Stanton Harcourt; while approving Burlington and Inigo Jones, he could also appreciate Wren. In painting he approved both colour and design, the formal qualities of Raphael and the freedom of Pietro da Cortona.

Hammond's conclusion to his discussion of *Epistle to Burlington* 'places' it entirely in a context of contemporary politics:

As the poem progresses, these principles of moderation and the harmonious integration of opposites, so disastrously breached at Timon's villa, become the cornerstones of patriotism and Britishness. They are possessed by the members of the old aristocracy . . . They are also possessed by the country squire who tends his family's acres, and whose vote Bolingbroke's political writings were intended to catch. (p.57)

If this was all that could be said about the poem, if the *poetry* is merely the easily-paraphrasable ideology enunciated, then I would suggest that the poetry of Pope can have little or no interest for the modern reader — or any reader who seeks pleasure in a poem. It reduces the

reader's experience of that poetry to the rote-learning and recognition of the content of those many, often pedantic, footnotes that hang beneath Pope's printed text like the cobwebs which festoon the rafters of an abandoned building.

Pope was perfectly aware that for verse to be social satire at all it must contain an ideology; the debating stance of the *persona* in any of his satiric poems is always that of a denier of the validity of alternative views, and an equation of ideology with 'Nature' ('Whatever is, is right'). He was also aware that the ideologue and the writer/poet have separate duties to perform in the creation of poetry:

True Wit is Nature to advantage dress'd;
 What oft was thought, but ne'er so well express'd.
 (*E. on C.*, 297-8)

Here Pope draws attention to 'expression' as a necessary component of 'True wit', to the enjoyment of which the *Essay on Criticism* has already directed the judicious reader:

A perfect judge will read each work of wit
 With the same spirit that its author writ:
 Survey the WHOLE, nor seek slight faults to find
 Where Nature moves, and rapture warms the mind,
 Nor lose, for that malignant dull delight,
 The generous pleasure to be charmed with wit. (ll. 233-8)

But where, the reader may ask, is the real *poetry*? The *Essay* has already suggested a partial answer:

Some beauties yet no precepts can declare,
 For there's a happiness as well as care.
 Music resembles poetry, in each
 Are nameless graces which no methods teach,
 And which a master-hand alone can reach.
 If, where the rules not far enough extend,
 (Since rules were made but to promote their end)
 Some lucky licence answer to the full
 The intent proposed, that licence is a rule.
 Thus Pegasus, a nearer way to take
 May boldly deviate from the common track.
 Great wits may sometimes gloriously offend,
 And rise to faults true critics dare not mend;
 From vulgar bounds with brave disorder part,
 And snatch a grace beyond the reach of art. (ll. 141-55)

We may be far from perfect judgement, nor recognise a 'grace beyond the reach of art' when we see one, but we might approach Pope's poetry with the desire to find enjoyment in it, perfecting one and learning

to discern the other. In doing so we are more likely to read it in the spirit in which it was written; in doing so in *Epistle to Burlington*, we may find a few surprises and an ideology more dynamic than the 'balance of opposites' and the aridities of Tory politics that Hammond's treatment would offer.

Despite its later imposed and somewhat pompous title *Moral Essay IV*, the *Epistle to Burlington* is not a formal essay; in general form and tone it is a familiar epistle, its tone dictated by the dramatic situation implied by the letter form. A letter implies both a writer and a receiver, and it is the relationship between these that determines content and form, especially if both writer and receiver are given artistic and fictional form for dramatic and literary purposes. Thus in the poem we find Burlington the austere, wealthy and influential aristocrat and aesthete; and his correspondent Pope, the acclaimed poet and writer on aesthetics, the *doyen* of the contemporary literary world, sophisticated and used to mixing in the best society. It is the tensions between all these variables, the consonances and clashes, that create the exciting thing which is the *poetry* of Pope; the general qualities of *Epistle to Burlington* are those that such personalities would engender: it is stylish, witty, apt, somewhat discursive, elegant, and at times both deferential and laudatory.

Ignoring, as we well may, the desiccative anatomizing of the introductory 'argument', we can note that the poem falls loosely into four parts, with alternating 'bad' and 'good' taste and practice being exhibited and commented on. Lines 1-38 exhibit numerous examples of bad or misplaced taste in the visual arts generally, and move gradually to those areas in which Pope and Burlington were particularly interested — architecture and landscape gardening; lines 39-98, while they pay some attention to architecture, concentrate on landscaping, setting out first of all the ideal of practice (ll. 39-70) and following this with criticism of inappropriate practice or, since it takes *time* for a landscape to perfect itself, of impatience and changeability. Lines 99-176, the 'Timon's villa' passage, are an extended exposition of bad taste in both landscaping and architecture. It is a passage in which Pope cleverly parodies the standardized 'stately home' tour of both then and now — through the gardens, up the steps and into the house itself for a tour of the rooms; lines 177-204 conclude the poem with idealized 'portraits' of Bathurst and Burlington which take up and contrast themes developed in the earlier 'portraits' of Villario and Sabinus on the one hand, and Timon's misapplication of excessive energy on the other.

In search of a grace beyond the reach of art, we might plunge *in*

medias res and look at a central passage of *Epistle to Burlington*, that which advocates ideal practice and where the poem's ideology might be felt to lie:

To build, to plant, whatever you intend,
 To rear the column, or the arch to bend,
 To swell the terrace, or to sink the grot,
 In all, let Nature never be forgot,
 But treat the goddess like a modest fair,
 Nor over-dress, nor leave her wholly bare;
 Let not each beauty everywhere be spied,
 Where half the skill is decently to hide.
 He gains all points, who pleasingly confounds,
 Surprises, varies, and conceals the bounds.
 Consult the genius of the place in all:
 That tells the waters or to rise or fall;
 Or helps the ambitious hill the heavens to scale,
 Or scoops in circling theatres the vale;
 Calls in the country, catches opening glades,
 Joins willing woods, and varies shades from shades;
 Now breaks, or now directs the intending lines;
 Paints, as you plant, and, as you work, designs.
 Still follow sense, of every art and soul,
 Parts answering parts shall slide into a whole,
 Spontaneous beauties all around advance,
 Start ev'n from difficulty, strike from chance;
 Nature shall join you; Time shall make it grow
 A work to wonder at — perhaps a Stowe. (ll. 47-70)

Hammond comments on this passage:

Aesthetically, the landscape that Burlington designs is as close as possible to the naturally occurring picturesque as described in *Windsor Forest*. It is a harmonious balancing of opposites, an adroit manipulation of light and shade, of concealment and revelation. (p.56)

It is generally agreed by modern commentators that the landscape of *Windsor Forest* to which Hammond refers (specifically ll. 11-28) is a landscape conceived very much in terms of the paintings of Claude Lorrain, and that its 'order in Variety' is rendered allegorically; it is a 'perfected' landscape, a return to Eden and a 'steady state'. In *Windsor Forest* the landscape is scarcely considered naturalistically at all, but as an emblem of political stability and productivity consequent upon the careful reign of Queen Anne and the Tory-engineered Treaty of Utrecht. It is an emblem of stasis. But are the landscapes and the forces in the lines from *Epistle to Burlington* directed to stasis or dynamism?

In this permissive age, it is a hardened or obtuse critic who can let the line 'Parts answering parts shall slide into a whole' pass by without

a query; its sexual connotations are obvious, even to the pun on '(w)hole'. Is it then just a sophisticated piece of smut, calculated to nudge though not offend the susceptibilities of a rather austere aristocrat? Then one notices how much of this passage contains sexual innuendo: a 'modest fair' neither over-dressed nor 'wholly' bare; whose beauties are 'decently' hid. Other verbs then strike the eye: plant, rear, swell, start, strike. Has the reader been over-sensitized by reading too much Laurence Sterne? No.

Pope is using a scarcely-concealed sexual metaphor of great antiquity — that of the plow and the furrow — to support a whole argument for a dynamic interaction between Man and Nature which is quasi-sexual in its operation and in its fruits. Burlington is the masculine principle ('rear the column') Nature is the feminine principle ('the goddess'). Their satisfactory union ('parts answering parts') will produce beauties which 'start' (= quicken in the womb) and 'strike' (= of a plant, to send down roots; a gardening-term new in Pope's day). The result of this union is a 'work' which will 'grow' and reach full bearing only over 'time' (l.69).

The concept of Nature which the poem here puts forward as vital and growth-oriented, rather than static or allegorical, is carried on in the later lines on Villario and Sabinus (ll. 79-98). There it is a Nature in which 'espaliers meet', 'parts unite', 'strength . . . contend(s) with strength'; in which there is 'thickening' and 'reddening', and 'stretching branches long to meet'. Villario's crime against taste is that he lacked patience; by the time his work has come to full bearing he can no longer enjoy it. Sabinus' crime is greater: having received by inheritance a fully-bearing landscape, he has ruthlessly destroyed it. That this is a destruction of 'life' is pointed up, however playfully, by the poem's reference to the fashionable eighteenth-century planting replacement, the 'mournful family of yews'. That it is a genuine death-mourning is made clear by the note which Pope himself appended to the reference:

Touches upon the ill taste of those who are so fond of Ever-greens (particularly Yews, which are the most tonsile) as to destroy the nobler Forest-trees, to make way for such little ornaments as Pyramids of dark-green, continually repeated, not unlike a Funeral procession.

Those who read *Epistle to Burlington* in the Dent *Everyman* edition are introduced to the ceiling-paintings of Antonio Verrio and Louis Laguerre, and meet them — or their like — in Timon's chapel as follows:

On painted ceilings you devoutly stare,

Where sprawl the saints of Verrio or Laguerre,
 Or gilded clouds in fair expansion lie
 And bring all Paradise before your eye. (ll. 145-8)

Those who read the poem in the *Twickenham* edition, now accepted as definitive, are given it slightly differently:

On painted ceilings you devoutly stare,
 Where sprawl the saints of Verrio or Laguerre,
 On gilded clouds in fair expansion lie,
 And bring all Paradise before your eye.

The *Everyman* lines are critical though innocuous: one gazes at the clumsily-drawn figures, indecorously nude or nearly so (as Pope's appended note points out) OR at one of those expanses of gilded clouds and rays of glory, so excessively present in the work of Baroque church decoration.

As printed, the 'Or' of the *Everyman* text is a conjunction, linking two parallel but separate ideas. In the *Twickenham* text 'On' acts as a preposition. Now it is the 'sprawling saints' who lie in fair expansion on gilded clouds and 'bring all Paradise before your eye'. Viewed from below, as they were painted to be seen, such sprawling figures might well suggest to the wandering eye a Paradise more fleshly and Oriental, one well in keeping with the general moral laxity of the chapel's teachings. Pope's note points unequivocally to the sexual connotation.

Accepting this Art/Sex conjunction as the apogee of the 'Timon's villa' passage, and contrasting it with that of Burlington and Nature in the earlier passage, it is not too much to say that an ideology *is* emerging from the poem, but from the language and imagery itself. Put simply, it is the statement that the expenditure of wealth and energy in the creation of architecture and landscape, when done in the right way and for the right reasons, is generative, productive and of long-term social benefit. Hence we are given the idealization of Lord Bathurst, prepared to be patient enough to let his oak-forests (notoriously slow-growing trees) come to maturity, in order to ensure a continuous supply of timber for Britain's future naval growth; hence also the selfless pouring out of Burlington, giving of his vigour in the creation of great public works. In contrast, Timon's expenditure has been entirely in pursuit of self-aggrandisement; his has been an imposition on Nature, not a fruitful union. Like the paintings in his chapel, all his works have been self-gratificatory and ultimately sterile; they will wither away, and the Goddess of fertility itself resume her sway:

Another age shall see the golden ear
 Imbrown the slope, and nod on the parterre,
 Deep harvest bury all his pride has plann'd,
 And laughing Ceres reassume the land. (ll. 173-76)

For all that current critical ideology would see it as merely a document in an ongoing iteration of eighteenth-century politics, the *Epistle to Burlington*, has, textually, a vigorous and idiosyncratic life of its own. One can look at how 'ample' (l.185) at the end of the poem, neatly contrasts, in its matrix of references and connotations, with 'profuse' (l.21) near the beginning; note that to control the 'roaring main' (l.200) by the application of architecture intelligently related to its aim is a laudable object, while to use architecture to encourage the wind to 'roar' through one's house (l.35) is madness. One can note that the breeze which produces 'silver-quivering' rills (l.85) may be the same breeze which, a few lines later (l.108) can produce a puny shivering 'insect' — a nice appreciation that aesthetic experience depends on place and circumstance.

Though it is a discursive discourse on the fairly rarefied topic of the conjunction of aesthetics and morals both in the private and the public sphere, *Epistle to Burlington* at times employs a vocabulary of energetic words which are often monosyllabic, frequently 'low' (in the Johnsonian sense) and at times definitely vulgar — bad taste in the extreme: whore, fool, dog-hole, clap, slide, heap, squirt, quirks, jig, sprawl, scrape, and the incomparable 'spew'. Such words at first startle by their tastelessness and then impress by their aptness and critical severity. They impart toughness and vigour to the discourse, tying it with a sufficiency of realism to the world of experience. Paradoxically, Pope achieves the 'grace beyond the reach of art' by reaching the nadir of bad taste as 'gaping Tritons spew to wash your face'.

If Pope's *Epistle to Burlington* exists to promulgate an ideology, it is an ideology that is perennial — the relationship between Nature and humankind. For the immediate audience of Pope's day — and I cannot believe there were many country squires of the Allworthy or Western type among them — it was debated in terms of topical phenomena: the creation of ostentatious private buildings and the carrying out of great ornamental landscaping projects; today it may be the resort hotel and the rainforest. Once it was debated as a moral imperative, now as a scientific necessity. The *Epistle to Burlington*, like all good poetry, still has 'relevance', but not because it enunciates an eighteenth-century Tory ideology of conservatism.