

# Nature and Dialogue: The Conflict-ridden Authoritative Discourse of Alexander Pope<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

Alexander Pope in “An Essay on Criticism” glorifies Nature as the ultimate guide for art and criticism. This universal and unchanged guide supposedly shines on the whole world and has been exerting her influence from the past to the present; she bestows “[l]ife, force, beauty” to all people and remains “the source, and end, and test of Art.” However, the self-contradiction in Pope’s discourse on Nature is too obvious to be neglected. This research, based on Bakhtinian dialogism, concentrates on three aspects which illustrate Pope’s problematic arguments about Nature: (1) the prevalence of men of little learning: since everybody is assumed to receive the grace of Nature, it turns out to be ironic that men of little learning prevailed in contemporary England and could resist the universal impact of Nature; (2) the critical rules and poetic license: Pope regards the critical rules as “Nature methodized,” and therefore those rules must be universally applicable; however, Pope also recognizes their limited applicability as well as the necessity of poetic license, which can supplement the critical rules and must be treated as a part of the rules—paradoxically, poetic license can be used rarely, not universally, and the above-mentioned supplement indicates the insufficiency of the critical rules; (3) the problem of canonization: in Part III of “Essay,” Pope canonizes some critics from Aristotle to William Walsh; nevertheless, his praise of Walsh does not correspond to modern evaluation of this minor critic; moreover, canonization usually blurs or belittles the heteroglossia in a literary work and tends to invite the single-voiced interpretation. Despite his authoritative tone, Pope usually presupposes a dialogic context in his poetry rather than isolating himself from society. His complaint of those men of little learning, his recognition of the limited applicability of critical rules, and the problem of canonization all originate from his interaction with contemporary society, not from the guide of abstract, transcendental Nature.

Keywords: Alexander Pope, “An Essay on Criticism”, Nature, Mikhail Bakhtin, Dialogue

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From harmony, from heavenly harmony  
    This universal frame began:  
    When Nature underneath a heap  
    Of jarring atoms lay,  
    And could not heave her head,  
The tuneful voice was heard from high  
.....  
Through all the compass of the notes it ran,  
The diapason closing full in man.  
(Dryden, "A Song for St. Cecilia's Day." 1-6; 14-15)

All nature is but art unknown to thee,  
All chance, direction which thou canst not see;  
All discord, harmony not understood;  
All partial evil, universal good;  
And, spite of pride, in erring reason's spite,  
One truth is clear, Whatever is, is right.  
(“An Essay on Man” 1: 289-94)

## INTRODUCTION

### Pope's Praise of Nature

“Nature” occupies the supreme status in Alexander Pope's discourse. While Dryden indicates the creation of the universe at the hand of Nature, Pope emphasizes the power of Nature with regard to literature and criticism in “An Essay on Criticism.” With universality and transcendence, she prevails as the sole, absolute, and ultimate standard of creativity and critical judgment:

First follow Nature, and your judgment frame  
By her just standard, which is still the same;  
Unerring Nature, still divinely bright,  
One clear, unchanged, and universal light,  
Life, force, and beauty must to all impart,  
At once the source, and end, and test of Art.<sup>3</sup> (68-73)

Nature is deified: she shines eternally as the alpha and omega of Art, and *must* bestow “[l]ife, force, and beauty”—the essential elements of creativity—on all artists and

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<sup>3</sup> All quotations and paraphrases from Pope in my discussion, unless marked specifically, come from “An Essay on Criticism.”

critics. This episode “is Pope’s statement of the old idea that as God gives being to beings, so He makes causes to be causes, and thus grants to them the ability to participate in His power” (Mason 152). This “must” bears the universal significance that determines the lifelong development of all writers and critics: they *must* follow Nature in their career; otherwise, they will decline and fall in both creativity and morality. Her universality is not allowed to be denied or doubted: all people have “the seeds of judgment in their mind” because Nature sheds “a glimm’ring light” on them (20-21); “Art from that fund each just supply provides, / Works without show, and without pomp presides” (74-75). In addition, the concept of Nature presumes “an ordered hierarchical conception characteristic of both the universe (the great chain of being) and of society” as well as of literature and literary theory (Jackson, “Teaching” 108).

Strictly speaking, Pope never defines “Nature” in “An Essay on Criticism.” He merely compiles what he has learned from the classics, and affirms the necessity of learning from critical rules and canonized works. Perhaps, for Pope, she is too sacred and mysterious to be exactly defined and described, and her vague image in the “First follow Nature” stanza does not help very much in our understanding. Although Pope believes that she is “[w]hat oft was thought” (298)<sup>4</sup>, “Nature” has long been identified as one of Pope’s slipperiest terms (McCrea 178; Brown, Laura 66). From “An Essay on Criticism” to “An Essay on Man,” the variety of her roles—as the mysterious guide of art and unknown art/physical world, respectively—reveals merely some slices of the complicated meanings and significance of Nature.<sup>5</sup> Lovejoy lists eighteen “senses of nature as aesthetic norm” in the neoclassical age (“Nature” 70) and he warns his readers that they may lapse into ambiguities if they are ignorant of these senses (69). Such an idea may be the source of its energy (Knuth 184), but the multiplicity of the meanings of Nature challenges the belief in “her just standard, which is still the same.”

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<sup>4</sup> The recognition of Nature as “what oft was thought” corresponds to Aristotle’s description of Nature: “That nature exists, it would be absurd to try to prove; for it is obvious that there are many things of this kind, and to prove what is obvious by what is not is the mark of a man who is unable to distinguish what is self-evident from what is not” (*Physics* 22). Perhaps for the same reason Pope never defines Nature in exact terms.

<sup>5</sup> Aristotle points out multiple meanings of “nature” already found in ancient Greece: (1) the power of growth for animals and plants (*Physics* 22); (2) the principle of a living subject (*Physics* 22); (3) “the immediate material substratum of things which have in themselves a principle of motion or change” (*Physics* 23); (4) “the shape or form which is specified in the definition of the thing” (*Physics* 23); (5) “a cause that operates for a purpose” (*Physics* 35); (6) “the principle of motion and change” (*Physics* 37). His “physics” deals actually with “philosophy” in the modern sense; hence “nature” in his discourse bears obvious philosophical senses. Nevertheless, Pope explores the significance in guiding wit and judgment on the one hand, and identifies her as God on the other—the former is slightly indicated in *Poetics*, while the latter is alien to Aristotle. In addition, Aristotle never attempts to simplify and purify the meaning(s) of nature—he exposes her heterogeneity and multiplicity. This negates the monologic image of Popean Nature: “One clear, unchanged, universal light.”

## The Heterogeneous, Dialogic Cultural Background in the Neoclassical Age

Neoclassical literature is usually treated as blatantly didactic, stubbornly authoritative, and impossibly insipid. Bakhtin describes the thought of the Neoclassical Age as “cold rationalism,” “official, formalistic, and logical authoritarianism,” and “the didactic and utilitarian spirit” with “narrow and artificial optimism” (*Rabelais* 37); this age seemingly approved authoritative, didactic, and serious discourse. “In the new official culture there prevails a tendency toward the stability and completion of being, toward one single meaning, one single tone of seriousness” (*Rabelais* 101). Official culture “is founded on the principle of an immovable and unchanging hierarchy in which the higher and the lower never merge” (*Rabelais* 166). The Enlighteners had “an abstract and rationalist utopianism, a mechanic conception of matter, a tendency to abstract generalization . . .” (*Rabelais* 116). This culture, which extolled reason and science, was fundamentally held to be hostile to imaginative art and literature. So influential and oppressive were reason and science that even the major neoclassical writers—including Dryden, Pope, and Johnson—speak in their works like *reasonable* and *authoritative* teachers who tend to persuade their readers with *reasonable* arguments to follow the *authority*. Imagination and artistic expression were supposed to obey the guidance of critical judgment, the manifestation of “cold rationalism” and “logical authoritarianism.” Bakhtin’s negative comments basically correspond to our stereotypical understanding of the neoclassical culture.

Yet it is hasty generalization to characterize the Neoclassical Age as the Age of Reason or the Age of “one single voice”; rather, its cultural diversity resists any conclusive, synthetic label. The call for order and reason did not prevail as the dominant voice then; at most it was only one voice among many others. “In every sense England in this period was a medley, and one that many enjoyed. It was possible . . . to emphasize not social divisions, but rich diversity . . .” (Hoppit 7). By 1727 “pluralism and heterodoxy in many walks of life were accepted . . .” (Hoppit 9). The environment was “far removed from order and reasoned pursuit of politics” because politics was haunted by plots, rebellion, and disorder (Hoppit 39). Disorder actually prevailed in all levels of society in addition to politics: “Contemporaries were sure that society ought to be stable, ordered, and predictable, yet equally certain that it was rarely so” (Hoppit 51). Therefore, this period “is best understood as one full of anxiety and prospects, each feeding off the other. People, often provoked by changes they disliked, usually sought stability and order, clamouring for an earthly paradise” (Hoppit 495). In other words, those who “sought stability and order”—including Pope,

who declares the necessity of following Nature in “An Essay on Criticism”—exposed in fact the fundamental lack of peace and harmony in all levels of society. No authority could effectively govern this pluralistic environment and settle all disputes.

Common was the dialogue among various voices in the pluralistic culture of the neoclassical England. The dominant literary mode in Restoration England was drama (Sutherland 397), a genre in a dialogic form. In fact, “collaboration and literary dialogue were essential” to eighteenth-century writers (Knapp 458). They emphasized the importance of imitation—which does not mean the slavish copy of some ancient writers, but the creative expression of nature or general humanity. Eugenius, in “An Essay of Dramatic Poesy” by Dryden, argues that a writer must resist “a dull imitation” of the ancients, and that nature must guide the creation of the poet (219). Boileau, following Horace, affirms the necessity for a writer to listen to the critical opinions from the others (243). Enmeshed in “an intricate web of social and political connections,” neoclassic writers produced mostly “occasional” works which were prompted by public events (Griffin 37). Writing at that time was “an essentially social practice, at every stage of literary production,” while “conversation primed the writer’s pump” (Griffin 38). The eighteenth century presented diverse, contradictory ideas which shared one characteristic: “a conscious engagement with social issues” (Cunningham and Reich 415). *Mac Flecknoe* and *Absalom and Achitophel* by John Dryden, *Gulliver’s Travels* and “A Modest Proposal” by Jonathan Swift, *Essay on Man* and *Dunciad* by Alexander Pope, and *Rasselas* by Samuel Johnson all mean to criticize their contemporary society. The story of the ancient mariner or the intoxication in listening to the song of a nightingale would not appeal to their socially oriented imagination.

Literary criticism, the response to literary works, became increasingly prominent in the Restoration England. Much of the work of Boileau, Le Bossu, Rapin, Saint-Évremond was available in English translation, while professional critics began to emerge in the last decades of the seventeenth century. Much of the literary criticism in Restoration England took the form of “a defensive attempt to rationalize contemporary creative practice” (Sutherland 397). By 1700, the discussion of literature had become common, and professional critics strove to match creative writers in importance (Sutherland 28). Poetry of all sorts was widely written and “subjected to constant criticism in coffee-houses, discussed in letters and pamphlets, expounded and defended in prefaces and dedications” (Sutherland 154). The pamphlet war in the early years of the eighteenth century focused on the value judgment of the ancient and modern literature, while in the middle of this century the flourishing of anthology and the critical review struggled to establish the aesthetic theory (Benedict

75). Critics did not give orders in the gesture of the cold authority, but strove to invite readers to hear their voices.

The dialogic quality of eighteenth-century writing can hardly be exaggerated. “Writing and talking were closer in the early eighteenth century than they are today”—the distinction between conversation and written text was blurred: both “were mixed so regularly in daily practice that oral conversation took on many of the stylistic habits associated with formal writing, and the written word often was conversational in tone and habit” (Hunter 11). Poets participated in the public sphere and “expected active readers who would respond to their formulations of policies, ideas, and opinions” (Hunter 13), and consequently they tended to assume the role of spokespersons for the culture. Poetry, moreover, “was considered a standard means of public communication, and poems . . . were often the basis for public discussion,” while abundant major issues were presented in verse (Hunter 15). An index of the close relationship between writing and talking is the great number of treatises, in both poetry and prose, written in dialogue form—to imitate “the give-and-take of social conversation” (Hunter 16). The eighteenth-century readers anticipated poetry to highlight the public, social, and discursive topics. Literature and literary criticism belonged to the public domain, and manifested the prevalence of “dialogue” in the neoclassical England.

### **Bakhtinian Attitude toward Popean Nature**

Popean Nature<sup>6</sup> emerged in this heterogeneous, dialogic cultural background. His characterization of Nature as the absolute, transcendental standard contributes to our general understanding of the so-called neoclassic poetics. This corresponds to what Lyotard calls “metanarrative”: the discourse that determines the validity of all the other discourses (Malpas 24). The most remarkable example of metanarratives is Enlightenment reason, which effectively dominated the particular “under the sign of the universal” and attempted to eliminate the heterogeneous (Docherty 11; cf. Lyotard xxiv). Adorno and Horkheimer also propose that “Enlightenment is totalitarian” because knowledge, based on human reason, is assumed to master the world (6-9). In Bakhtinian dialogism, such a totalitarian discourse always hampers cultural development.

In the official culture after the Renaissance, Bakhtin observes, “there prevails a tendency toward the stability and completion of being, toward one single meaning, one single tone of seriousness” (*Rabelais* 101). Official culture “is founded on the

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<sup>6</sup> By “Popean Nature” I merely refer to the “clear, unchanged, and universal” power that the poet praises in his discourse; it does not follow that he harbors a consistent and unproblematic “definition” of Nature.

principle of an immovable and unchanging hierarchy in which the higher and the lower never merge” (*Rabelais* 166). With such a principle, “[t]he Enlighteners had a lack of historical sense, an abstract and rationalist utopianism, a mechanic conception of matter, a tendency to abstract generalization . . .” (*Rabelais* 116). In short, they “tended to impoverish the world” (*Rabelais* 124), whereas “[r]ationalism and classicism clearly reflect the fundamental traits of the new official culture; it . . . was also authoritarian and serious” (Morris 228). From Bakhtin’s perspective, therefore, Pope spoke for the absolute “official” culture in the eighteenth-century England, with Nature as the soul of a stable hierarchical order and the representation of “abstract generalization.”

Pope inherited the critical tradition of western poetics, and intended to develop an all-embracing and systematic theory. His worldview and philosophy presume an ordered universe: “See worlds on worlds compose one universe, / Observe how system into system runs, / . . . / May tell why heav’n has made us as we are” (“An Essay on Man” 1.24-25, 28). The Great Chain of Beings, upheld by God, “draws all to agree” (“An Essay on Man” 1.33-34). Likewise, systematic poetics must be formulated and taken for granted, an opinion that can be traced back to Aristotle.<sup>7</sup> With the ambition to construct such poetics, Pope was “the last great Renaissance poet, the last poet to speak from an enviable sense of real authority in the country” despite his handicaps and marginalization (Woodman 2). However, such an ambition

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<sup>7</sup> Aristotle, the first arch-critic mentioned in Part III of “An Essay on Criticism,” might inspire Pope’s ambition to develop an all-embracing discourse to describe and regulate the creation of literary works. Both Aristotle and Pope encountered similar situations in their careers. (1) In Athens in Aristotle’s age, “there was ample interchange among the schools of philosophy” (Cooper 130), while in London in the neoclassical England gentlemanly conversation was in vogue: “literature is no longer proffered by men who speak with the voice of authority, but by men whose tone is persuasive; the reader is not being addressed from above, he is being spoken to as an equal” (Dobrée 3). (2) They were marginalized among their contemporaries. After having returned to Athens “as a resident alien” (Cooper 125), Aristotle established Lyceum outside the city rather than rejoining his former colleagues at the Academy; Pope as a Roman Catholic was deprived of the rights to attend colleges, to live in London, and to serve in public organizations. Aristotle’s writings “provide the systematically developed and deployed, detailed accounts of the physical, sensible world and our life within it . . .” (Cooper 132), with the aim to highlight “the universal” in the world. Paralleling the conquest of the Hellenistic world by Alexander the Great, Aristotle’s absorption of all branches of his contemporary knowledge established a comprehensive system of western philosophy, the system that initiated “the consolidation of a ‘unifying language’” from the Bakhtinian perspective (Gardiner 34). The study of nature occupies the most remarkable portion of his complete works. His *Physics* deals with nature, which is defined as “a source or cause of being moved and of being at rest in that to which it belongs primarily” (*Physics* 22) and which covers at least both scientific and philosophical senses—with the conclusion that the world depends on some “unmoved mover” in order to exist under constant change (Cooper 138-39). He indicates that poetry should express the universal (“Poetics” 55). He formulates the requirements of tragedy with respect to plot, characterization, language, thought, spectacle, and music. The power that sets the standard for literary creativity and judgment is identified as Nature: “Nature herself . . . teaches the choice of the proper measure” (“Poetics” 63). Following Aristotle’s example, Pope also tried to establish systematic poetics and asserted Nature to be the supreme head in terms of literary creativity and judgment. Unlike Aristotle, however, Pope emphasizes the forces of Nature mainly with regard to artistic creation in “An Essay on Criticism.”

incurs theoretical problems for Bakhtin. “In the literature of classicism and the Enlightenment a special type of aphoristic thinking was developed, that is, thinking in separate rounded-off and self-sufficient thoughts which were purposely meant to stand independent of their context” (*Problems* 96). The “organic poetics of the past—those of Aristotle, Horace, Boileau—are permeated with a deep sense of the wholeness of literature and of the harmonious interaction of all genres” (Bakhtin, “Epic and Novel” 5). The high genres present “a single and unified world view” (Bakhtin, “Epic and Novel” 35). This “wholeness of literature” and the “single and unified world view” in “An Essay on Criticism” allegedly derive from the “harmonious” influence of Nature. Pope’s translation of *Iliad* also impresses his readers with “representative, stable truthfulness to Nature” (Brower 130). Nature seemingly presides over Pope’s poetry and the “official” culture of the neoclassical England as well.

Nevertheless, Pope’s view of Nature does not totally correspond to Dryden’s. According to the latter, human beings are the best created by Nature: “The diapason closing full in man.” Harmony and unity characterize the whole universe, and should also reign in human relationships. However, Pope witnessed ceaseless conflicts in history, and also continually attacked and counterattacked his enemies. In order to defend the sacredness of Nature, he intends to silence all disputes in “An Essay on Man”: “Cease then, nor order imperfection name” (1.281). Without offering sufficient explanation about the existent discord and imperfection, he merely calls for the acceptance of the status quo: “Whatever is, is right.” He blames all who question the ultimate perfection of Nature: “All nature is but art unknown to thee”—a statement which contradicts his description of Nature as “[w]hat oft was thought” in “An Essay on Criticism.” The value of Nature depends on her universal acceptance by all poets and critics, yet in “An Essay on Man” Pope denies this universality.

Such a self-contradiction invites a Bakhtinian reading of Popean Nature. The absolute status of Nature is taken for granted and hence emerges as monologism attacked by Bakhtin. The monologic culture “asserted all that was stable, unchanging, perennial: the existing hierarchy, the existing religious, political, and moral values, norms, and prohibitions” (Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 9). Furthermore, unlike the consistent, harmonious image of Popean Nature, that of Bakhtinian Nature “has a deeply carnivalesque spirit.” He quotes some passages of Goethe’s “Nature” to highlight this spirit:

Surrounded and embraced by it, we cannot emerge from it, nor penetrate deeper into it. Unwanted, unexpected, it draws us into the whirlwind of its dance and flies on with us, until we drop wearily out of its hands. . . . It is all. It rewards and punishes, gladdens and torments. It is stern and gentle,



loves and terrifies, is impotent and all-powerful. All men are in it, and it is in all men. It conducts a friendly game with all, and the more they win in it, the more it rejoices. . . . It is whole and eternally unfinished. As it creates, so can one create eternally. (*Rabelais* 254)

Goethe/Bakhtin also considers Nature a universal and eternal force; however, with “carnavalesque spirit” this force contains contradictory elements (“impotent and all-powerful”; “whole and eternally unfinished”). In a carnival, the constant and the changeable coexist (*Problems* 158). Far from being a monological, transcendental, and unchanged goddess, Goethean-Bakhtinian Nature stands with all people on equal terms, conducting “a friendly game with all” and yielding to endless transformation. Unlike Pope, Goethe/Bakhtin does not formulate Nature as the unerring soul of a systematic, authoritarian discourse.

Bakhtin’s model of Nature triggers our reconsideration of Popean Nature. Despite Pope’s endeavor to establish an all-embracing, organized theory of Nature, he in fact exposes the insufficiency of Nature as the ultimate guide of creativity and criticism, and renders her universality as problematic and untenable. For the convenience of discussion, I will concentrate on three aspects related to Nature proposed mainly in “An Essay on Criticism”: (1) the prevalence of little learning versus the universality of Nature; (2) poetic license versus all-embracing Nature; (3) the canonization of classics and critics. In other words, this paper intends to explore *the significance of Pope’s self-contradictory voices with regard to Nature through the perspective of Bakhtinian dialogism*. The historical and social background concerning Nature in different ages—an issue far beyond the scope of this paper—or the comparison between Pope’s concept(s) of Nature and those of his predecessors and contemporaries will be slightly touched in some notes in the discussion.<sup>8</sup> This, in other words, is a paper devoted to *the problems of Popean Nature*, not to the evolution and comparison of the concepts of Nature in western culture. The demystification of Nature may reveal the importance and inevitability of dialogue in Pope’s poetry.

## **LITTLE LEARNING VS. NATURE**

### **The Downgrading of Nature**

#### **The prevalence of men of little learning and the lack of harmony**

Originally the Latin word *natura* means “birth” or “character,” and reflects the mythological image of Mother Earth that allegedly gives birth to all forms of life.

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<sup>8</sup> Readers who are interested in the multiple meanings of nature can find detailed discussion in Lovejoy’s works listed in Works Cited.

Such an image reveals the yearning for a universal, almighty being that can guarantee order and procreation. This image of a life-giving mother is also found in Pope's glorification of Nature (72). In literature, the demand for unity and consistency in a literary work under the authority of Nature emerges in many classical critical works.<sup>9</sup>

If Nature actively imparted "[l]ife, force, and beauty" to all creative and critical minds, then harmony would definitely reign in the literary circle because "Unerring Nature" could never betray herself. The infinite wisdom of God, in addition, "must form the best" and render everything coherent so that "all that rises rise in due degree" ("An Essay on Man" 1.44-46). The general order, he boldly asserts, "[i]s kept in nature, and is kept in man" ("An Essay on Man" 1.171-72); "That God of Nature, who, within us still, / Inclines our action, not constrains our will" ("The Second Epistle of the Second Book of Horace" 280-81). Humanity and Nature supposedly go hand in hand and share the same characteristic.

Yet conflicts in literary circles frequently occurred, while Pope attempted to defend himself and to attack his enemies throughout his life. The decline of humanity, he laments, has turned man to be the "foe to nature" ("An Essay on Man" 3.161-64). His masterpieces contain the most brilliant satires on all those who know nothing about Nature, and harmony seldom graces his tone and discourse<sup>10</sup>. In "An Essay on

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<sup>9</sup> Horace, for example, describes the Sabine farm, which "are not Nature still, but Nature Horatianized," while Pope and his friends "often saw their own world through Horace's eyes" and "tried to shape the actuality to fit the dream" (Brower 164). In other words, Horace uses his own imagination more than he follows and imitates a transcendental guide or tradition, although he does not emphasize the value of individual creativity as humanists. Yet he still acknowledges the irresistible and ubiquitous power of Nature: "For Nature first forms us within to meet all the changes of fortune. She causes us to rejoice or impels us to anger or burdens us down to the ground with a heavy grief" (69). This description anticipates Pope's argument that Nature imparts "[l]ife, force, [and] beauty" to all creatures (72). Nature is presumed to be an active, dynamic force that directs a poet's emotion and literary creation. Such ubiquity is not emphasized by Aristotle, who only indicates the direction of Nature in choosing the proper measure. His career as a poet and a critic was nourished in a dialogic background as well: he valued "the interaction and exchange of ideas with contemporaries" (Rutherford 249)—a situation that also nourished Alexander Pope's creativity. Horace's comments on other poets frequently stemmed from his desire to establish his relation to them (Rutherford 252). In addition, Plotinus also affirms that the creation of an artist depends on nature (102), while Quintilian advises rhetoricians to "[f]ix your eyes on nature and follow her. All eloquence is concerned with the activities of life . . . and the mind is always readiest to accept what it recognizes to be true to nature" (251). These classical critics portray Nature as the procreative female, whose power sustains the life and force of creativity. Pope's veneration of Nature indeed owes much to the Greco-Roman heritage.

<sup>10</sup> The veneration of Nature in western tradition usually accompanies the belittlement of human capability. Most of the major Renaissance and Neoclassical writers tend to exalt Nature above human creativity and judgment in terms of importance despite the humanist affirmation of individual potential. Castiglione argues that an orator must compose "in the simplest manner and according to the dictates of nature and truth" (32), and that nature "always aims to produce the most perfect things" (157, 158), an aim that stands beyond the reach of ordinary poets. Boileau encourages poets to study nature and to follow her guide alone; she "appears in every soul marked with different traits," but "not everyone has the eyes to see her" (249). Dryden indicates that those which delight all ages "must have been an imitation of Nature" ("Author's" 2130). John Dennis, Pope's life-long enemy, recognizes poetry as "the imitation of nature" (270), not as the expression of the poet's artistry and feelings. Samuel Johnson also glorifies nature by indicating that to imitate nature is "the greatest excellency of art" ("On Fiction" 318), and that "[n]othing can please many, and please long, but just representations of general nature"

Criticism,” he identifies them as “men of little learning”—“Those half-learn’d witlings, numerous in our isle, / As half-form’d insects on the banks of Nile” (40-41); in *Dunciad*, he mocks them as fools who worship the goddess Dulness. Nature as “the personification of the cosmological order” should have assigned all things to their ordained rank; however, “[t]oo much learning, ‘the maze of schools,’ tempts man to go outside his assigned role, to disrupt the inner and outer orders, and so become a ‘fool’” (Brower 198). Later in his life, Pope became skeptical and disbelieved the possibility for common people to learn truth: “Can they direct what measures to pursue, / Who know themselves so little what to do?” (“The First Epistle of the First Book of Horace” 122-23). Little learning is dangerous (215), and it leads directly to chaos:

Some to Conceit alone their taste confine,  
And glitt’ring thoughts struck out at every line;  
Pleas’d with a work where nothing’s just or fit,  
One glaring chaos and wild heap of wit. (289-92)

Some writers reject or neglect the universal truth of Nature and focus only on studying some trivial techniques (“Conceit”). They will subsequently “hide with ornaments their want of Art” (296).

Furthermore, in Pope’s eyes, some dull people cannot learn the true essence of Nature despite studying hard: “The vulgar thus thro’ imitation err, / As oft the learn’d by being singular” (424-25). John Dennis, from Pope’s perspective, can be such a foolish critic who fails to follow Nature. Men with little learning outnumber the true followers of Nature—a fact which Pope unwillingly recognizes and which stimulates the poet’s vehement ridicules later in his life. With little learning, a critic cannot convince the readers with valid arguments, and conflicts become the “norm” in criticism. In a conflict-ridden environment, a critic cannot please everybody: “Sure some to vex, but never all to please” (505). Thus Homer and Dryden were attacked, and would continue to be criticized in the future (458-65). Pope criticizes “shameless bards,” “mad, abandoned critics,” and “bookful blockhead” for their degenerating of contemporary culture (616-18). Besides, he deems it impossible to educate the “honourable fool[s]” (i.e., the aristocrats who get degrees without studying) (588). As

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(“Preface” 321). Thomson depicts Nature as the work of God: he characterizes Nature as the mighty and majestic “Great Parent” who wins universal praise (“Spring” 859-60). For him, Nature can restore poetry from its fallen state (Morris 228). The veneration of Nature permeated, whereas the poet’s art appeared comparatively insignificant. However, this fallen state did not improve in the Augustan Age, as Pope’s numerous satires suggest. In the abundant discourses about nature-art relationships, critics rarely belittle the sacredness and transcendence of Nature. Her sacredness stood far beyond disputes, and it might never occur to those critics to resist or reject her. This almighty and universal image of Nature also marks Pope’s characterization of her in “An Essay on Criticism”: she is “the source, and end, and test of Art” (73), and critical rules are “nature methodized” (89). Wit and imagination, which are valued by humanists, must obey those rules and yield to the restriction of Nature-inspired judgment.

Pope pictures the ideal state of Nature, he also observes the chaotic reality, which obeys no guidance from Nature. The best policy is to leave these dull people alone (596-97). This insinuates that the so-called universal, almighty force of Nature actually fails to shed light on some people.

### **The dubious universality of Nature**

Pope's pessimistic comments on the status quo negate his proposal in the "First follow Nature" stanza. Under the "universal light" of Nature, it is impossible for artists and critics to deviate from her "just standard" since this "light" *must* impart life and force to everyone. An ideal poet, Pope also points out, will compose "true expression, like th' unchanging sun, / [which] [c]lears and improves whate'er shines upon" (315-16). According to his argument, no one can resist the universal force of Nature just as no one can escape from sunshine—even the blind can feel its warmth. If Nature as the authority were accepted universally, then "people would fully coincide with themselves, be defined once and for all in a way potentially knowable by all" (Morson and Emerson 219). However, in his "Epistle II," he mocks Chloe by declaring that Nature forgot to give this lady a heart (158-60). His series of satires ironically subverts the universality of Nature. "What oft was thought" appears as a mysterious, unknown power.<sup>11</sup>

Now that little learning can bewilder people and separate them from this "universal light," then the universality of Nature appears quite dubious and problematic. Probably trying to mend his arguments of Nature, he owes the

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<sup>11</sup> Pope's discourse on the significance of Nature brought problems, as illustrated in the inconsistency in his description of this "source and test of art"—she is "[w]hat oft was thought" in "An Essay on Criticism," but becomes unknown to mundane people in "An Essay on Man." Pope's anger towards his contemporary society exposes the absence of a truly universal power, which may guarantee the social harmony in general and the poet's creativity in particular. This longing for nature "is a desire for something in visible retreat"; writers "who grew up during Pope's ascendancy felt strongly that something was amiss" (Morris 229). In other words, Nature was not unanimously praised or followed in the eighteenth century—otherwise, Pope would find no target to satirize. Ironically, some interpretations of Nature treat her as part of humanity—interpretations that Pope also proposes ("An Essay on Man" 1.171-72)—and consequently render her significance all the more problematic and controversial. The eighteenth-century readers "could agree with Pope that Nature and Homer were the same, because they shared a belief in the unchanging characteristics of human beings" and in "a stable order in the nature of things" (Brower 106-07); Nature means "that which is universal and unchanging in human experience" (Cunningham and Reich 434); Hammond points out that "by 'Nature' Pope primarily means 'how the world is' or 'how human beings behave'" (156)—all these interpretations of Nature contradict the all-too-evident fallen state of humanity. If Nature were "the unchanging characteristics of human beings," "how the world is," or "how human beings behave," then Pope's basic tenets in "An Essay on Man," his attack on the corruption of humanity, and his lament for the decline of culture would become unreasonable and farcical. Thence the concept of Nature falls into a paradox: the identification of Nature as a feature of humanity sets her to be the target of mockery and praise simultaneously, and reminds us of Bakhtin's description of Nature mentioned earlier. This challenges Dryden's declaration of the harmony of Nature and of the "diapason closing full in man." The neo-classical age was not actually governed by harmonious Nature; the diverse explications of her meanings did not reach a universal consensus in all details.

prevalence of little learning to men's ignorance of Nature in "An Essay on Man": "All nature is but art unknown to thee" (1.289). If human beings cannot understand Nature, however, they naturally cannot follow this "universal" standard, and thence their deviation from her guidance should not be blamed. After all, "[w]hat can we reason but from what we know" ("An Essay on Man" 1.18)? Pope's defense of Nature still fails to reconcile the universality of Nature and man's inability to follow her. His lament of the dominance of men of little learning downgrades the power of Nature and renders her at the mercy of little learning. If the power of Nature prevailed, then no one would feel vexed under her light. The monologic and absolute status of Nature is disrupted due to the existence of men of little learning. The more powerful Pope's attack toward those men of little learning is, the more dubious the universality and power of Nature appear.

### **Pope's Pride: His Deviation from Nature**

In addition, Pope never explains why it is possible for his enemies, such as Dennis, to deviate from the source and end of Art. Perhaps their blindness to the universal light of Nature derives from their little learning, and will consequently lead to pride (201-04). If it is indeed Nature's will to leave dull people alone (588, 596-96), then Pope violates this will by continually attacking Dennis and all his "foolish" enemies. Theoretically, only Nature can "punish" the ignorantly proud writers: "Nature to all things fix'd the limits fit, / And wisely curb'd proud man's pretending wit" (52-53). Like God, Nature can actively determine the order of all things and humble the proud people. Yet Pope, presuming himself as Nature, tries hard to fight against the "fools" as if Nature herself were unable to do her job. He speaks in a tone in which he is very much at home with Nature, and she is definitely on his side (Brower 199).

This self-appointed surrogate of the "universal light," nevertheless, either commits the same error as his victims do or fails to recognize their merits. He considers that "man's as perfect as he ought" ("An Essay on Man" 1.70), but his fierce satires never "respect" his enemies as God's perfect creation. He blames the proud people who "[c]all imperfection what thou fanci'st such" ("An Essay on Man" 1.115), and who considers that all creatures are created for their own benefit ("An Essay on Man" 3.27-46), yet his derision of the "dull" critics assumes the same pride. Partial and biased is Pope's criticism of Charles II, the Britain monarch who is blamed for bringing the corruption and ecline of culture (534-37). In fact, the king encouraged the study of science and patronized artists. Charles "was certainly a connoisseur of wit and humor and raillery in verse and prose, and he was by no means insensitive to the

prestige that his poets could confer upon the monarchy . . .” (Sutherland 154). In the universal light of Nature, moreover, theatrical degeneration and religious conflicts should not have happened as Pope criticizes (540-43; 546-49). If Charles II should be blamed, then Nature evidently fails to grace the king with “[l]ife, force, and beauty.” Pope’s prejudice perverts the basic principle of criticism: “In all you speak let Truth and Candour shine” (563). In “An Essay on Man,” he shows that “reason, possessed by pride, issues in the closure of the divine and an alienation from nature . . .” (Jackson, “Teaching” 103). Pope urges critics to avoid pride, but throughout his life his mockery of his enemies exposes his pride, as he blatantly declares:

So proud, I am no slave:  
So impudent, I own myself no knave:  
So odd, my country’s ruin makes me grave.  
Yes, I am proud; I must be proud to see  
Men not afraid of God, afraid of me:  
Safe from the bar, the pulpit, and the throne,  
Yet touched and shamed by ridicule alone. (“Dialogue II” 205-11)

Pope takes pride in satirizing men of little learning, a declaration of his independent critical thinking which approximates arrogance. With such an announcement Pope elevates himself even higher than God in terms of the judgment of his “foolish” and proud enemies. This is what he attacks in “An Essay on Man”: “In pride, in reas’ning pride, our error lies; / All quit their sphere and rush into the skies!” (1. 123-24). His voice “is not detached from but entangled with the audience as it participates in the very follies it purports to criticize” (Bellanca 64). Although Fenner avers that the unity of “An Essay on Criticism” is achieved though the theme of attacking pride (236-37), Pope does betray such a unity and show his pride by his vehement criticism of those men of “little learning”—he exposes his own pride more than he attacks the “pride” of his enemies. Pope the critic contradicts his own argument and assumes himself the role of the ultimate judge—a situation that upsets the so-called all-powerful and all-embracing Nature. Auden recognizes Pope’s inability to follow Nature: Pope

was a snob and a social climber, who lied about his ancestry and cooked his correspondence; he was fretful and demanded constant attention, he was sly, he was mean, he was greedy, he was vain, touchy, and worldly while posing as being indifferent to the world and to criticism; he was not even a good conversationalist. (208-09)

Most of Pope’s satirical discourses arise from his dissatisfaction with the status quo (“my country’s ruin makes me grave”). He wrote much of his great poetry “from an anti-establishment stance, from a position of self-righteous Achillean defiance of

authority. Pope saw himself, in his role as Horatian satirist, as an Achillean warrior . . ." (Shankman 70). He intended his satire as a "supplement to the public laws" (Baines 150). This is to "position himself as a kind of superior magistrate, acting outside the limited ethics of the law"; "An Essay on Criticism" in fact "enacts a kind of social judgment" (Baines 151). He was even regarded as the first poet of political opposition in English literature (Erskine-Hill 135). Nevertheless, his morality did not qualify him as the perfect incarnate of Nature or God.<sup>12</sup> His self-righteousness attests to his own deviation from Nature and from his ideal. In his own words, an ideal critic is "a soul exempt from pride; / And love to praise, with reason on his side" (641-42); sour or severe criticisms should be avoided since "[t]o err is human, to forgive, divine" (525). Oddly enough, his funny caricature of Dennis (267-84) demonstrates that the poet who asserts the importance of following Nature and of maintaining modesty also proudly transgresses his own regulations. His complaint of the dull critics and his lament of the cultural decline do not vindicate his ways to men, but expose the imperfection of humanity and the limitation of Nature. What truly guided his writing, consequently, is not Nature but his "dialogues" with his friends and foes.

As Pope mocks his foes, therefore, he also invites self-mockery unawares. He assumes Nature and human beings to be God's perfect creation, but his eagerness to take the role of Nature exposes his own deficiencies in both morality and ideal. He laughs at poor poets and critics, not accepting that he can be laughed at as well. For Bakhtin, "carnival does not know footlight, in the sense that it does not acknowledge any distinction between actors and spectators"; "everyone participates because its very idea embraces all the people"—consequently, it has "a universal spirit; it is a special condition of the entire world . . ." (*Rabelais* 7). Contrary to his intention, Pope's description of Nature unintentionally negates her universal power, and thus carries the carnivalesque mark.

### **Pope's Laughter toward Dull Poets**

Of course Pope does not palpably devote himself to carnival writing like Rabelais. In "An Essay on Criticism," the sparkle of carnival flashes now and then, and shows Pope's sense of humor seldom found in his later works. He continues to

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<sup>12</sup> Pope was viewed as "hypocritical in his attitude toward money"—he earned money by publishing his translation of Homer, but he condemned those who wrote for money as well (Ingrassia 176). As the first English writer to achieve a comfortable independence from the business of marketing his own poetry and translation, he "soon became an astute manipulator of audience and opportunity" (Nicholson 77). His letters during the time when translating Homer are filled not with the writing of poetry, but the selling of his works (Ingrassia 181). Poetry eventually justified the money he earned (Ingrassia 183).

attack “dull” poets throughout his life by poking fun at them. For example, he “parodies” their poetry:

Where'er you find “the cooling western breeze,”  
In the next line, it “whispers thro’ the trees” ;  
If crystal streams “with pleasing murmurs creep,”  
The reader’s threaten’d (not in vain) with “sleep” (350-53)

This tricky passage emanates carnivalesque flavor: Pope mocks awkward poets by “quoting” their words. With his arrangement, the clichés become imbedded in Pope’s satire, which becomes a double-voiced discourse. Bakhtin indicates that every genre has “its own parodying and travesty double, its own comic-ironic contre-partie” (“From the Prehistory” 53). As he argues, parody is “an intentional dialogized hybrid” (“From the Prehistory” 76) and “the creation of a decrowning double” (*Problems* 127). It is not a dialogue like that in narration but “a dialogue between points of view” (“From the Prehistory” 76). To laugh at the poor language, in this case, can hardly be separated from self-teasing. “The direct and serious word was revealed . . . only after it had become the laughing image of that word . . .” (“From the Prehistory” 56). The “truth” about the writers of little learning is laid bare in Pope’s mimicry of their words. Parody brings laughter and criticism as well, and it forces men to experience the truth “that is not otherwise captured in them” (“From the Prehistory” 59). The satirical effect of Pope’s mimicry becomes more impressive and powerful than that of direct condemnation.

Pope’s carnivalesque passage, nevertheless, lacks the positive side of parody emphasized by Bakhtin. For Bakhtin, parody is free from nihilistic denial: “[p]arodic-travesty literature introduces the permanent corrective of laughter, of a critique on the one-sided seriousness of the lofty direct word . . .” (“From the Prehistory” 55). It shows “the corrective of reality” which is “*too contradictory and heteroglot* to be fit into a high and straightforward genre” (“From the Prehistory” 55). “Pope is posing as a healer, but his satires are often motivated by vengeful spite” (Canfield 75). Pope, in other words, worked as a *pharmakeus* (a magician), who used the *pharmakon*, a drug that is both remedy and poison at the same time. It is “the dangerous supplement; it suggests that no one vision, no one word will ever suffice, not Pope’s, not ours” (Canfield 79). He pronounced the “faults” of his foes and the necessity of following Nature, but he did not really care whether they took his advice or not. His life-long hatred of and conflicts with John Dennis, Lewis Theobald, and Colley Cibber manifest his narrow-mindedness: his attack, far from defending Nature, amounts to nothing but a means to humiliate his enemies. Yet, for Bakhtin, parody “was not, of course, a naked rejection of the parodied object. Everything has its parody, that is, its laughing aspect, for everything is reborn and renewed through



death” (*Problems* 127). “Parody undermines not authority in principle but only authority with pretensions to be timeless and absolute” (Morson and Emerson 435). In “An Essay on Criticism,” Pope shows no sign of “renewing” his victims; what they are supposed to do is to follow his instructions unconditionally. Actually, he intends to establish his own authority as the spokesman of Nature, an intention that drives him toward monologism.

Carnival is essentially incompatible with Popean Nature. In Bakhtinian terms, Pope sets Nature as a monologic, centripetal force. He praises her as an unerring goddess, who bequeaths life and beauty to everybody in her “clear, unchanged, and universal light.” He hopes to impose this ultimate guide on all poets and critics, and to offer a once-for-all solution to all literary disputes. Yet carnival demonstrates a totally different worldview: it celebrates “joyful relativity” which rejects rationality, seriousness, absolutism, and dogmatism (*Problems* 107). Dual images abound in the combination of contradictory elements: the sacred and the profane, the lofty and the low, the great and the insignificant, the wise and the fool (*Problems* 123). It is “the festival of all-annihilating and all-renewing time” (*Problems* 124), and therefore it contains more than one meaning and refuses to be finalized (*Rabelais* 218). Popean Nature, alien to carnival, will necessarily be downgraded and subverted in this unfinalized, indeterminate festival. To some extent Pope carnivalizes Nature: he exalts her as the universal, ultimate guide for all poets and critics, but he also exposes her inability to guide men of little learning and to reconcile conflicts. He pokes fun at dull poets, yet the language of his mockery is found to “contain” their voices and anticipates no harmony in general humanity. Though he exalts the universal influences of Nature, he himself fails to behave as a generous and humble critic toward his enemies—an image which Pope proposes in “An Essay on Criticism”: Nature-inspired critics can “gladly praise the merit of a foe” (638) and be “exempt from pride” (641). Still, his unintentional subversion of Nature arouses no laughter, while his attack on his enemies brings no renewal. His argument is generally accompanied by a serious, one-sided tone, not by the hearty, rejuvenating carnival laughter.

## POETIC LICENSES VS. NATURE/RULES

. . . the first Almighty Cause  
Acts not by partial but by gen'ral laws:  
Th' exceptions few; some change since all began;  
And what created perfect? ("An Essay on Man" 1. 145-48)

### The Authority of Man-made Rules

The recognition of Nature as a universal force and standard cannot practically guide poets and critics in their writing; therefore, Pope offers concrete methods for them to follow: to study Homer (classics) day and night<sup>13</sup>, and to obey the critical rules developed by continental critics. Nature is restrained only by the law that she has ordained (90-91). In other words, she will remain consistent and never contradict herself; all who follow her just standard will never betray this harmonious "norm." Proclaiming Nature as his ultimate ideal, Pope intends to formulate a systematic and consistent discourse and to put his arguments into practice. Since Nature remains unchanged and stable, creativity for Pope aims not at exploring some unknown field or highlighting some revolutionary ideas. Her image corresponds to Bakhtin's description of authority:

The authoritative word demands that we acknowledge it, that we make it our own; it binds us, quite independent of any power it might have to persuade us internally; we encounter it with its authority already fused to it. The authoritative word is located in a distanced zone, organically connected with a past that is felt to be hierarchically higher. (Bakhtin, "Discourse 342)

In this light the "First follow Nature" episode functions as an authoritative discourse. Such a discourse "demands our unconditional allegiance," refuses to merge with diverse voices, and assumes itself pure and complete; in Bakhtin's words, "one must either totally affirm it, or totally reject it" ("Discourse" 343). Since wit (poetic imagination), which Pope compares to Pegasus, "[m]ay boldly deviate from the common track" (151), it must be restrained by critical judgment. In order to regulate literary expression, theorists have devised so-called "critical rules," and to copy

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<sup>13</sup> The identification of Homer as Nature can be traced back to the Tudor era. For Tudor writers, imitation signified (1) the copying of other writing, and (2) representation of nature, and modern accounts "often describe the transition from medieval to Renaissance poetics as a shift from a rhetorically based imitation to an Aristotelian understanding of mimesis. . . . [Yet] the two meanings of imitation . . . [are] always present in Tudor aesthetic discourse and always in dialogue with each other" (Hulse 29). Learning from Nature/Homer was already a dialogic concept in Renaissance.

Nature, Pope asserts, is to obey these rules (140), which are “nature methodized” (89)<sup>14</sup>. In other words, the rules must be worshipped as universal, unchanged, and monologic as Nature.

The identification of the aesthetic rules as the universal Nature was propelled by the seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century rationalistic philosophy (Bate 29). Classicism assumed that the universal that comprises the absolute standard of taste may be grasped by human reason; this standard is to be achieved by “a proper use of methods and of rules” (Bate 27). It is essentially a humanist view to treat Nature and critical rules as the same. It affirms the potential of human capacity indirectly by assuming that those man-made rules can match transcendental Nature. Paradoxically, Pope calls for the respect for and practice of the man-made rules, which are treated as Nature herself, because he does not believe that poets by nature can follow Nature. His ambiguous attitude toward human potential coexists with that toward Nature: in Pope’s eyes the continental critics followed Nature actively, while the Britons rejected it. Nature/rules did not prevail in England at all.

### **The Subversion of Popean Nature/Rules**

Yet the sacredness or transcendence of the man-made rules may bring more problems than solutions. Those rules, nonexistent in ancient Greece and Rome, were gradually developed based on interpretations of the classics. Aristotle mentions some reasonable arrangement of time and place in a theater, but he neither prescribes the so-called “three unities” nor renders them absolute and unchanged. Horace suggests some tips for a creative writer: decorum in language and style, the convincing portrayal of characters, and the learning from the critical opinions of mentors. He does not conceive his suggestions as the equal of an absolute aesthetic standard, either. Even Corneille, in his discussion of the three unities, advises critics not to be too severe in maintaining these critical rules. He humbly states that his readers may reject his opinions (212). Samuel Johnson, moreover, insinuates the disparity between nature and the three unities: those who follow the rules deserve to be applauded, but “the greatest graces of a play are to copy nature and instruct life” (“Preface” 327). He

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<sup>14</sup> The identification of Nature as the governing principle can be traced back to Aristotle. Although Pope does not accept all the various meanings of Nature found by Aristotle, at least both treat her as some transcendental, universal, ultimate ruling power. “Things ‘have a nature’ which have [sic] a principle of this kind” (*Physics* 22). Aristotle intends to find the “unmoved” principle behind or beyond the mutability of the world. Following Anaxagoras, he proposes that “Mind is impassive and unmixed . . . for it could cause motion in this sense only by being itself unmoved, and have supreme control only by being unmixed” (*Physics* 144). He emphasizes the importance of the essence “that which primarily imparts motion is unmoved” (*Physics* 147). Pope basically follows Aristotle’s attempt to grasp the “unmoved” and the “universal”—especially with respect to literary creativity and judgment—yet neither of them can actually simplify and unify the various meanings of Nature, the so-called “unmoved” mover.

does not consider the three unities absolute: the action on the stage is not supposed to be real, and “the unities of time and place are not essential to a just drama” (“Preface” 327). After all, those rules “have given more trouble to the poet, than pleasure to the auditor” (“Preface” 325).

Indeed, critical rules cannot explain and guide everything in creative writing: “Some beauties yet no precepts can declare” (141). Pope warns critics not to stick to the rules: “Neglect the rules each verbal critic lays, / For not to know some trifles is a praise” (261-62). This warning ironically denies the correspondence of Nature and rules. In the all-embracing grace of Nature, “trifles” do not exist and nothing should be neglected. In addition, he maintains,

If, where the rules not far enough extend,  
(Since rules were made but to promote their end)  
Some lucky license answers to the full  
Th’intent proposed, that license is a rule. (146-49)

So evident is Pope’s self-contradiction in his presumption that the rules cannot extend “far enough,” and that licenses are required to supplement the rules. When a poet “snatch[es] a grace beyond the reach of art” (155), this poetical license, though not regulated in the rules, must still be respected as Nature/rule. Pope intends to incorporate the irregularities in literary creation to the general order of Nature, and identifies the “license” as “a rule.” The rules, identified as the equivalent of Nature, should have been able to shed constant light on all creative works like the stable sun. To accept licenses as indispensable means to reject the universality and transcendence of the rules and of Nature as well. Licenses function as a “dangerous supplement” to the rules, and reveal their insufficiency as the universal, transcendental guide. “The supplement is an inessential extra, added to something complete in itself, but the supplement is added in order to complete, to compensate for a lack in what was supposed to be complete in itself” (Culler 103). Like Nature, the critical rules are presumed to be complete; however, the existence and necessity of licenses deny this completeness. Licenses can be incorporated to those rules only if the latter are not self-sufficient, only if there is already in the rules a lack that invites licenses to supplement them. Since critical rules are identified as “nature methodized,” the need for licenses directly exposes the original deficiency in Nature.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Derrida indicates this lack of Nature when talking about Rousseau. Nature should be self-sufficient, but the supplement of art manifests a void in Nature. The supplement is exterior to Nature; “Nature’s supplement does not proceed from Nature, it is not only inferior to but other than Nature” (Derrida 144-45). Based on this argument, then, licenses do not essentially belong to either Nature or the critical rules. Pope’s recognition of the necessity of licenses for the critical rules actually downgrades Nature—the universal, all-embracing power must rely on some extra supplement in order to be “complete.” In addition, Pope proclaims the universality of Nature in his description of true wit: “True wit is nature to advantage dressed; / What oft was thought, but ne’er so well expressed” (297-98). The relationship between wit and Nature parallels that between licenses and critical rules, and may

From the perspective of Bakhtinian dialogism, a self-sufficient idea does not exist, while Pope's affirmation of the necessity of poetical license verifies Bakhtin's conception of Nature as "eternally unfinished" (*Rabelais* 254). The meanings of Nature remain unspecified and undefined, so does the essence of "methodized" Nature (critical rules). Epic is a dead genre because it has been fully developed and remains unchanged in a self-enclosed world; novel is a developing genre because it continually incorporates various elements from other genres ("Epic and Novels" 4). Similarly, to proclaim Nature and critical rules as unchanged means to sentence them to death. Because Pope identifies Homer (metonymy for "epic" or "classics") as Nature (135), the "death" of epic also connotes that of Nature from the perspective Bakhtinian dialogism. Epic "is already antiquated" with "a hardened and no longer flexible skeleton"; studying this genre "is analogous to studying dead languages" (Bakhtin, "Epic and Novel" 3). Epic is among all the old genres that are "already dead" (Bakhtin, "Epic and Novel" 4). "The epic world is an utterly finished thing . . . it is impossible to change, to re-think, to re-evaluate anything in it" (Bakhtin, "Epic and Novel" 17). "The dead [genres (including the epic)] are loved in a different way. . . . Language about the dead is stylistically quite distinct from language about the living" (Bakhtin, "Epic and Novel" 20). Epic, tragedy, and all the other major genres "had already long since come to completion, they were already old and almost ossified genres" (Bakhtin, "Epic and Novel" 38). On the other hand, "life" depends on continual dialogues: "*To be means to communicate*. Absolute death (non-being) is the

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consequently yield to the deconstructive reading as well. To proclaim that "[t]rue Wit is Nature to Advantage drest" insinuates the insufficiency of Nature herself to work independently as the life-bestowing power. Wit serves as a "supplement" to Nature—this relationship resembles that between education and Nature when Derrida discusses Rousseau's theoretic problems in *Confessions* and *Emil*. The place of a supplement "is assigned in the structure by the mark of an emptiness" (Derrida 145). It is "exterior, outside of the positivity to which it is super-added, alien to that which, in order to be replaced by it, must be other than it" (Derrida 145). Nature is supposed to be complete—both Rousseau and Pope agree—but the need of supplement exposes an inherent lack in Nature. The universal truth—"What oft was thought"—must depend on wit so that it can be "well expressed" (298). Nature in Pope's discourse, therefore, never directly formulates the ultimate beauty and truth by herself. The supposedly universal presence of Nature is consequently deferred. Moreover, wit does not exist universally: as Pope has observed, men of half learning abound, while only few poets can be identified as wits. Even if wit can function as an ideal supplement to Nature, the presence of Nature still does not claim to be universal and ultimate, since "supplementation is possible only because of an originary lack" (Culler 105).

Wit as a "dangerous supplement" (in Derrida's phrase) to Nature will also threaten the transcendence of Nature. In Pope's "Essay on Criticism," wit comes from Nature, the "source" of art. Thus, Nature is the cause, while wit, the effect. However, no one can see Nature directly; the existence of Nature arises from our perception of wit in literature. In other words, the concept of Nature is constructed after the presence of wit. Viewed from this perspective, it is wit which "causes" Nature, not vice versa. Without the supplementation of wit, Nature can claim neither completeness nor presence. Furthermore, the cause-effect relationship between Nature and wit crumples in self-deconstruction: "If the effect is what causes the cause to become a cause, then the effect, not the cause, should be treated as the origin. . . . If either cause or effect can occupy the position of origin, then origin is no longer originary; it loses its metaphysical privilege" (Culler 88). Pope's arguments, to sum up, deconstruct the transcendence and originality of Nature.

state of being unheard, unrecognized” (Bakhtin, *Problems* 287). “To communicate,” far from being unilateral, always presupposes the mutual interaction of both sides. In Pope’s argument, Nature, like the unchanging sun (315-17), never “communicates” with common poets and critics; he even asserts that she is too sacred and transcendental to be known by the mundane world (“An Essay on Man” 1.289). Blasphemous and downgrading, therefore, are Pope’s deification of Nature and glorification of critical rules as self-sufficient, unmovable standard.<sup>16</sup>

Even if a writer follows the rules strictly, his/her “unerring” works do not necessarily impress readers as “divinely bright.” Pope satirizes those who write with a certain formula (352-53). An unimpeachable work may appear insipid and lifeless. Hartley denies that Nature and critical rules, represented by Aristotle, can be identified the same (261). Besides, Pope warns those who stick to the rules:

But in such lays as neither ebb nor flow,  
Correctly cold, and regularly low,  
That shunning faults one quiet tenor keep,  
We cannot blame indeed—but we may sleep. (239-42)

This warning contradicts Pope’s equation of rules with Nature: this “source of Art” is supposed to inspire artists, not to hypnotize readers. Nature is viewed as “Unerring”; however, Pope affirms, “a faultless piece” never exists (253-54). Faults are sometimes inevitable and normal:

As men of breeding, sometimes men of wit,  
T’avoid great errors must the less commit;  
Neglect the rules each verbal critic lays,  
For not to know some trifles is a praise. (259-62)

Indeed it is beyond the power of mortal men to reach perfect Nature, and indeed it is poor judgment to concentrate on some trivial mistakes in a piece of work without recognizing its merits. Nevertheless, Pope fails to reconcile his identification of critical rules as Nature on the one hand and his argument for the tolerance of some minor errors on the other. He acknowledges indirectly that critical rules cannot function as the absolute and universal standard, and that some “minor errors” in a literary work may achieve the effects which those rule-abiding poets cannot do. Nature is “Unerring,” so is the excellent expression of art which shines on all objects “like th’unchanging sun” (315-17). A good critic, however, must not stick to the “rules” and must sometimes accept “licenses,” the deviation from those rules, as an expression of wit. Universal and unerring Nature, consequently, does not correspond to man-made rules, which appear “[c]orrectly cold, and regularly low.” He echoes

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<sup>16</sup> The impossibility to depict Nature as a consistent universal standard is echoed by Gadamer’s negation of natural sciences as the base of human studies: “Thus a conclusion based on universals, a reasoned proof, is not sufficient, because what is decisive is the circumstances” (23).

Dryden's argument in "An Essay of Dramatic Poesy": though the French follow the classical laws strictly, their works "are indeed the beauties of a statue, but not of a man" (227); they demonstrate nothing but "dearth of plot, and narrowness of imagination" (230). In the "irregular plays" of Shakespeare, Dryden indicates, "there is a more masculine fancy and greater spirit in the writing" than any French play; this is not his deviation from nature because Shakespeare "was naturally learned; he needed not the spectacles of books to read nature; he looked inwards, and found her there" (231). Thus rules do not work as "unerring" Nature at all. The Swan of Avon can find Nature without studying Homer and critical rules day and night.

Furthermore, Pope unintentionally divulges the clash between Nature and critical rules when praising Aristotle's achievement:

Poets, a race long unconfin'd and free,  
Still fond and proud of savage liberty,  
Receiv'd his laws, and stood convinc'd 'twas fit  
Who conquer'd Nature should preside o'er Wit. (649-52)

In other words, poets are not *naturally* inclined toward discipline and order; by learning Aristotle's poetics, one may demonstrate wit and *conquer* Nature. This evaluation opposes his statement that the general order "[i]s kept in nature, and is kept in man" ("An Essay on Man" 1.171-72), while the critical rules, initiated by Aristotle, become so terribly powerful as to subordinate Nature. By nature, this passage (649-52) indicates, poets obey no order and authority, whereas the application of critical rules incurs tension and conflict—not harmony—between poets and Nature—insinuated in the word "conquer'd." He even condemns Britons for their defying the critical rules and their staying uncivilized (715-18)—a condition which denies the "universality" of critical rules. Neoclassical England, unlike contemporary France, stood outside of the "universal" influence of Nature/rules and still needed the regulation of critical rules in order to approach her. The emphasis on the necessity of critical rules, therefore, subverts the transcendental and authoritative status of Nature. The emergence of the heterogeneous voice, uttered by Pope himself, manifests again Bakhtin's negation of a self-sufficient, harmonious idea and of the validity of monologism. No authority "is established once and for all" (Emerson xxxviii).

Pope's ambivalent attitude towards critical rules may derive from Longinus's interpretation of sublimity. On the one hand, Longinus affirms the transcendence of Nature and praises her "a first and primary element of creation"; she must work with "method" (rule) which "is competent to provide and contribute quantities and appropriate occasions for everything, as well as perfect correctness in training and application" (139). He formulates some certain criteria for sublimity and proposes certain techniques for writers so that they may achieve greatness. On the other hand,

however, he also recognizes that “divine writers . . . disdained exactness of detail and aimed at the greatest prizes in literature” (152). A mediocre writer who attempts to avoid all mistakes is inferior to a great writer who, despite some mistakes, reaches sublimity. The “great geniuses are least ‘pure’. Exactness in every detail involves a risk of meanness; with grandeur, as with great wealth, there ought to be something overlooked” (150). Sublimity, a deviation from Nature/rules, belongs to the “license” proposed by Pope. The necessity of overlooking something does not match the all-embracing quality of Nature at all. Longinus never attempts to reconcile the disparity between the necessity of his “rules” and the transcendence of sublimity—neither does Pope. The existence of such a paradox, nevertheless, denies the legitimacy of the monologic, authoritative voice with regard to Popean Nature and critical rules.

## CANONIZATION AND RE-ACCENTUATION OF THE CLASSICS

Nature is also incarnated through the canonization of the classics: Pope identifies Homer as Nature, and he canonizes a series of arch-critics from Aristotle to William Walsh in Part III of “An Essay on Criticism.” As the models for all critics, they demonstrate the universally ideal learning and personality: “pleased to teach, and not yet proud to know” (632), unbiased (633), well-bred and sincere (635), willing to praise the merits of a foe (638), owning exact taste (639), not proud (641), and reasonable (642). Their supreme status is supposed to remain permanently unchanged and universally accepted because they reveal the eternal light of Nature—they devoted themselves to topics of universal values, not to those of particular issues.<sup>17</sup> He encourages all would-be poets and critics to study Homer day and night, and thus indirectly promotes the conclusive and closed worldview. In epic, tradition must be accepted as totally sacred and authoritative (Morson and Emerson 421). Bakhtin indicates this closedness:

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<sup>17</sup> Pope’s veneration of the canon, as well as his glorification of critical rules, can be traced back to Aristotle’s quest for the “unmoved.” Unlike his teacher Plato, Aristotle does not label the “unmoved” as “Ideal,” nor does he reject the changing world as illusory and false. He conceives the ultimate principle as dynamic: “The only continuous motion, then, is that which is caused by the unmoved movement: and this motion is continuous because the movement remains always invariable, so that its relation to that which it moves remains also invariable and continuous” (*Physics* 162). Numerous literary works are continuously created, and readers must rely on some ultimate guidance in order to appreciate the truly valuable. Canonical works and critics are affirmed because their value is presumed to be permanently valid like the “unmoved.” Therefore, “when Aristotle defined poetry as an ‘imitation of nature,’ he did not mean the indiscriminate copying of any individual, but rather the selective imitation of what is general and representative in man” (Bate 10). Pope echoes this by stating that the general order “[i]s kept in nature, and is kept in man” (“An Essay on Man” 1.171-72). For Pope, the reliance on critical rules and the identification of canonical critics can illustrate Nature; Nature constantly sheds light on all beings, a “continuous motion” in Aristotle’s words.



There is no place in the epic world for any openendedness, indecision, indeterminacy. There is no loophole in it through which we glimpse the future; it suffices unto itself, neither supposing any continuation nor requiring it. . . . Absolute conclusiveness and closedness is the outstanding feature of the temporally valorized epic past. ("Epic and Novel" 16)

Therefore, Pope announces that a poet and a critic cannot expect to create anything "new" under the sun, but only "[w]hat oft was thought" (298). With this closed worldview, Pope detests the academic debates between Scotists and Thomists (444), and means to silence all disrupted voices in "An Essay on Man": "Cease then, nor order imperfection name." Nature, tradition, classical rules, and classics are valued as eternally stable, authoritative, and sacred; it is not allowed in Pope's discourse to question their validity and authority. The world governed by Nature operates essentially in order, and thus he maintains that "Whatever is, is right" ("An Essay on Man" 1.294). Disharmony and chaos do not really exist in the fundamentally systematic, peaceful universe. Heteroglossia is thus suppressed and neglected in this static, monologic discourse. Popean Nature is hostile to dialogism: dialogue in such a condition is rejected, and the clash among various voices is considered deviation from Nature.

Canonization, however, depends on value judgment, which, in Pope's words, works "as our watches, none / Go just alike, yet each believes his own" (9-10). The evaluation of the so-called canon varies from generation to generation, and no decisive comment can be placed on any single masterpiece. In the process of canonization, the valued elements are preserved and glorified, while the heteroglot voices are rejected and marginalized. Still, it is difficult to decide the canonized element of the literary language and that of heteroglossia; it is especially so in the analysis of ancient works (Bakhtin, "Discourse" 418). A reader must possess the knowledge of "the shifting dialogizing background" in order to discern what was canonized at a particular time (Morson and Emerson 363). Canonization "blurs heteroglossia" and "facilitates a naïve, single-voiced reading" (Holquist 425). In "An Essay on Criticism," Pope's neglect of Sidney's achievement<sup>18</sup> in literary criticism is

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<sup>18</sup> Beginning from Renaissance, the significance of Nature gradually became diversified, but generally her superior power and status were still widely acknowledged. With the rise of humanism, human creativity was affirmed to the extent that sometimes a poet's glory can rival that of Nature—a situation which is not found in classical critics and which is suppressed in "An Essay on Criticism." Sidney represents the typical humanist voice when he praises poetic imagination: a poet can create "better than nature bringeth forth" and deliver a golden world, while nature only set forth a brazen (145). "He mixes Platonic ideals with an Aristotelian mimesis in order to convey . . . how the poetic world is analogous to an intricate natural one by means of varying perspectives" (Kinney 9). In Bakhtinian terms, Sidney's poetics is essentially polyphonic and heterogeneous. His ideal poet "produces works for the Tudor century distinctive in the pluralism and plenitude they harbor. Such writing opens things up rather than closes them down, forever inviting readers to join in the production of meaning" (Kinney 9). In other words, although the court functioned as the center of all cultural activities in the Tudor dynasty,

perhaps an attempt to blur heteroglossia: since this Renaissance courtier exalts poet's creativity above Nature's power, Pope must reject this voice in order to present an apparently consistent western critical tradition. Pope inherited Renaissance humanism in assuming the necessity of learning from the Greek and Roman writers, but he excludes Sidney, an arch-humanist who dares to regard as brazen the world brought forth by Nature.<sup>19</sup>

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Renaissance was actually pluralistic, hostile to all forms of monologic discourse that meant to render all its disparate voices into harmony. Therefore, Sidney does not propose nature to be as authoritative and transcendental as Popean Nature. Although he still recognizes poesy as "an art of imitation," he does not encourage poets to follow nature; in his eyes the best poets can "imitate the inconceivable excellencies of God" (146). Sidney's discourse here demonstrates the integration of the classical tradition and Christian belief—the concept of nature originated from the Greco-Roman culture, while the representation of "excellencies of God" in poetry is alien to Aristotelian poetics. Likewise, Hobbes defines Nature as "the Art whereby God hath made and governes the World" (9). This is the result of the dialogue between two heterogeneous cultures, and both Sidney and Hobbes do not even attempt to justify the co-existence of God and nature, a pagan deity, in his defense. This co-existence may derive from the cultural background of Renaissance. Renaissance was simultaneously the "rebirth" of the Greco-Roman culture and the "revolution" of medieval heritage. Medieval Christianity did not totally pass away, while the pagan voices poured into Europe. The veneration of Mother Nature was introduced into Renaissance. Pope himself also blends God and Nature: "All are but parts of one stupendous whole, / Whose body nature is, and God the soul" ("An Essay on Man" 1.267-68). Since the humanist learning, which requires the study of Greek and Roman classics, may easily lead to heteroglossia in one's language and discourse, we can anticipate that Pope, who studied Homer day and night, also speaks with a heteroglot voice. Nevertheless, he attempts to present a systematic, harmonious discourse by excluding heterogeneous voices like that of Sidney.

<sup>19</sup> No other Renaissance writers except Sidney dare to claim that Nature can only bring forward a brazen world, but the affirmation of the poet's imagination still continues in the humanism-inspired culture. It does not follow that Renaissance generally remained unified and single-voiced. It was the time when "many strands of authority coexist[ed] and occasionally struggle[d] against each other"—while such a struggle is often reflected in literature (Burrow 19). A dialogic milieu also stimulated the literary production of this age: "London writers read each others' works, imitated each others' styles, and tried eagerly to overgo each other . . . . Genres developed and died with an almost unhealthy rapidity" (Burrow 24). The Aristotelian sense of imitation—the representation of nature—was interpreted and practiced so variously as to arouse the nature-art debate. With regard to the relationship(s) between nature and art, both Shakespeare and Jonson had their unique viewpoints which can hardly be rendered in a totally consistent, harmonious "system." Shakespeare emphasizes the dramatist's autonomous artistry when indicating the mimetic feature of drama: plays must hold "the mirror up to nature: to show virtue her own feature, scorn her image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure" (*Hamlet* 3.2.19-23). It is a humanist declaration of the artist's independence: Not that a writer should follow Nature passively, but that she must follow the creativity of the artist in order to show the true essence of virtue or vice. However, Shakespeare does not belittle the power of Nature at all: "Yet nature is made better by no mean / But nature makes that mean; so over that art / Which you say adds to nature, is an art / That nature makes" (*The Winter's Tale* 4.4.89-92). This is Polixenes's response to Perdita, who has heard that art may corrupt Nature; in short, the latter denies the transcendental power of Nature, while the former affirms it. Nature predetermines art, and artists' creativity and judgment miraculously echo the work of nature. Shakespeare leaves the nature-art debate with no conclusive remarks, but the image of nature as a universal life giver is recognized. For further discussion of nature-art debate in Shakespeare, see Colie; Orgel; Wilson; Kermode. For Ben Jonson, on the other hand, Nature "is always the same," but "Men are decayed" ("Timber" 402). The guidance of Nature, therefore, is indispensable for artists. Generally speaking, nevertheless, he holds that Nature and art work together in harmony, as it is expressed in his praise of Shakespeare—"Nature herself was proud of his designs, / And joy'd to wear the dressing of his lines" ("To the Memory" 47-48); "a good Poet's made as well as born" ("To the Memory" 64). Nature gives birth to the artistry of poets, and poets can reach her through their creation. Besides, "without art, nature can never be perfect; and, without nature, art can claim no being" ("Timber" 416). The mutual dependence of art and

Reader's understanding will definitely be biased with the rejection of heteroglossia. Nowadays "An Essay on Criticism" has been canonized, and readers tend to treat Pope's discourse as the genuine representative voice in the eighteenth-century England. Pope satirizes Dennis, and we may be led to treat the latter as a genuine dunce, to believe in the supremacy of Nature in the production of neoclassical writers, and to take for granted the correspondence of Pope's practice and preaching. Nevertheless, Dennis was a dominant and important critic among his contemporaries, and Pope, a minor figure when he started to mock Dennis, never forgave his enemy like the generous critic portrayed in "An Essay on Criticism." The canonization of Pope's poetry may thence misdirect our understanding and evaluation of Dennis's works; it distorts Dennis's true image and suppresses his voice. Pope's description of his enemy manifests the ideology of dominance, which tends to "dehumanize people by stereotyping them, by denying them their variousness and complexity" (Christian 2263). To regard Dennis as a dunce is simply "a naïve, single-voiced reading." Pope's mockery does not shine like the sun and demonstrates nothing but his own prejudice.

Also, Pope's extol of William Walsh (725-44) amounts not to the general consensus but to his own biased judgment. The young poet owes his own artistry to the deceased critic in a language that seems to elevate the latter to the status of Nature, with the tone which sounds like that of a Christian's prayer to God. Nowadays, Walsh

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nature implies their equal status—here nature is not deified as the supreme guide for poets and critics. Jonson also avers the poet's creativity. In his praise of Shakespeare's achievement, he exposes the contrast between Nature and art: "For though the Poet's matter Nature be / His art doth give the fashion. And that he / Who casts to write a living line, must sweat / (Such as thine are), and strike the second heat / Upon the Muses' anvil, turn the same / (And himself with it), that he thinks to frame" ("To the Memory" 57-62). This episode, agreeing with that from *Hamlet*, proclaims the independent creativity of a poet. Nature herself engenders no masterpiece; it is only through the labor of poets that her glory may come into being. "*Ars corona* (i.e. "Art is the crown")," he argues, and art can make nature and imitation perfect ("Timber" 416). Moreover, Jonson adds, Shakespeare's art can match Nature ("To the Memory" 55-56). With different talents, both Shakespeare and Jonson—though not so provocative like Sidney as to belittle Nature—harbor the humanist idea that an individual poet can reach beyond the grasp of Nature with independent creativity. For both dramatists, Nature represents the transcendental power that finds incarnation in literary works, a view that Alexander Pope also agrees in his statement that Nature and Homer are the same. In both Shakespeare and Jonson, artists and Nature were held to complement each other. Pope also recognizes such a relationship: "True wit is nature to advantage dressed; / What oft was thought, but ne'er so well expressed" (297-98). Yet Pope does not conceive the poetic creativity as the equal of Nature: a poet as a humble servant of Nature must always follow Her instructions. Moreover, Shakespeare is regarded as a poet with "the natural wit" because of his "wildness," his non-conformity to the conventional rules, the spontaneous freedom of his imagination and his expression, that proved him Nature's true pupil" (Lovejoy, "Discrimination" 12). In "An Essay on Criticism," by contrast, Nature and the critical rules are identified the same (140). Deviation of those rules, consequently, offends Popean Nature. The contrast between these two types of Nature reflects different viewpoints on human potential: Shakespeare composed at the time when humanism was on the rise, and therefore the artist's creativity was highly affirmed (the same can be found in Sidney's "An Apology for Poetry"); Pope's voice characterizes the typical neoclassical evaluation of human capacity: "So vast is art, so narrow human wit" (61). With this wit, a poet can only demonstrate "[w]hat oft was thought" (298). For Popean Nature, therefore, tradition is far more important than invention.

is not universally ranked as important as Aristotle, Horace, or Erasmus; Pope's canonization of a minor critic, again, illustrates the absence of a generally accepted aesthetic standard. His own "peculiar" evaluation reveals that his "watch" goes different from the others', and that his personal appreciation of Walsh corrupts his own critical judgment. His condemnation of Dennis and his encomium of Walsh originate actually from his communication with both, not from a mysterious source of Art. As the self-appointed spokesman for Nature, Pope attacks those who deviate from the monologic, static ideal, but his life-long interaction with his contemporaries illustrates the inevitability of dialogue—he did not really practice what he preached. Monologic as his argument appears, his works still highlights more dialogic awareness than those of Romantic poets such as William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. He prefers to speak directly to the others rather than indulge in his emotion recollected in tranquility. This dialogic inclination runs counter to his attempt to canonize his own favorite poets and critics once for all.

Actually Pope recognizes diverse voices with regard to the canonized works and western world in general, a recognition that denies his own belief in the existence of general order in Nature and humanity<sup>20</sup>. Homer and Dryden are continually attacked in every generation (458-65); Horace suffers from "wrong translations" and "wrong quotations" (663-64); tyranny and superstition ruined arts when Roman had declined and fallen (685-88); monks destroyed civilization like Goths (692). All the disorder and destruction theoretically do not and should not exist in the harmonious universe proposed by Dryden and Pope. Yet their existence challenges the myth of harmony and unity in Pope's ideal, and questions the stability of Nature and canon as well.

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<sup>20</sup> "Nature" in the eighteenth century carried various meanings—"It is a landscape, but it is also a way of feeling—of feeling about native soil, of feeling about the past, of feeling about Englishness itself" (Fulford 109); it is also "an exact reproduction of every-day life and manners, as opposed to anything wild or extravagant, or that existed only in the writer's imagination. Nature meant . . . Common-Sense" (Phelps 11). "The conception of 'nature' as the ultimate standard . . . underlies the classical conviction that the end of art is the revelation to man and the rational, ethical inculcation in him of that ideal perfection of which . . . he as a particular is only a faulty image" (Bate 10). Pope's glorification of Nature, perhaps stemming from Boileau's argument that she actively bestows talents among authors (242; 249-50), "made nature the place where God's order . . . could be observed" (Fulford 111). This glorification also emerges in his "An Essay on Man," in which he admonishes human beings to be content in "the hand of one disposing Power" and not to question mysterious, "unknown" Nature (1.285-89). He announces that "All are but parts of one stupendous whole, / Whose body nature is, and God the soul" (1.267-68). All the seemingly contradictory elements in Nature actually exist in harmony, and she "is but art unknown to thee" (1.289). She guides wit and reason (2.161-64), shaping everything according to various laws (3.1-9) and remaining "unvaried" and "fixed" (3.189-90). In other words, the faith in the source of Art in "An Essay on Criticism" echoes the religious belief in "An Essay on Man"—both refer to the same divine power, which governs all creatures and activities. In "Epistle I: To Sir Richard Temple," Pope even identifies Nature as God (95)—a manifestation of the blending of Christianity and pagan cultures. "Nature" in the eighteenth century, as Morris argues, held "an inseparable connection with religion and with religious feeling" (230). She was presumed to guide not only literature but also the whole universe, and Pope's glorification of her governance manifested his yearning for a universal and transcendental order.

Moreover, Pope praises the “great injur’d name” of Erasmus (693-96). This humanist philosopher was persecuted by the Roman Catholic Church because of his tolerance of different voices in faith. Pope should have had supported the action of the church, since the “unity” and “order” in religion must be maintained by the suppression of heterogeneous voices, and this is what Pope attempts to achieve in his discourse. However, he violates his monologic inclination in his canonization of Erasmus, a man who embraced heteroglossia. Perhaps Pope appreciated Erasmus because of his own social status in England: as a marginalized Catholic, who had been denied a college education and many public rights, Pope meant to challenge the contemporary authoritative culture with the publication of *An Essay on Criticism*, speaking as if he alone were the authority who could regulate the rules and interpret the classics. In the same work he even boldly denounces Charles II, William III, and reformist priests, taking it for granted to vent his anger to those political and religious leaders (534-53)<sup>21</sup>. Both Erasmus and Pope spoke “alien” voices among their contemporaries. Though he declares the necessity of harmony and order in criticism and society, his own voice neither preserves self-consistency nor yields to his contemporary authority. Pope’s canonization of the critics, thence, exposes his intention to be the authority.

Pope’s veneration of Nature and classics as the universal standard for creativity and criticism parallels the predominance of the natural sciences described in *Truth and Method* by Gadamer. The human sciences, in order to gain its independence from the natural sciences, must abandon the glorification of a universal, abstract standard and resort to the humanistic tradition, which presupposes the necessity of *sensus communis* (good sense). *Sensus communis* requires a dialogic environment: it “does not mean only that general faculty in all men but the sense that founds community” (21). Gadamer’s argument about the problems of the human sciences also illustrates those of literary creativity and judgment in Pope’s discourse. Popean Nature, which is similar to the abstract formulas in the natural sciences, assumes transcendence and thus separation from the changing human community. Under such a circumstance, poets and critics can only accept passively the grace from Nature, which never yields to the evaluation and investigation from human beings. Literary criticism, which follows Pope’s monologic ideal, will fail: “a conclusion based on universals, a

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<sup>21</sup> Pope’s denouncement here reveals his own prejudice. His partial judgment of Charles II has been discussed earlier. William III, after the Glorious Revolution, promoted the Act of Toleration (1689), which protected the Protestant nonconformists. He even accepted the Bill of Rights (1689), which restricted the royal prerogatives. As to the religious Reformation, it is regarded as a revival of Christian faith by nonconformists, but Pope as a Catholic treated it as an unpardonable rebellion against the true belief. John Wesley, one of the famous nonconformist preachers among Pope’s contemporaries, witnessed the corruption of Catholic clergymen and consequently persisted in his reformation. Therefore, Pope’s criticism does not “gladly praise the merit of a foe” (638) as a Nature-inspired critic would do.

reasoned proof, is not sufficient, because what is decisive is the circumstance” (Gadamer 23). Judgment “cannot be taught in the abstract but only practiced from case to case.” Neither can it be learned, “because no demonstration from concepts can guide the application of rules” (Gadamer 31). Therefore, community or a dialogic environment counts far more important than a transcendental guide. Placed in a community, a critic must endeavor the “renewed adaptation to new situations” (Gadamer 26), not the application of universals to individual cases.<sup>22</sup>

Language is never unitary (Bakhtin, “Discourse” 288). Epic is considered a dead genre by Bakhtin because it assumes an inaccessible, transcendental tradition, which resists continual evaluation and interpretation. Nothing is new under the sun in the epic. Yet language is always re-accentuated: “For the word is . . . not a dead material object in the hands of an artist equipped with it; it is a living word and is therefore in all things true to itself . . . . [I]ts meaning—once realized—can never be completely extinguished” (Bakhtin, “Discourse” 419). Pope’s evaluation of Nature, critical rules, the classics, the canonical critics and his contemporaries actually re-accentuates what he has learned from ancients and moderns; his evaluation must also be re-accentuated by later generations.<sup>23</sup> “The historical life of classic works is in fact the uninterrupted process of their social and ideological re-accentuation”—new meanings continue to emerge (Bakhtin, “Discourse” 421). Canonization may lead readers to neglect the necessity of their continual dialogic relationship with the text. The value and significance of classics do not rely on a once-for-all judgment based on universals. The “potentials of the text must enter into dialogic relations with other perspectives the author cannot predict or concretely imagine” (Morson and Emerson 364). All canonized works can achieve immortality through continual re-accentuation, not through the authoritative prescription of some major critics.

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<sup>22</sup> My application of Bakhtinian dialogism does not work like that of formulas in dealing with problems of mathematics or physics. First, the meanings of Pope’s discourse are not “determined” once for all by Bakhtinian reading. The meanings and significance of literary texts can never be exhausted by a single approach. Besides, Bakhtin never affirms the universal applicability of his own theory—he maintains that dialogue must prevail if we intend to learn more widely and deeply, and he also recognizes the existence of monologism. “Exceptions” and “deviations,” which frequently occur in literary criticism and the human sciences as well, must be reasonably resolved in the rigorous natural sciences. Yet my reading does not aim at reconciling the self-contradictory voices in “An Essay on Criticism.” Dialogism does not function as the critical rules upheld by Pope, but only as a possible method to interpret a text.

<sup>23</sup> The meanings of “Nature” indeed underwent significant re-accentuation in the Romantic age. While Pope deals generally with her philosophical and religious connotations, Wordsworth and some other romantics tend to appreciate her as an enlightening landscape. The poet’s ego is considered to be the origin of creativity, while Nature reflects ideal humanity (Bloom 136-37; 142-43), not the transcendental guide for wit and judgment as Pope emphasizes. “Nature is important insofar as it manifests the same transcendental energy as informs the human mind . . .” (Day 45); mind or spirit is given “a priority over nature and matter” (Day 58). Romantic poets describe the details of natural objects with far more effort than neoclassical writers. For the thorough discussion of the significance of Nature in romantic age, see Abrams; Bloom.

## CONCLUSION

### **The Insufficiency of Popean Nature as the Transcendental Guide**

If Popean Nature functions as a “metanarrative,” then the Bakhtinian reading of this transcendental standard exemplifies the postmodern spirit in Lyotard’s term: “incredulity toward metanarratives” (xxiv). Lyotard’s rejection of universal theories means to incorporate different voices in a discourse (Malpas 103). Likewise, Bakhtinian reading of Popean Nature exposes various voices in Pope’s arguments. Pope recognizes their existence, but his belief in Nature, the ultimate and harmonious power, invites him to suppress or deny those voices. The prevalence of men of little learning, the limited applicability of the critical rules, and Pope’s evaluation of certain characters all call into question the validity of the all-embracing power of Nature.

This embarrassing status of Nature reflects the essential problem of all monologic discourse. “Pope, Swift, and Dryden still believe there is some absolute truth out there, to which only the God’s-eye view is adequate, even as they deny that any human perspective may grasp it” (Noggle 9). Such an imposing gesture works like “adding epicycles to a Ptolemaic astronomy and at worst a wholly unjustified leap of theoretic faith” (Morson and Emerson 144). One’s discourse and voice, nevertheless, “will sooner or later begin to liberate themselves from the authority of the other’s discourse . . . [since] a variety of alien voices enter into the struggle for influence within an individual’s consciousness . . .” (“Discourse” 348). Pope’s “centripetal” attempt lapses into self-contradiction, and this attempt characterizes the “monological” career of a poet as well: “The poet can speak alone, and does not require interaction with other consciousnesses and with other languages . . . . [T]he poet escapes [heteroglossia] in order to write in a language that is timeless . . .” (Morson and Emerson 320).

Yet it is inappropriate to conclude that Pope was a monologic poet and that neoclassical literature rejects dialogism. Actually the neoclassical age was “full of anxiety and prospects, each feeding off the other. People, often provoked by changes they disliked, usually sought stability and order, clamouring for an earthly paradise” (Hoppit 495). Neoclassical critics tended to imposed “a set of principles created for one language on to another” (Cruttwell 453), and their “[b]elief in hierarchy and order were as strong as ever, but society was too fluid to be contained within any neat categorization or series of expectations” (Hoppit 88). Dialogical spirit already existed at that time. Sitter believes that most of the neoclassic apologists for poetry “stay[ed] closer to the ground” (“Questions” 136)—in other words, they were mostly practical

and hostile to abstract theories. Therefore, young Rasselas deems it impossible to be a poet who “must write as the interpreter of nature, and legislator of mankind, and must feel himself “superior to time and place” (Johnson, *Rasselas* 50-51). Pope’s life-long career also illustrates his continual “dialogue” with his friends and foes. His gentlemanly but authoritative tone in his poetry, though inclining toward monologism, always presupposes the existence of a community and the possible responses of addressees. Monologue, self-pity, and the ennui of an isolated, wandering hero are rarely found in his work.

Bakhtin conceives truth as that which “allows every moment of existence to be rich in potential” (Morson and Emerson 236)—that is, truth can never be pinned down in a conclusive generalization. An idea begins to exist “only when it enters into genuine dialogic relationships with other ideas . . . .” The realm of the existence of an idea “is not individual consciousness but dialogic communion *between* consciousnesses” (Bakhtin, *Problems* 88). Indeed “[c]onversation was a form of public utterance, almost of publication; often texts were created from conversation, and texts and talk easily followed from one another” (Hunter 12). In a dialogue, open-endedness prevails and yields to no definite, ultimate standard: “unfinalizability, real creativity, cannot be located in a system of laws” (Morson and Emerson 39), while authoritative discourse rejects growth and unfinalizability, and never merges with other voices (Morson and Emerson 219). Pope hails Nature as universal; for Bakhtin, the true universal spirit is carnival (*Rabelais* 7). In carnival “*nothing conclusive has yet taken place in the world, the ultimate word of the word of the world and about the world has not yet been spoken, the world is open and free . . .*” (*Problems* 166). Pope’s satire of his foes carries some carnivalesque tints, and his discourse about Nature brings unintentional self-mockery. Nature, “the source, and end, and test of Art,” did not govern Pope’s relationships with his foes; her “incarnation” in critical rules and canonized works never wins unanimous approval in history. Whatever is, is not necessarily right.

### **The Necessity of Dialogue**

Pope conglomerates various arguments about Nature from ancient Greece to the Neoclassical Age, and consequently carries heteroglossia. Perhaps this is why he does not exactly define the “essence” of Nature. The meanings of Nature are too complicated, and her significance is too multi-layered, while his declaration of Nature as “[w]hat oft was thought” may lead us to neglect such complexity and multiplicity. As he absorbs knowledge from the ancient writers and intends to describe Nature, he brings simultaneously diverse voices and contradictory elements into his discourse.



Things become all the more complicated because he also puts contemporary men and issues in his arguments. In a Bakhtinian reading, Pope's self-contradiction manifests actually the result of his "dialogues" with the ancient and his contemporaries. By exposing incongruous elements in Pope's arguments about Nature, we may detect the true power that guided his creativity.

In Bakhtin's theory, we are alien to one another, and being alien makes dialogue possible. With one viewpoint one cannot fully comprehend truth (Gardiner 94). Judgment "involves not merely applying the universal principle according to which it is judge, but co-determining, supplementing, and correcting that principle" (Gadamer 39). Pope cultivated his concept of Nature through his "dialogue" with the ancient writers. What is truly "canonized" is neither absolute Nature and the classics, nor tradition and critical rules, but dialogue. To assume the universality and transcendence of Nature neither removes all the warring voices nor contributes to the establishment of perfect poetics. Bakhtin affirms the value of dialogue, which was "canonized among all the genres" ("Epic and Novel" 12). He points out the necessity of dialogism: "Languages throw light on each other: one language can, after all, see itself only in the light of another language" ("Epic and Novel" 12). Only in continual dialogue can each critic probe into truth, not in the passive, static reliance on some ambiguous standard (Bakhtin, *Toward a Philosophy* 44, 46). True dialogic spirit never evades the conflicts of different voices, nor compels others to disregard them by claiming "Whatever is, is right"; rather, this spirit always treats disharmony as the "norm." In dialogism, human consciousness "always exists in a tensile, conflict-ridden relationship with other consciousnesses, in a constant alterity between self and other. In fact, a fully self-sufficient and isolated consciousness cannot possibly exist" (Gardiner 28). Bakhtin means to "break the stranglehold of the omniscient, authorial viewpoint, to challenge the pretence of any mode of representation to 'reflect' reality and fully to depict the external world" (Gardiner 95).

Therefore, a serious critic does not impose a transcendental standard on literary works; rather, he/she may recognize the dialogical relationship in them (Bakhtin and Medvedev 20). The meaning of a text never comes *naturally* from the so-called authority; the understanding of a text always changes from generation to generation. "There is neither a first nor a last word and there are no limits to the dialogic context." Meanings which were generated in the past dialogue can never remain stable and will change in the future (Bakhtin, "Methodology" 170; "Notes" 146). Therefore, a critic's job "is to bring the past into the present and the present to confront the past" and a critic "had to free himself from the tyranny of the present and the tyranny of the past" (Mason, "Miraculous" 294). Pope himself did not and could not escape from dialogues despite his glorification of monologic Nature: he speaks like an ironist who

“is always expressing identities between opposites of praise and blame, seeming ignorance and true knowledge” (Brower 199). A satirist always assumes some specific targets and responds to the attack from foes. “Pope knew that things fall apart, even the classics of verse, which he sought to refashion, and hence fleetingly preserve, through translation . . .” (Young 130). The changing evaluation of the classics insinuates the impossibility of the existence of an infallible standard, and Pope’s attempt in “An Essay on Criticism” represents only his voice among his conflict-ridden contemporaries. Whatever is, is to be re-evaluated in dialogue.

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## 天道與對話：亞歷山大·波普權威式論述中之衝突<sup>24</sup>

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### 摘要

波普 (Alexander Pope) 在《批評論》(An Essay on Criticism) 中認為：文藝和批評最高的指導原則為「天道」(Nature)。此一原則放諸四海皆準、亙古不易，其光輝普照人間、影響遍及古今，並將生命、能力、美艷賜給眾人，實為文藝的本源、目的、和試金石。然而波普對於「天道」的論述，充滿矛盾，難以自圓其說。本文借用巴克汀 (Mikhail Bakhtin) 的對話理論，擬就三方面探討波普矛盾的「天道」觀：(一) 半瓶醋文人的充斥：照波普說法，人人都蒙受「天道」恩澤，無人例外；然而波普又埋怨半瓶醋文人遍及全英國，似乎他們可以抗拒「天道」的影響；(二) 「批評法則」與「破格手法」(poetic license)：波普認為「批評法則」為天道之「方法化」，因此本質上和天道應同具「普遍適用性」；不過波普也承認「批評法則」有時而窮，無法解釋許多現象，而「破格手法」可以適時補充其不足，也應當視為批評法則的一部分。弔詭的是：「破格」不能常常使用，違反「天道」或批評原則的普遍性；且批評法則需要靠「破格」補全，表示「法則」本身不周全。(三) 「經典化」的問題：波普《批評論》第三部分列出所謂重要批評家，上自亞里斯多德，下至華許 (William Walsh)。波普對後者的讚許，顯然和現代普遍觀點不合。此外，作品被稱為「經典」後，容易使讀者忽略其背後多重聲音的樣貌，使詮釋趨向單一化。其實波普雖然說話有如權威，但他的創作經常預設對話情境，而非與世隔絕、喃喃自語。他對於半瓶醋的抱怨、對於批評法則有限性的論點，以及將其恩師華許「經典化」的作法，其實都出於他和當時社會的互動，而非根據一抽象、超然的「天道」來寫作。

關鍵字：波普、《批評論》、天道、巴克汀、對話

<sup>24</sup> 本文改寫自作者所著《批評論：亞歷山大·波普對話手法之展現》一書中第二章「對話、異質性、天道之窘境」。內容已大幅增刪。