WILLIAM MASON: A STUDY

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ABSTRACT


This thesis is an examination of the work of William Mason, an eighteenth-century poet who, though highly regarded in his own time, is little known in ours. The thesis seeks to revalidate Mason as a poet worthy of attention in the twenty-first century.

The Introduction contextualises Mason, both socially and culturally. Emphasis is given to the importance of Whig politics in his life and works, and to the influence upon him from an early age of the philosophy of John Locke. Attention is also drawn to Mason’s ability as an innovative adaptor of ancient genres, the importance to him of Milton’s verse, and the relevance of his ‘public’ poetry to modern Britain.

The first part of Chapter One provides an overview of Mason’s poetic trajectory, from his popularity in the eighteenth century to his decline in the nineteenth. The general loss of interest in eighteenth-century poetry, and its revival in the twentieth, is considered. In the second part of the chapter, Mason’s youthful poetic claim to be the literary and moral descendant of Milton and Pope is examined in the context of his early monody, and its innovative purpose and style. Attention is drawn to the intertextuality that informs much of the poetry discussed in this thesis. The treatment of the Pindaric ode in the hands of earlier poets, and Mason’s far more authentic one, is subsequently discussed. Examples are given which illustrate Mason’s successful treatment of the genre, and of his concern with the preoccupations of the age.

In Chapter Two Mason’s georgic, The English Garden, is examined. Consideration is given to Mason’s choice of Miltonic form, to the poet’s employment of his subject, gardening, as a representation of the state of the nation, and to the poet’s personal involvement in the verse in a variety of manifestations. His success in matching subject to form is demonstrated. Mason’s correspondence with Walpole concerning the American war, his collaboration with William Burgh, and his use of prose as well as poetry for political purposes, are discussed.

Chapter Three provides a brief account of the attitudes to satire from the late seventeenth century to Pope’s death, and goes on to look at Mason’s own satire. His satires are discussed in the context of his political and literary relationships with Walpole, Gray, Pope and Churchill, and his concern with the issue of slavery is foregrounded. The individual satires are examined, and examples explored of Mason’s novel and varying employment of the genre in the service of his Whig viewpoint.

The Conclusion draws together the points made in the body of the text, and claims a place for Mason amongst the eighteenth-century poets rediscovered by recent scholarship.
DECLARATION

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Acknowledgements and Dedication

I wish to thank the staff and students of the University, present and past, who have encouraged and supported me throughout the writing of this thesis. Thanks must also go to the library staff of the University, particularly those at the Rylands Library on Deansgate, for their consistently cheerful assistance.

A special thanks must go to Dr. Bill Hutchings, who supervised this thesis until his retirement in October 2008. Bill has been an unfailing source of inspiration, help and understanding. Thanks must also go to Dr. Hal Gladfelder, who took over supervision of the thesis, for his perceptiveness, patience and encouragement.

Finally, my thanks to my husband Michael, who has given me unwavering support and encouragement during the years of writing, as well as providing solutions to many computer-related problems.

I wish to dedicate this thesis to all my family, and to the memory of my mother and my father.
Preamble

Almost all the examples of Mason’s poetry, excluding his satires, have been taken from the 1811 edition of his works, which was published in four volumes. Occasional references, however, where extra textual information can be found, are to earlier editions. These are indicated in the footnotes, and can be accessed at http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/Eighteenth-Century Collections Online.

Examples of several of Mason’s satires are taken from *Mason’s Satirical Poems with Horace Walpole’s Notes*, edited by Paget Toynbee (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1926.) Other satires, such as *The Dean and The Squire*, can also be accessed at Eighteenth-Century Collections Online.

Following the initial citation in the text of Mason’s longer poems, for example *The English Garden* and *An Heroic Epistle*, reference in the footnotes is subsequently made to the initials of the title only.

There is frequent reference in the text to the *Correspondence of Horace Walpole* (48 volumes), edited by W.S. Lewis and others. Almost all the references are to Volume 28, the first of two volumes containing the correspondence of Walpole and Mason. Where reference is made to other volumes, this is indicated in the footnotes.
‘As a poet of at least historical importance, [Mason] still awaits resurrection.’

INTRODUCTION

William Mason, who was born in 1725, occupied a central place in the literary and cultural life of the eighteenth century. He was a poet, a dramatist, and a garden designer, as well as a painter, musician and writer of sermons. While a student at St. John’s College, Cambridge, he met Thomas Gray, with whom he forged a lifelong friendship. Through the varied activities of his life, he came into contact with culturally prominent men such as Richard Hurd, William Warburton, David Garrick, Joshua Reynolds and Horace Walpole, all of whom took an interest in, admired, and even collaborated with him in his literary productions. Reynolds contributed a preface to Mason’s work on painting, De Arte Graphica; William Hayley, noted supporter of the arts, referred to him as ‘master of the lyre/ Harmonious Chief of Britain’s living Choir.’ In his fifties, he became a political activist, a founder of the Yorkshire Association for political reform. His abolitionist principles brought him the friendship of William Wilberforce, whose supporter he became. At the centre of a network of significant cultural figures, he was to become one of the best known and most highly regarded poets of his day.

Though Mason’s literary reputation remained high in his lifetime, it diminished after his death, and throughout the nineteenth century. The critical strictures of Wordsworth and Matthew Arnold upon the poetry of the eighteenth century, a poetry which drew, as Mason’s did, upon classical references, and was influenced by the new vogue of ‘sensibility’, assisted in making his literary output appear irrelevant and outworn. His complete Works were published in 1811, but by the end of the century his name was little known. A biography of Mason by John W. Draper, written as a result of a doctoral study completed in 1916, was published in 1924. Though it is a work of painstaking scholarship, Draper’s account is limited in its approach to its subject by the contemporary

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1 An essay on epic poetry; in five epistles to the Revd. Mr. Mason, with notes (London, 1782), 1. 11.13-14, p. 3, in Eighteenth-Century Collections Online <http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/Eighteenth-Century Collections Online> [accessed 7 November 2007].
mistaken belief in eighteenth-century literature as the enervated forerunner of Romanticism. ‘Mason’, Draper writes, ‘represents a generation that was looking towards the Romanticism of life and art, but that never really attained either.’

Mason has been bound in a straitjacket fashioned from the received cultural opinion of almost two centuries. In recent decades, through the work of scholars such as Roger Lonsdale, James Sambrook, David Fairer, and Christine Gerrard, the poetry of the eighteenth century has undergone a reappraisal, and is newly valued for its diverse vitality and contemporary interest. The purpose of this thesis is an overdue revaluation of a poet whose work was variously informed with skill, passion and humour, qualities that elicited positive responses, in his own time, from both general reader and critic.

Much of Mason’s poetry, including the majority of the poems I shall examine in this thesis, is written from a Whig viewpoint. Mason’s most striking poetry is animated by a political passion which would in time result in his active participation in the demand for parliamentary reform. For him, politics occupied a central place in life and literature. The library of Pembroke College, Cambridge, where he became a Fellow after his undergraduate days at St. John’s, holds a record of the books he borrowed, which include the works of John Locke. Mason, however, was more than a curious student intent upon familiarising himself with the work of the famous philosopher. Brought up by a staunchly Whig father, he had been educated at Hull Grammar School by a master, John Clarke, who ‘energetically propounded the educational ideas of John Locke in theory and practice.’ The ideas of Locke had been part of Mason’s intellectual development since childhood.

As James Sambrook observes, Locke was ‘the best-known apologist’ for the settlement that followed the Glorious Revolution of 1688. For Locke, in spite of difference dictated by birth and ability, each man was born ‘with a title to perfect

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freedom, and an uncontrolled enjoyment of all the rights and privileges of the
law of nature, equally with any other man.’ Though the people, for the good of
the whole society, must give political power into the hands of governors, that
power should be used for no other purpose than ‘the peace, safety, and public
good of the people.’ A monarch should remain such only with the consent of
the people, who were entitled to replace a ruler failing to honour and protect their
rights as free men.

Locke’s thinking found an application in the political tenets of Whiggism. For
Whigs, as for Locke, all men were equal in the sight of God. All were entitled to
personal freedom, as well as freedom of expression and of conscience, to the
enjoyment of their own property and the fruit of their labours, and to their right
to resist any attempt to interfere with these. Kingship was maintained, not jure
divino, but by the continuing acceptance of the people, with the aristocracy
holding the middle ground. As his writings show, it was to such principles that
Mason adhered.

Mason’s poetic writings took several forms, including monody, odes, elegies,
dramas, satires, and georgic. In each of these genres, he demonstrated an ability
to put the literature of the classical past, the poetry of Pindar, Virgil, and the
satirists, to use in the service of contemporary concerns. He showed himself as a
poet keenly alert to the moral value of both classical writing and biblical texts,
and their relevance to the cultural and political trends of his time. As part of this
process, he deliberately situated himself, as his verse shows, in direct descent
from Milton and Pope, the great poets of the seventeenth and early eighteenth
centuries, themselves inspired and supported by classical and Hebrew literature.
As they had done, Mason intended that his poetry should be a moral guide for the
reader.

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Mason wrote in a poetic tradition inherited, via the Renaissance, from the texts of the classical authors. To this tradition he brought significant new applications. In the genres I shall examine in this thesis, Mason’s early monody, his Pindaric odes, his georgic *The English Garden*, and his satires, Mason uses the poetry of the ancient world as a vehicle to comment upon his own times. He does, however, much more than this. In each of these genres, he shows himself to be not only skilled at adapting the forms of ancient literature, but also strikingly innovative. His monody, a form little used in the eighteenth century, breaks new ground as a pastiche by means of which he is able to display his poetic versatility, while simultaneously making a serious declaration of his moral intent as a poet. The novel, disciplined conformation of his Pindaric odes to their original, carefully controlled structure is in contrast to the loose Pindaric structure that had been favoured by British poets since Abraham Cowley composed his own free versions of the Pindaric ode. Pindar’s original use of the form was as a political vehicle for public celebration and moral admonition at the Greek Games. Mason’s Pindaric odes are also concerned with matters of political interest. Unlike Pindar’s, however, his response to political and philosophical concerns becomes in his odes, at times, intensely inward-looking: the response of the self to experience becomes the poem’s central concern.

In Mason’s georgic, too, he demonstrates a willingness to enter his own lines in ways that allow his readers a sense of the man behind the verse, whether as grieving husband or friend, or as a poet called to his country’s service. His georgic, unlike the monody, is one of many written during the eighteenth century. Once again, however, Mason’s use of it is different from that of other poets. His poem, published in four books between 1772 and 1781, is a didactic exposition of the art of gardening. Crucially, however, it provides a changing commentary on the political condition of the state, its expression informed by its writer’s growing concern about the war with the American colonies. Other contemporary georgics extolled the worth of a prosperous and industrious nation. In the first book of his georgic, too, Mason promotes a hopeful vision of all Britain made a garden by the efforts of the young men into whose hands its care will pass. The subsequent books, however, reveal the poet’s disquiet about the state of the nation as it moves towards colonial war. Even in his first book,
Mason is criticising the lack of horticultural taste of a pusillanimous king; in the fourth, published in 1781, he laments the shame and dishonour of the country that he loves. The nation Mason mourns as his poem ends is far from the idealised versions found in other eighteenth-century georgics. Its praise, from the first, is tempered by perceived political reality. Consistently throughout the text, as I shall show, Mason describes the condition of, and activity within, the garden, in political terms, leaving his reader in no doubt of his support for a constitutional monarchy reliant upon ‘People, peers, and prince.’

In the Preface to *The English Garden*, Mason elucidates his choice of the georgic form, and of blank verse, the usual medium for eighteenth-century georgic. Significantly, however, he is careful to explain that he has chosen this medium for the reason his predecessor Milton did in writing *Paradise Lost*, in order, in the interests of poetic freedom, to escape the restrictions of rhyme.

The reference to Milton indicates a political element in Mason’s choice of verse form for his poem, even before he has begun to write it. For him, the greatness of Milton’s poetry was inseparable from its author’s concern for the moral and political behaviour of the nation in the present. Milton’s call for three kinds of liberty, religious, domestic and civil, articulated in *The Second Defence of the English People* of 1654, meant that he would be laid claim to by the Whig tradition of which Mason was part, in which ‘liberty’ would be regarded as the foundation stone of the British Constitution. As Nicholas von Maltzahn observes, ‘It is not too anachronistic to style [Milton] one of the first Whigs.’

It is in *The English Garden*, too, that Mason foregrounds himself in a new way, in the guise of his country’s self-styled ‘Bard’, guardian of national honour, and messenger concerning its threatened loss in the face of an indefensible military adventure.

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The apparent progress of George III towards despotism, and the concomitant progress towards the American war during the 1770s, gave rise to Mason’s satires. Mason’s georgic, discursive in form, was begun in 1767, four years after the end of the Seven Years’ War, when Britain was enjoying a period of peace and prosperity. Satire, in contrast, provided him with a sharply focused verse form through which he could channel his contempt for the King and his warmongering allies, and the evils of despotism. His first satire was published in 1773 as a riposte to a dissertation on the superiority of Chinese gardening, written by the King’s Comptroller of Works, William Chambers; his last were written in the early 1780s, when he had become involved in the movement for parliamentary reform. The threat of autocracy, implied in Chambers’ promotion of the gardening ideas of a country ruled by a despotic emperor, continued to inform Mason’s satiric poems, together with revulsion against what he saw as fratricidal war with the American colonies, and against the powerful men who promoted it.

The poetry of the Roman satirists, of Horace and Juvenal, had been notably mediated for the eighteenth century through the satire of Pope at its beginning, and of Churchill in the decade before Mason began writing his own. Mason read and learned from them both, but as with the other genres in which he wrote, he brought his own voice to the creation of satire. Determined to thrust home his deeply felt political message through passion and humour, he shows himself, in the process, not only as the possessor of a late eighteenth-century saeva indignatio worthy of Swift himself, but also as an accomplished director of satiric comedy. Anna Seward was to refer to Mason’s first major satire, An Heroic Epistle, as ‘a new species of satire.’

In it, the author employs a distinctive farcical knockabout humour absent from the satire of Pope and Churchill, to expose the follies of Chambers’ dissertation. The poem went into eleven editions in its first year of publication, evidence of its success with readers.

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8 Anna Seward to Court Dewes, in Letters of Anna Seward, 6 vols (Edinburgh, 1811), II, p. 86 (9 April 1788).
In all the genres examined in this thesis, Mason was concerned with the issue of poetic form. In his monody, he re-works the structure and syntax of Chaucer, Spenser, Milton and Pope. The structure of his Pindaric odes adheres to the strict contours of Pindar’s own. The blank verse of his georgic is carefully selected, through consideration of Milton’s verse, as a medium which allows flexibility in the treatment of changing subjects and moods within a long poem of several books. In his satires, the heroic couplets so successfully used by Pope are modulated by a poet who is also familiar with the more discursive structure of Churchill’s couplets, and is ready to shape the form to his own purpose.

Throughout his poetic career, Mason was willing to experiment with the genres left to his own time by the poets of the ancient world, adapting them in the service of contemporary pressures and contexts. An essential aspect of such an undertaking was his desire to innovate, so announcing his presence in the world as a poet able to harness the best of the old with the new, one worthy of a century in which experiment and discovery informed cultural and commercial life.

The nature of much of Mason’s poetry was public. Recently, the poet Sian Hughes has observed that though Carol Ann Duffy is the present Poet Laureate, she is not a ‘public poet’: rather, she is a consummate poet of ‘private disquiet.’ A modern Poet Laureate, unlike those of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, is not required to produce panegyric at each event in a monarch’s life. These days, in Hughes’ view, poetry itself ‘is for the shameful, secret, private, taboo.’ What Hughes does here, in indicating the change over centuries in how poetry is perceived, is to emphasise the challenge for modern readers coming to the poetry of a writer such as Mason. For him, the poetry of politics, that most public of verse, was the natural manifestation of the cultural mindset of his time, a fusion of art with life that was both necessary and unremarkable. Much of Mason’s poetic life was lived and expressed in the context of his country’s destiny. It was an attitude to poetry’s purpose alien to modern readers used to poetry as the expression of the personal, which sometimes includes individual

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response to national affairs, but no longer views itself, in the terms of eighteenth-century poetry, as an integral part of the political fabric.

Though the political detail of eighteenth-century poetry is unfamiliar to many in the twenty-first, the passions aroused by political issues, now as then, do not change: anger at the machinations of those in power, indignation at evidence of corruption and hypocrisy, pride in military and commercial victory, anxiety at the prospect of national ruin. The robust expression of these passions, which informs Mason’s work, resonates with our responses to what is public and political, closing the gap between Mason’s time and our own.

Much of Mason’s poetry was inspired by the events of his time. Always prepared to experiment with form, he was poetically versatile, mediating the themes of his verse through a variety of genres. He was also, as this thesis will demonstrate, a poet of quality, whose writing is well worth the attention of twenty-first century readers. Literary prejudices, of omission as well as criticism, are perpetuated through time: it is interesting to note that in Patricia Spacks’ recent book on eighteenth-century poetry Mason, whose contribution to it was considerable, receives no mention.¹⁰

Mason’s poetry was known and praised in his lifetime. A fresh examination of his work, unclouded by prejudice, and by the lazily repeated dicta of two centuries of scholarship concerning the pre-Romantic enfeeblement of eighteenth-century poetry, is due.

I shall begin the first chapter with an account of the success of Mason’s writing in his own time, and go on to discuss his decline in popularity, in the context of the fate of eighteenth-century poetry from the nineteenth century onwards. I shall consider the revival, in recent decades, of interest among scholars in eighteenth-century poetry, and the renewed interest in Mason himself, demonstrated by the York Exhibition held to commemorate his life in the early 1970s. I shall then examine his early monody and, in the context of eighteenth-

century Pindarics, the contribution to contemporary verse of his own Pindaric odes. In the second chapter I shall consider *The English Garden*, in the light of the general nature of eighteenth-century georgic, Mason’s own political beliefs, and the effect upon his own georgic of the progress of war with the American colonies. I shall also examine the effect upon the poem of Mason’s friendship with Walpole, and with his literary collaborator, William Burgh. I shall begin the third chapter with a short account of the passage of satire through the first half of the eighteenth century, and continue with an examination of Mason’s own remarkable contribution to the genre, including the influence upon its composition of his relationship with Gray, the work of the earlier eighteenth-century satirists, and contemporary political events and debate. In the Conclusion, I shall claim a place for Mason amongst the eighteenth-century poets revaluated by the efforts of scholars unwilling to accept the unchallenged academic opinion of so many decades.
CHAPTER ONE

PART ONE: MASON AND HISTORY

MASON IN HIS OWN TIME

John Draper wrote of Mason that ‘There is hardly a writer of his period who is so little known in our day, and whose poems ran through so many editions in his own.’ Mason’s poems made regular appearances in Dodsley’s popular miscellany, the Collection of Poems in Several Hands. They included his odes To a Water-Nymph, To Independency, To an Aeolus’s Harp, and For Music. The Collection was first published in 1748: its popularity was such that it ran into many editions into the latter half of the century. The first edition contained three volumes; by 1763 it boasted six. Mason’s early pastiche Musaeus, whose focus is the death of Alexander Pope, was initially published in 1747, and thereafter found its way into the Collection. It was included in all the editions up to and including 1782. The editor’s Postscript to the edition of 1782 demonstrates a contemporary view of Mason’s poetry: Dodsley writes that of the verse written in the last half-century, ‘I have […] endeavour’d to select and preserve the best.’

Mason’s tragedies Elfrida and Caractacus, much admired in their time, were popular enough to go into several editions. Both were written as ‘dramatic poems,’ and published respectively in 1752 and 1759. Elfrida was re-issued in 1753, 1757, 1759 and 1796. It was given a stage performance in 1772, to which Mason had not given his consent, and was included in Bell’s British Theatre in 1797, and in Modern British Drama in 1811. It was translated into Italian and published in Florence in 1774.

Caractacus, similarly, ran into a number of editions before being ‘altered for theatrical representation’ in 1777. Thereafter, it was translated into Latin by G.H. Glasse at Oxford in 1781; an Italian version was published in Naples in

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2 Draper, pp.341-2.
1823. The latter’s translator, T.J. Mathias, paid tribute to the author of *Caractacus* in the sixth edition of his *The Pursuits of Literature. A Satirical Poem in Four Dialogues*, which was published in 1798, a year after Mason’s death. ‘Every Grecian, every British Muse/ Scatters the recent flow’rs and gracious dews/ Where Mason lies,’ Mathias writes. In a later footnote to his text, he observes, with apparent reference to the consequences of the French Revolution, that ‘In this political and depressing period, it is some comfort to divert the attention for a moment to such characters of literary and political excellence as the Reverend William Mason.’ Both the tragedies ‘were done into French prose by the Baroness de Vasse,’ and published in the *Traduction de Theatre Anglois* in Paris in 1784. Had Mason lived until 1804, he would have been pleased, as an admirer of Milton, at the appearance of *Elfrida* and *Caractacus* in *Dramatic Poems*, which claimed to include the best work of Mason, Milton and Thomson.³

Mason’s georgic, *The English Garden*, published in four books between 1772 and 1781, was published in its entirety in 1781, in London and York. In 1783 a new edition appeared, complete with commentary and notes by Mason’s friend and colleague in the Yorkshire Association, William Burgh. Subsequent editions were published in 1803, 1813 and 1825; *The English Garden* again appeared as late as 1851, in the third volume of *British Poets*.⁴

Besides lyric, didactic and dramatic poetry, Mason wrote well-received poetic satire. His *An Heroic Epistle to Sir William Chambers*, first published in 1773, ran to eleven editions in that year. Similarly, *An Heroic Postscript to the Public*, written partly as a result of the popularity of the *Epistle*, went into eight editions in 1774, the year of its first publication. Both poems appeared, together with Mason’s more recent satires such as the *Ode to Mr. Pinchbeck* and *An Epistle to Dr. Shebbeare*, first published in 1776 and 1777 respectively, in the 1786 edition of *The New Foundling Hospital for Wit*. *An Heroic Epistle* and *An Heroic Postscript* appeared in *The School for Satire* of 1802, and the first of these in *The

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⁴ Ibid, p. 342.

By the middle of the century, however, Mason’s contribution to anthologies is noticeably dwindling. In the Book of the Poets of 1848 only his Elegy on Lady Coventry is included; in both 1840, in the New York publication of Selections from the British Poets, and in 1896, in A Treasury of Minor British Poets, the Epitaph on Mrs. Mason is the only representative of his work. The title of the latter book, and the sole inclusion of such a brief, if heartfelt, poem, indicate not only the depreciation of Mason’s perceived poetic worth in the cultural world of the fin-de-siecle, but also a continuing public appetite for literary productions of ‘sensibility,’ reflections of the feeling heart, that had begun in the eighteenth century. Mason’s young wife had died of consumption early in their marriage: his epitaph for her, to which his friend Thomas Gray contributed the final lines, was a release of private sorrow into a world ready to sympathise with his loss, if no longer to appreciate his other work.

A complete edition of Mason’s poetry appeared in England in 1811, fourteen years after his death, and was re-issued in 1816. The four books of his Works contained all the poems previously published in his own name, and some unpublished up to that point. It was a posthumous testimony to his poetic life. In 1756 he had published a slim volume of odes, and in 1763 one of elegies, both books including some of the poems which subsequently appeared in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century anthologies. Mason’s Poems were published in London in 1764, and in Dublin in the same year. Four further editions came out in York in 1771, 1773, 1774, and 1779, and two, consisting of two volumes, in Glasgow.

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5 Draper, p. 348.
in 1774 and 1777. A new edition was published, this time in three volumes, in 1796-7, shortly before Mason’s death, and another in London in 1805. Mason’s omission from Johnson’s Lives of the English Poets, the great critical work of the late eighteenth century, can be explained by the fact that Johnson assessed his subjects posthumously: Mason would outlive the biographer by thirteen years.

**MASON’S DECLINING FORTUNES**

In a review of Moore’s Byron, published in 1830, Macaulay placed Mason ‘with half a dozen others as the only real poets of the eighteenth century.’ Thirty years after Macaulay’s encomium, however, George Gilfillan, in his Specimens and Memoirs of the Less-Known British Poets, published in 1860, would describe Mason as ‘a gentleman […] now nearly forgotten, except as the friend, biographer and literary executor of Thomas Gray.’

Sixty-four years later, John Draper published his scholarly account of Mason’s works and life. Draper’s attitude to his subject is squarely contextualised in the wider academic attitude to the eighteenth century in his time. ‘With his Sentimentalism and his experiments as a versifier, Mason is a fair representative of Neo-Classicism growing feeble, and of Romanticism in its green-sickness of inglorious youth.’ However, as ‘a lively embodiment of his culture and age,’ Draper writes, he is ‘a figure too typical to be ignored. Such is the apologia pro vita sua for the present work.’

So, Draper suggests, it is primarily as a writerly example of what Matthew Arnold referred to as the ‘excellent and indispensable eighteenth century’ that Mason is to be examined. As I have shown, his work continued to be respectfully treated into the nineteenth century. Draper observes, however, that during the latter part of the century criticism of Mason as a poet became ‘distinctly hostile.’ In his Studies of Chaucer, published in 1892, T. R. Lounsbury, commenting on Mason’s pastiche of Chaucer’s language in his early

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7 Draper, pp. 341-8.
9 Draper, pp. 139, 15.
poem *Musaeus*, pronounced Mason ‘the most pretentious poetical prig that the eighteenth century produced […]’ No student of Chaucer needs to be told that language is hardly contemptuous enough to set forth […] the contemptible character of his imitation.’ Leslie Stephen wrote that *Elfrida* and *Caractacus* ‘would not bear a moment’s inspection’, while *The English Garden* was Mason’s ‘most ponderous and unsuccessful performance.’ For Arthur Compton Rickett, about Mason’s tragedies ‘the less said the better.’ Some years later, George Saintsbury treated Mason’s poetic endeavours to a pithily trenchant dismissal: ‘His couplets are tinsel; his blank verse is wood; […] and his odes are plaster.’ Displaying incomprehension of the creative partnership of eighteenth-century verse with visual art, W.J. Courthope declared that Mason’s poetry demonstrated ‘the tendency in the art of poetry to recruit the sinking springs of invention from the sister art of painting.’

**EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY POETRY IN THE NINETEENTH AND TWENTIETH CENTURIES**

The century’s poetry had been vigorously dismissed in Wordsworth’s *Preface* to his *Lyrical Ballads* of 1800, as he turned his back on what he considered its worn and superficial tropes. For Arnold, Wordsworth was a great poet ‘because of the extraordinary power with which [he] feels the joy offered to us in nature.’ In the eighteenth century, however, after decades of civil unrest, there was a need for ‘a fit prose’, for ‘regularity, uniformity, precision, balance.’ The ‘repression and silencing of poetry’ that followed meant that Dryden and Pope became ‘builders of an age of prose and reason.’ Gray, so ‘influenced by the Greek masters’ that

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‘the point of view and the manner are not self-sprung in him,’ is ‘the scantiest and frailest of classics in our poetry.’ 11

Arnold’s reference to ‘our excellent and indispensable eighteenth century’ seems to us now both patronising and diminishing. Reasons for the critical hostility directed at Mason’s verse by Lounsbury and the rest, however, become clearer in the light not only of Wordsworth’s polemic, but also of Arnold’s limited praise even for Dryden, Pope and Gray as makers of poetry who could, in Wordsworthian fashion, guide and inspire.

It seems ironic that another reason for the contemporary diminution of interest in eighteenth-century verse was an altered attitude to the classical literature that Arnold, like Mason and his peers, cherished as a foundation of wisdom. David Hopkins writes that ‘Educated English culture [in the eighteenth century] was permeated at every level by the art, history, mythology, philosophy, and literature of ancient Greece and Rome.’ When Mark Akenside writes in the Advertisement to his Odes on Several Subjects of 1745 that he had ‘attend[ed] to the best models,’ it is to classical models that he refers. 12

Jonathan Swift’s Battle of the Books of 1704 had satirised the fierce debate begun in the previous century between the ‘Ancients’, who believed in the virtue of the classical literary heritage, and the ‘Moderns’, who advocated the superiority of contemporary writing. Long before Arnold’s view of the classically-influenced Pope was expressed, Joseph Warton, in his Essay on the Genius and Writings of Pope, had placed him in the second class of poets because he lacked the ‘creative and glowing Imagination’ of a true ‘Poet’. 13 By the end of the nineteenth century, the eighteenth-century approach to classical

literature, with its emphasis on imitation of the ancient writers, seemed outdated, dependent upon influences irrelevant in the modern world.

The rejection of classicism, and with it the poetry of the eighteenth century, was encouraged in the twentieth century by the work of F.R. Leavis. In *Revaluation*, published in 1936, he condemned the ‘pedantic artifice of […] diction’ employed by the classically schooled Milton, revered predecessor of eighteenth-century authors. ‘The mind that invented Milton’s Grand Style,’ so dependent on classical narrative and latinate diction, had, for Leavis, ‘renounced the English language,’ applying a ‘consistent rejection of English idiom.’

A consequent neglect of classicism has to some degree continued. Its association with elitism in the twentieth century, as Hopkins suggests, was encouraged by, for example, Ian Watt’s influential *The Rise of the Novel*, in which ‘assertion of the primacy of individual experience’ was privileged over the classical idea of ‘conformity to traditional practice.’ The growing availability of printed matter in English, for which knowledge of the classical languages was unnecessary, allowed a more general access to novels such as Samuel Richardson’s popular *Pamela*, in which the eponymous maidservant is raised through virtue to aristocratic heights. In the light of such a change of attitude to the tenets and expressions of classicism, to ‘conformity to traditional practice,’ it is unsurprising to find that Mason’s sole representation in *A Treasury of Minor Poets* of 1896 is the brief *Epitaph on Mrs. Mason*, which contains evidence of a grieving sensibility, but no classical references at all.

*Pamela* was an example not only of a new attention to literary expression based on individual experience, but of what Jerome McGann calls ‘a momentous shift whose terms were defined in the eighteenth century,’ the increasing popularity of the literature of ‘sensibility’ and ‘sentiment.’ Such a shift would affect the way poetry was written, and its progress through the following two centuries. Its appearance created ‘a special population’ of writers, readers and fictional characters, ‘men and women of sorrow […] acquainted with grief.’ A glance at

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Mason’s poems confirms his awareness of and contribution to this aspect of contemporary verse. The protagonist of his early poem on the theme of the tension between nature and art, To A Water-Nymph, is herself ‘acquainted with grief.’ The poet, who ‘Who can see [her] drooping head, [her] withering bloom/ See grief diffus’d o’er all [her] languid mien,’ is himself the possessor of a ‘heaving heart/ That mourns a faithful virgin lost.’ His elegy In A Churchyard in South Wales, an expression of sorrow for his dead friend Gray which echoes the lexical terms of the Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard, is unequivocal in its expression of sensibility: ‘all that meets my eye some symbol shows/ Of grief, like mine, that lives beyond the tomb.’ In an endnote to the poem, which is written, Mason asserts, by a ‘too partial friend,’ its author refers to Mason’s ‘extreme sensibility,’ ‘breath[ing]’ in his poem ‘a tenderness which softens […] the heart.’

The letters Mason wrote to accompany Elfrida, his first ‘dramatic poem,’ at its publication mid-century, also indicated his awareness of a modern public taste for sensibility. Having asserted about the ‘design’of his poem in the first letter that ‘I meant […] to pursue the ancient method, so far as it is probable a Greek poet […] would now do, in order to adapt himself to the genius of our times, and the character of our Tragedy,’ Mason indicates his concern to demonstrate his understanding of and ability to share in modern cultural predilections. ‘A story was chosen,’ he writes about his plot, ‘in which the tender rather than the noble passions were predominant […] and affections [were] raised rather from the impulse of common humanity, than the distresses of royalty and the fate of kingdoms.’ In the second letter he returns to this theme. It is surely not ‘improper,’ he claims, for a writer ‘to adapt [the best models of antiquity…] to the manners and taste of his own times.’ It was by this means, the adaptation of tried and respected antique forms in the service of modern modes and pressures, that Mason so frequently chose to work.

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17 Works, II, pp. 177-8, 180.
As in the case of the classics, however, the taste for ‘sensibility’ diminished. In McGann’s view, literary expressions of sensibility and sentiment were unable to counter the attack upon them launched by twentieth-century ‘institutionalised modernism,’ with T.S. Eliot at its head. For Eliot, the eighteenth century became a ‘sentimental age,’ whose poets ‘revolted against the ratiocinative […] they thought and felt by fits,’ in an atmosphere of increasingly ‘crude […] feeling.’ As a consequence of such criticism, McGann avers, a significant body of important poetry disappeared from view.¹⁸ Not only classicism, then, but also the eighteenth-century impulses of sensibility, were dismissed as unpoetic and irrelevant by twentieth-century critics.

As the poetry sank from view, so did many of its authors. The perceived need for a changed attitude to the style and content of poetry that gained ground in the nineteenth century, articulated by men such as Wordsworth and Arnold; the moral, religious and psychological disjunctions experienced as a result of increasing scientific knowledge and the uncompromising premises of Darwinism; the slackening interest in a classical legacy that seemed too antiquated to retain relevance in the modern world, and the disfavour into which poetry of sensibility fell, all contributed to a loss of interest in much eighteenth-century verse. Mason’s star began to fall in the first half of the nineteenth century, and continued to do so as the century went on. From the middle of the twentieth century, however, the fortunes of the eighteenth, and of its literary culture, began to change again.

**SCHOLARLY REVISION AND THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY**

As the twentieth century progressed, the literature of the eighteenth, and by extension the merit and contribution of its literary figures, became a site of critical contestation. In his seminal paper of 1956, ‘Towards Defining an Age of Sensibility,’ Northrop Frye argued that the old label of ‘The Age of Reason’ that was habitually attached to the eighteenth century, as if its poetry was subject only to ‘a reptilian Classicism, all cold and dry reason,’ should be abandoned. Frye

challenged the notion that a cultural era of Classicism gave place almost without break to one of Romanticism, and that the poetry of this ‘Classical’ era was awaiting an injection of life and light from the advent of a Romanticism that was, unlike its outworn predecessor, both energetic and inspired. Draper commented about Mason that ‘[his] lyrics go through all the motions essential in Romanticism; but his work does not carry conviction because he was not essentially Romantic in his life and action and mode of thought. [He...] represents a generation that was looking towards the Romanticism of life and art.’ As Frye pithily wrote, however, ‘there has probably never been a case on record of a poet having regarded a later poet’s work as the fulfilment of his own.’

Frye’s assertions about the inappropriateness of the label previously attached to the eighteenth century became part of a groundswell of changing opinion about its cultural and intellectual life. The last four decades have seen the publication of scholarly works, editions of poetry and commentaries which have shown the literature of the eighteenth century to be as different, interesting, challenging and surprising as that century’s colourful procession of talented individuals. In 1969 Roger Lonsdale published a painstakingly annotated edition of the work of Gray, Collins and Goldsmith. The remit of the series of which it is a part, Longmans’ Annotated English Poets, is to elucidate ‘the meaning of the extant texts in their various contexts,’ rather than to concentrate on ‘textual refinement,’ as recent editions of the poets had done. In addition, Lonsdale’s annotation took account of ‘the reorientation of much mid-eighteenth-century poetry towards the earlier English tradition,’ by recording ‘all borrowings from Spenser, Shakespeare and Milton.’ It was an important acknowledgement of the intentions of and influences on a poetry as least as vitally organic as that of any other century.

Lonsdale subsequently published the New Oxford Book of Eighteenth-Century Poetry in 1984, updated in 2003, and Eighteenth-Century Women Poets in 1989. As David Fairer writes, such publications opened the subject of eighteenth-

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19 Draper, pp. 171-2; Frye, ELH 23, no. 2 (June 1956), 144-152 (p. 144).
century poetry out in several directions. Light began to shine upon the work of previously unacknowledged or forgotten poets, many of them women. In 1999 Fairer and Christine Gerrard published an edition of eighteenth-century poetry in which they demonstrated the ‘richness and variety’ of subject, style and spirit in eighteenth-century verse, from the familiar witty urbanity and polished lexis of Pope to the recently recognised work of later eighteenth-century poets such as the ‘milkwoman’ Ann Yearsley. New editions of the works of some of the eighteenth century’s major poets were published at this period, including James Sambrook’s of James Thomson’s, Pat Rogers’ of Jonathan Swift’s, and Baird and Ryskamp’s of William Cowper’s.²¹

As Fairer has asserted in recent years, ‘Gone for ever […] are the days when the eighteenth century was thought to be an age of certainty, status, consensus, and restraint, when […] reason and sense lorded it over unquestioned passion and subjectivity.’ In a chapter of his _English Poetry of the Eighteenth Century: 1700-1789_ on ‘The Romantic Mode’ of 1700-1730, Fairer clarifies the familiar but mistaken view of the term ‘romantic’ as it has been customarily attached to poetry and poets since the nineteenth century: ‘The term ‘romantic’ in relation to the poetry of the early eighteenth century might seem anachronistic’, but the opposite is true. When poets such as Shelley, Keats and their contemporaries, who were eventually labelled the “English Romantics,” made use of the word, it is in the eighteenth-century sense, and is associated with ‘youthful love, […] fabulous fictions, melancholy contemplation, […] the trappings of chivalry and enchantment’, the poetic landscapes of Spenser and Shakespeare.²² So in turning its back on the literature of the eighteenth century, the academic community not only failed to understand its diverse vitality, but also the modes of composition which underpinned and inspired its writing.


MASON REVIEWED

In 1973, as desire for a re-examination of eighteenth-century literature was increasing, an exhibition in two parts, one at the York Art Gallery, the other at the York Minster Library, was held as part of the York Festival. Its title was *A Candidate for Praise*, and its subject was William Mason, a valued eighteenth-century citizen of York who had, during his lifetime as a clergyman, become first a Canon and then a Precentor of York Minster, spending several months of the year in residence in the city.

The exhibition’s title was taken from Mason’s *Elegy III, Written in the Garden of A Friend*, which he composed in 1758. Five years before its composition Mason’s father had died, leaving him financially unsupported. He took orders, and in the autumn of 1754 was ordained, becoming the Rector of Aston near Sheffield, a post he retained until his death in 1797. In 1756 he was given the Prebend of Holme by the Archbishop of York, a distant relative. In addition, in 1754 he was made chaplain to Lord Holdernesse; in 1757 he was appointed chaplain in ordinary to George II, a post he resigned in 1772, the year in which the first book of *The English Garden* was published. By the time of writing *Elegy III*, he had published *Musaeus* (1747), *Elfrida* (1752) and a volume of odes (1756) and was working on *Caractacus* (1759). 23

In *Elegy III*, Mason takes a classical theme familiar to eighteenth-century readers from the opening lines of Horace’s second epode. Horace commends the integrity of a rural life simply lived, far from the corruption of the city. The friend in whose garden Mason sits, with whom he was a student at Cambridge, has himself ‘wisely fled/ From all that folly, all that pride approves.’ Under a ‘laurel-woven bower’ with its ‘arch of glittering verdure,’ Mason measures the tenor of his own existence, in which he feels he has allowed himself to be ‘Misled by flattering Fortune’s specious tale/ Won to the world, a candidate for praise.’ ‘Teach me, like thee,’ he asks of his friend, ‘to muse on Nature’s page.’ *‘Mus[ing] on Nature’s page’ was to become a significant part of Mason’s life.*

23 Draper, pp. 338-45.
From making his own garden at Aston he would go on to design and create gardens for friends such as Richard Hurd and Viscount Nuneham. This aspect of his cultural life was represented in the York exhibition, along with exhibits relevant to his activities as a poet, painter and musician. In spite of the demands these activities made on him, he was also an attentive minister of the Church. As Barr and Ingamells, creators of the exhibition and its Catalogue, write, the custom of pluralism, by which clergymen were entitled to hold several offices, could also result in ‘ambition, greed and carelessness.’ Though Mason was a typical example of this system, he remained always ‘a conscientious priest.’

The exhibition included a large number of portraits, pictures and manuscripts, many of which were gathered together from a diversity of lenders, including the Queen; Pembroke College, Cambridge, where Mason was a Fellow for a decade, and Roy Strong, then Director of the National Portrait Gallery. For ‘permission to use and reproduce manuscript material in their charge’ thanks went from the organisers to, among others, the Trustees of the British Museum, to the Bodleian Library, Oxford, and to the Huntington Library, California. The exhibition ‘aim[ed] to revive this Yorkshireman’s memory, in the belief that his achievements are at least worthy of local recollection.’

Aspects and connections of Mason’s life and work spread far beyond York. The breadth of information about him gathered into the exhibition, and what it tells us about his life and work, help to identify him as a genuine ‘candidate for praise.’ The portraits featured in the exhibition demonstrated how widely Mason’s cultural, social and political networks extended. There were portraits of Joshua Reynolds, William Wilberforce, Thomas Gray, William Gilpin the promoter of the ‘picturesque,’ Horace Walpole and David Garrick, among many others. The first few pages of the Catalogue indicated some of the opinions of his contemporaries about him. ‘He grows apace into my Good Graces as I know him more,’ wrote Gray to a friend in 1749. ‘He is very ingenious with great Good-

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24 Horace had written ‘beatus ille, qui procul negotiis/ Ut prisca gens mortalium/ Paterna rura, bobus exercet suis/ Soletus omni saenore.’ Christopher Smarts’s translation (1767) is ‘A happy man is he/ From business far and free/ […]/ With steers at his command/ To till his father’s land/ Whom int’rest neither plagues nor sways.’ (The Works of Horace, 4 vols, II, p. 151); Works 1, pp. 102-3; Barr and Ingamells, p. 10.

Nature and Simplicity’; ‘Shakespeare and Milton and Dryden and Gray and you, will be remembered,’ Horace Walpole wrote to Mason in 1783. In his preface to Mason’s translation of Du Fresnoy’s *Art of Painting* Joshua Reynolds wrote in 1782 that he ‘Consider[s] it as one of the greatest honours of my life to have my name united as it is here with the greatest poet of his age.’ Reynolds’ accolade chimed with that of William Burgh, whose commentary on *The English Garden* was included in the edition of 1783. In his Introduction to the Commentary, Burgh wrote of his contribution to Mason’s poem that ‘my best pride will receive its ample satisfaction from seeing my name thus publicly connected with that of Mr. Mason.’

**MASON AND COLLABORATION**

It is clear from these comments that Mason was admired and valued both as a friend, and as a poet with whose work significant cultural figures of the day were honoured to be associated. Burgh provided a commentary for *The English Garden*; Horace Walpole was anxious to provide Mason’s satires, which Mason wrote contemporaneously with his georgic, with accompanying notes that would clarify beyond doubt the identities of the characters that his friend Mason was satirising.

Marilyn Butler asserts that ‘Literature […] is a collective activity, powerfully conditioned by social forces […] Authors are not the solitaries of Romantic myth, but citizens.’ The York exhibition was a demonstration of Mason’s wide and varied social and intellectual circle. Richard Hurd, man of letters who became the Bishop of Worcester, was an early critic and supporter of his verse, as was Gray; David Garrick and William Whitehead, poet laureate from 1757, wrote poems to and about him; William Hayley dedicated a long poem on the

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27 *Mason’s Satirical Poems with Horace Walpole’s Notes*, ed. by Paget Toynbee (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1926), p. 31. The final entry in Walpole’s ‘Short Notes of my Life’, dated 1779, was ‘At the end of May wrote a Commentary and Notes to Mr. Mason’s later poems.’ (Toynbee, p. 3). At the end of the 1770s, however, Mason’s friendship with Walpole cooled. The notes were left unpublished until the twentieth century.
epic to him. Fairer, considering the activities of the Scriblerus Club early in the century, comments on the spontaneous manuscript verses which were ‘the staple of coffee-house and dinner-table,’ and the idea, now lost, of poetry as another mode of ‘conversation.’28 The creative behaviour of Mason and his friends chimed with such a habit: their mentality was collegial, social, and supportive.

In his essay, ‘Gray Among the Victorians,’ Malcolm Hicks, commenting on aspects of Victorian criticism, asserts that ‘gentlemen critics do not stoop to particulars.’ Leslie Stephen, one of Mason’s critics, is described by Hicks as ‘an avowed promoter of an historical, rather than judicial, criticism’, in which the sensitive incisiveness of valuable criticism plays little part.29 Arnold, Leavis and Eliot all approached eighteenth-century poetry in the light of their personal literary crusades. The nineteenth and twentieth-century critics whose superficial interpretation dismissed the eighteenth century as ‘The Age of Reason,’ and its verse as mediocre, failed to understand this aspect of its intellectual life, culture as a socially engineered event which could include, and frequently did, a concern for political activity and the state of the nation. In dismissing the poets of the eighteenth century, these critics were also dismissing the cultural, social and political contexts in which their work had its being.

**PART TWO: MASON, MUSAEUS AND THE ODE**

**MASON, MILTON AND MUSAEUS**

Roger Lonsdale, in his edition of the poems of Gray, Collins and Goldsmith, acknowledged the interest eighteenth-century poets had begun to take in the work of Shakespeare and Spenser. As Fairer indicates, poets writing in the mid-eighteenth-century were ‘[becoming] interested in the idea of a national literary

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history, and in placing their own work within it.’ In this ambitious enterprise, Mason was an undoubted forerunner. His *Musaeus: A Monody on the Death of Mr. Pope*, was written in 1744, two years before Collins or the Wartons published their books of odes, and published in 1747. The publication of his poem, in which the shades of Chaucer, Spenser and Milton visit the dying Pope, would have indicated to the world not only that its author, a fledgling poet, was well aware of his poetic heritage, but also that by composing such a poem, and involving his poetic ancestors in it, he was indicating his own desire and willingness to become part of that noble line. More than this, the rarely used poetic form Mason chose for his poem, pastoral elegy, demonstrated his knowledge of classical verse, and his own belief in, and wish to make use of, the classical heritage to which the great English poets of the past were themselves indebted. In notes to the final section of *Musaeus*, Mason indicates which lines are imitations of parts of Virgil’s fifth and tenth *Eclogues*.

The fact that the genre of the pastoral elegy was rarely used indicates the young poet’s interest in experimenting with form.

In his plan for a history of English poetry, in the creation of which it was intended that Mason would collaborate, Gray would later place Milton and Pope within different strands of poetic influence and style. For Gray, Milton took his place at the end of a line which began with Spenser; Pope was within a still vital School of France, active since the Renaissance, which included Waller, Prior and Dryden. Mason’s poem, however, makes quite clear that its young author saw his own poetic ancestry as Dryden had done, as a continuing line of influence linking the major poets of English literary history. ‘Chaucer is the father of English poetry,’ Dryden had written. ‘Spenser […] insinuates that the soul of Chaucer was transfused into his body,’ and ‘Milton has acknowledged to me that Spenser was his original.’ In *Musaeus*, Milton is portrayed as the forebear of Pope, and the ‘swain’ who gives the account of the poem’s narrative, Mason himself, becomes by inference their direct descendant.

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31 Draper, p.62; Mason wrote that he had been sent by William Warburton a manuscript of Pope’s, ‘which contains the first sketch for [a History] of this kind […] on my proposal of engaging with [Gray] on compiling such a list, he […]formed an idea of an Introduction to it.’ *(The Poems of Mr. Gray. To which are prefix’d Memoirs of his Life and Writings* (York, 1775),
As John Jortin had written in his *Remarks on Spenser’s Poems* (1734), Milton ‘[is] the favourite poet of this nation.’ He was the author of a ‘classic’ poem, which Dustin Griffin defines as, in the terms of the eighteenth century, a work that ‘stands at the head of a national literature.’ Throughout the century, many imitations of the versification of Milton’s epic, and of *L’Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, called ‘Miltonicks’, appeared.

William Mason was, as John Shawcross writes, ‘a devoted Miltonian.’ Two of his early poems, the ‘Miltonicks’ *Il Bellicosos* and *Il Pacifico*, written in 1744, were composed in direct imitation of *L’Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*. *Il Pacifico* was published in 1749 as part of the *Cambridge Verses on the Peace of Aix la Chappelle* which celebrated the recent cessation of war. In the same year Mason’s ode *For Music* was set to music and sung as part of the ceremony in which the Duke of Newcastle was made Chancellor of Cambridge University. Both are early indications of the contemporary acceptance of Mason as a poet worthy of the name, and of his own willingness to become, unlike his friend Gray, a ‘public’ poet, to make an overt contribution to the life of his country, as his hero Milton had done, through his verse.

The inspiration for *Musaeus* was Milton’s own pastoral elegy, *Lycidas*. In Mason’s poem, Pope is given the name of Musaeus, the son of Orpheus, divine singer of classical myth. The dying poet is visited in his Twickenham grotto by the shades of Chaucer, Spenser and Milton, who praise his poetic undertakings. Each poet speaks in the mode of his own versification. Chaucer, here named ‘Tityrus’, ‘a name frequently given him by Spenser,’ as Mason notes, addresses the dying ‘Great Clerke of Fame’ in ‘antique guise’; Spenser, calling himself ‘Colin Clout,’ a ‘name he gives to himself throughout his works,’ speaks in the first two stanzas Mason allots to him, ‘in the measure which Spenser uses in the

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first eclogue of the *Shepherd’s Calendar,* and the following three ‘in the stanza of the *Faery Queen.*’ Last of the three to speak is Milton, here called ‘Thyrsis’, a reference to the name he gives himself in ‘the *Epitaphium Damonis.*’

Notwithstanding Lounsbury’s myopic nineteenth-century pronouncement on his imitation of Chaucer’s verse as ‘an outrage [...] upon the memory of the poet,’ in *Musaeus* the young Mason presents himself, as Fairer observes, as well able ‘to show off his mastery of [the poets’] individual rhythms, vocabulary, phrasing and imagery.’ In the poem, Chaucer’s shade thanks Pope for re-working the ‘full rough song’ of his verse into lines comprehensible to the eighteenth-century reader:

Mickle of wele betide thy houres last,
For much gode wirke to me don and past.
For syn the days whereas my lyre ben strongen,
And defly many a mery laie I songen,
Old Time, which alle things don maliciously
Gnawen with rusty tooth continually,
Gnattrid my lines, that they all cancrid ben,
Till at the last thou smoothen ‘hem hast agen…
Whanne shallow brook yrenneth hobling on,
Ovir rough stones it makith full rough song;
But, them stones removen, this lite rivere
Stealith forth by, making plesaunt murmure:
So my sely rymes, whoso may them note,
Thou makist everichone to ren right sote…

There is a real sense of enjoyment, humour and poetic self-confidence in Mason’s Chaucerian rendition.35

Following Chaucer’s speech to Pope, Spenser concedes that the ‘dapper ditties rare’ of Pope’s ‘deft swains [...] Surpass ought else of quaintest shepherd’s quill.’ ‘My Hobbin’s or my Thenot’s rustic skill’ cannot ‘compare.’ Even Spenser’s ‘beauties’ are overshadowed:

34 *Works*, 1, pp. 5-9.
35 Lounsbury, p. 126, in Draper, p. 12; *English Poetry*, p. 151; *Works*, 1, pp. 5-6.
Eke when in Fable’s flowery paths you stray’d
Masking in cunning feints truth’s splendid face;
Ne Sylph, ne Sylphid, but due tendance paid,
To shield Belinda’s lock from felon base,
But all mote nought avail such harm to chace.
Then Una fair ‘gan droop her princely mien,
Eke Florimel, and all my faery race:
Belinda far surpast my beauties sheen,
Belinda, meet for such soft lay, I ween.

Draper concedes ‘the fine concrete touch’, in its Spenserian section, of Mason’s description of a peacock, a metaphor for Pope, which he compares to ‘meaner’ birds:

…quacking ducks, that wont in lake to swim,
And turkeys proud, and pigeons nothing bold;
If chance the peacock doth his plumes unfold,
Eftsoons their meaner beauties all decaying,
He glist’neth purple and he glist’neth gold,
Now with bright green, now blue himself arraying.
Such is thy beauty bright, all other beauties swaying.

In his introduction to his edition of The Faerie Queene, A.C. Hamilton points to Spenser’s use of repetition, ‘the simplest kind of wordplay.’ Mason’s lines reiterate such repetition in his double use of ‘gli st’neth’, at the same time echoing the shining richness of Spenserian imagery: the ‘pillar[s] and posts[s]’ of the ‘Castle Ioyeous’ of Book Three, for example, are ‘with great pearles and pretious stones embost’, that ‘sparkle forth great light.’ The alliteration of ‘gli st’neth’, ‘gold’ and ‘green’, ‘bright’ and ‘blue’, employs a device much used by Spenser: ‘Whiles yet his foe lay fast in senseless sound’; ‘And broke his sword, for fear of further harmes.’ It was a device that would be regularly used by his poetic imitator: when Draper condemns what he sees as Mason’s excessive use of alliteration, he is demonstrating, in part, an incomprehension of the delight mid-century poets took in the richness of their lexical inheritance.36

36 Works, 1, p. 7; Draper, p. 144; Works, 1, p. 8; Edmund Spenser: The Faerie Queene, ed. by A.C. Hamilton (London: Longmans, 1977), pp. 16, 14; The Faerie Queene, III. 1. 32, p. 311; VI. 1. 34, p. 630; V. 5. 21, p. 561; Draper, pp. 141-2.
Mason’s lines are also reminiscent of Pope’s description in *Windsor Forest* of a pheasant slain by hunters: ‘His Purple Crest, and Scarlet-circled Eyes/ The vivid Green his shining Plumes unfold/ His painted Wings, and Breast that flames with Gold.’ So Mason suggests, in this section of his poem, not only a continued iteration of lexis, conceit and diction from Spenser to Pope, but also a sense of himself, the ‘shepherd swain’ without whom ‘the Muse’ would have remained uncalled to tell this story, as the descendant of an illustrious line, a recent member of a poetic ‘community of reference.’

Intertextuality in Mason’s poem indicates not only his attention to style and lexis in the verse of his poetic ancestors, but also, in cultural and social terms, to a far more important aspect of poetry’s task. The sections of *Musaeus* that deal with Chaucer and Spenser are undertaken with a sense of delight in their language. Mason’s approach to Milton’s verse, though a continued pleasure in the manipulation of both his and Pope’s poetic styles is evident, is more serious, an acknowledgement of his seventeenth-century forebear as the provider of a moral beacon for Mason’s time as well as his own.

Last came a bard of more majestic tread,
And Thyrsis hight by Dryad, Fawn, or Swain,
Whene’er he mingled with the shepherd train;
But seldom that; for higher thoughts he fed…
And thus in strain, unus’d in sylvan shade,
To sad Musaeus rightful homage paid.

Indeed, there is an incongruity in the appearance of the sober shade of Milton in Pope’s own playful ‘semblage meet of coral, ore and shell.’ Mason’s abandonment of rhyme for blank verse in the mouth of Thyrsis emphasises the difference such a high-minded poet will make to the tenor of the poem, as he addresses Musaeus:

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Thrice hail, thou heav’n-taught warbler! last and best
Of all the train! Poet, in whom conjoin’d
All that to ear, or heart, or head, could yield
Rapture; harmonious, manly, clear, sublime.
Accept this gratulation: may it chear
Thy sinking soul; nor these corporeal ills
Aught daunt thee, or appal. Know, in high heav’n
Fame blooms eternal o’er that spirit divine,
Who builds immortal verse.

It is the crown already bestowed, Mason suggests, on Milton himself.38

Even Milton, however, cannot be approached completely seriously by a tyro poet
who is clearly delighting in the process of composition. Congratulating Pope on
replacing the tyrannous ‘chains’ of rhyme with ‘soft-wreathed bands of flowers’,
Thrysis seems reminded of his own youthful poeticizings, the sensual images of
L’Allegro and On May Morning, and as if seduced by the physical present,
begins to detail the grotto’s own delights, its ‘pointed crystals’ and ‘slowly-
dripping rills.’ Musaeus, however, who understands the central message that his
visitor represents, and interrupting Milton’s complimentary address, is roused
enough to deliver it in his own terms:

Ah! why recall the toys of thoughtless youth?
When flowery fiction held the place of truth…
Alas! how little were my proudest boast!
The sweetest trifler of my tribe at most.

To sway the judgement, while he soothes the ear;
To curb mad passion in its wild career;
To wake by sober touch the useful lyre,
And rule, with reason’s vigour, fancy’s fire:
Be this the poet’s praise. And this possessst,
Take, Dulness and thy dunces! take the rest.

Come then that honest fame; whose temperate ray
Or gilds the satire, or the moral lay.

Mason’s lines are a further reference to the task inherited from his poetic
ancestors. ‘The toys of thoughtless youth’ echoes directly Pope’s own

38 Works, 1, pp. 8-9.
‘Farewell’, in The First Epistle of the First Book of Horace Imitated, to ‘Verse, and Love, and ev’ry Toy/ The rhymes and rattles of the Man or Boy.’ ‘What right’. Pope had continued, ‘what true, what fit, we justly call/ Let this be all my care.’

By involving the presence of the author of Paradise Lost at Musaeus’ deathbed, Mason is putting down a poetic marker of his own. Musaeus continues his speech, discoursing on the value of poetry in the role of ‘indignant Muse’, confronting ‘Vice’ with its venally acquired ‘stars and strings,’ and ‘pouring, for Virtue’s cause, serene along/ The purest precept in the sweetest song.’ Milton had engaged in moral discourse by means of his writing; Pope had confronted corruption in his. The young poet who articulated his belief in the nature and purpose of poetry through the lips of Musaeus was himself to write odes and satires criticising corruption and the abuse of power, as these great poets had done before him. Though he could not know yet what form his future poetry would take, he was able, at this early stage, to articulate what for him was its meaning. ‘Come then, that honest fame; whose temp’rate ray/ Or gilds the satire, or the moral lay,’ are the lines spoken by Musaeus in which Mason marks his own present and future as a poet.

The nature of the intertextual echoes in Musaeus reinforces Mason’s moral positioning. At the end of Musaeus’ speech on his own use of poetry, by which he attempted to teach ‘mankind in reas’ning Pride’s despite/ That God is wise, and all that is is right,’ ‘Virtue’ appears to ‘pour that praise’ which is his due. Though, ‘when the lay was o’er,’ she ‘clasp’d him to her throbbing breast,’ her action is useless: ‘Blind Fate before/ Had op’d her shears, to cut his vital thread.’ The lines are a direct echo of Milton’s own in Lycidas: when ambitious man ‘Think[s] to burst out into sudden blaze/ Comes the blind Fury with th’abhorred shears/ And slits the thin-spun life.’ The words of Musaeus as his speech ends, already referred to, are of course an echo of the final lines of the first book of Pope’s Essay on Man: ‘And, spite of Pride, in erring Reason’s spite/ One truth is clear, ‘Whatever is, is right.’’ Such echoes suggest not only the young poet’s

40 Works, 1, p. 12.
familiarity with the poetry of Milton and Pope, but also a wish to ally himself with poets whose verse was employed for a moral purpose. As young poets themselves, both Milton and Pope had trifled with ‘the toys of thoughtless youth,’ abandoning them in maturity for a poetic involvement with the political life of the nation. In spite of the playfulness evident in much of Musaeus, it is clear that the young Mason also recognised the power of his forebears’ poetry principally as a moral force, and his own wish to continue that ancestral strain. ‘Oh! Make [my poem] worthy’ of the now dead ‘sacred Bard,’ he writes as his poem draws to its conclusion.  

In choosing monody as the poetic structure for Musaeus, Mason was again echoing Milton, whose own monody Lycidas was not only a vehicle by which his friend Edward King could be mourned, but was used also to comment on the corruption of the clergy. Mason’s own choice of monody is an adumbration of his later use of the strict Pindaric structure for many of his odes. By the time Mason was writing, both forms were little used by poets. As an innovative poet, one apparently eager to draw attention to his work by the use of a novel framework, Mason was to employ both, and to play a crucial part in resurrecting the second.

The monody was first known as a poetic form in ancient Greece. Unlike the odic triadic structure which, it is assumed, denotes a choral ode, the monody represented the poet’s own speaking voice. What is left to us of the verse of Sappho, Alcaeus, and Anacreon is mostly monody. In the third or fourth century BC it became the vehicle for Greek poems of lament. In it, the act of mourning took place in a setting of pastoral mythology, in which a shepherd grieved for the loss of a companion. The monody was recognised as the means by which the dead, remembered in song, were protected, if only temporarily, from oblivion.  

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42 See Carey and Fowler, p. 235.  

Griffin, commenting on the decline of pastoral elegy, notes that ‘Miltonic pastoral elegy […] was adopted by a few monodists such as Mason and Lyttelton.’ Mason wrote his monody in 1744, and published it in 1747. In that same year George, Lord Lyttelton, published another of the eighteenth century’s rare monodies.

Lyttelton’s monody was inspired by private tragedy, the death of his wife Lucy. In it, the poet places himself, as tradition required, in a natural setting, in an ‘emowering shade’ where his tears could flow unhindered. His monody is laced with classical allusion, to the ‘Muses’ who failed to save Lucy from ‘relentless fate’; to the ‘Dryads of the woods,’ who had listened to ‘her heavenly voice,’ and to the joy Lucy herself had taken in ‘the wit of Greece and Rome.’ Lyttelton concludes his poem, however, with an acknowledgement of Lucy’s presence in the heavenly ‘regions of serene delight’, where he hopes to join her. His is the Christian resolution of Lycidas, and of the eighteenth-century ‘graveyard’ poem. In such a way, Lyttelton synthesises the classical premises of the monody with those of the Christian faith.

In spite of its Christian conclusion, however, Lyttelton’s monody is classically traditional in its emphasis on personal grief and the wish to preserve its object in memory. Mason’s pastiche, though written at the same point of the century, bears very little resemblance to Lyttelton’s in tone or remit, and looks, in spite of its traditional structure and promise of a place in heaven for Musaeus, as much to the future as the past. Lyttelton’s poem, an expression of personal grief, is set in the real landscape of his estate, Hagley Park, with its ‘tufted groves’ and ‘gently-falling rills.’ Mason’s ‘woodlands wide’ and silver-headed lilies, like the ‘gushing brooks’ and ‘vernal flowers’ of Lycidas, are products of imagination against the background of which a moral point can be made. In Musaeus, Mason’s point about the moral purpose of poetry is mediated through the imagined death of a poet known for his opposition to corruption.

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44 Paradise Regained, p. 55.
Milton had trodden such a path in writing *Lycidas*, by using pastoral language to deplore a very modern state of affairs. In his poem he had condemned the neglectful clergy who ‘scarce themselves know how to hold/ A sheep-hook […]’ The hungry sheep look up, and are not fed.’ Encased in a poem of mourning, Milton’s anger finds a conduit through imagery that is both classical and biblical: these shepherds are inattentive and uncaring, an anomaly in traditional pastoral; in Ezekiel, chapter 34, the shepherds who ‘feed themselves’ but ‘feed not the flock’ are condemned.47 Milton’s monody becomes, not only a political vehicle, but also one for the expression, not simply of concern for the dead, but of the unrelated passions of the self.

The political criticism of Milton’s poem is particular and discrete. In his own monody, his young disciple was to go further, to make use of the monodic structure in forming his own statement about the transcendent purpose of poetry, and to announce himself both as a poet adept in manipulating the style and lexis of his forebears from classical times to that of Milton, and as a worthy carrier of the moral flame. *Musaeus* is, in fact, a poem about the poet himself, its structure an inheritance of classical tradition, its tone modern. Mason, knowing the works of Locke, would have become familiar with the philosopher’s emphasis on the centrality of the individual’s responses to the world. Indeed, Locke’s ‘Epistle to the Reader’ at the beginning of his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* can be seen as a challenge to the modern writer: ‘This […] is the Entertainment of those, who let loose their own Thoughts, and follow them in writing […] ’tis to them, if they are thy own, that I refer myself.’48 Mason’s use of the monody is a new departure in poetry, one which acknowledges the value of the classical heritage of Britain’s poets even as it is employed to foreground the particular skills and creed of the living poet.

There is significance not only in what Mason chooses to reveal to the reader about himself, but the way in which he chooses to tell it. His employment of the form of pastoral elegy in *Musaeus* is highly theatrical. As Shawcross observes, it

47 ll.119-125, in Carey and Fowler, pp. 248-9; Ezekiel, 2-3.34.
is ‘poetry dramatizing the author as performer.’ Mason’s poem is undeniably a performance. Against the shell-encrusted backdrop of Pope’s grotto, the pronouncements of its four chief actors, who occupy the stage in turn, are made between a prologue and an epilogue spoken by the ‘fond swain’ who plays, in addition, and with considerable versatility, all the other parts.\(^{49}\)

The idea of performance would continue to influence the composition of Mason’s poetry. A letter from Mason to Walpole described how, as a student at Cambridge, he would travel to London whenever he could to visit the theatre.\(^{50}\) The love of the dramatic never deserted him: it can be sensed in much of his writing. That he would choose to write in the form of the Pindaric ode can be explained, in part, by the place it occupied in performance in the ancient world. Pindar’s verse was spoken before the assembled partakers in and spectators of the Greek Games, amidst all the heat and dust of competition. In Mason’s tragic dramas, a number of Pindaric odes provide choral performances within a performance. In *The English Garden*, as I shall show, the poet himself plays a variety of parts; in his satire, *An Heroic Epistle to Sir William Chambers*, he reveals himself to be a gifted director of farce.

*Musaeus* was published by Dodsley in April, 1747. At the end of May, Richard Hurd wrote to Mason that ‘This afternoon I have seen a small piece of Mr. Neville’s,’ which had been inspired by ‘the fame of Musaeus.’ In November that year Mason wrote to his friend Bryant that his elegy had ‘met with greater success than I could have imagined; for it passed through three impressions [...] and, I am told, is now out of print again.’ Accolades for *Musaeus* continued. In November 1749 *The Gentleman’s Magazine* carried verses which cited Mason as ‘of Britain’s noblest Wits, a full epitome.’ And in his *Letters on Taste*, John Gilbert Cooper wrote that Mason’s ‘Monody on the Death of Mr. Pope’ had given ‘every Man of true Taste more Pleasure than the joined Efforts of all the Wits of the celebrated Court of Leo the Tenth.’\(^{51}\)

\(^{49}\) Shawcross, p. 82; *Works*, 1, p. 15.  
\(^{50}\) Lewis, p. 181 (3 March 1775).  
\(^{51}\) The Early Letters of Bishop Richard Hurd, ed. by Sarah Brewer (Church of England Record Society: Boydell Press, 1995), p. 172 (30 April 1747); Mason to Bryant (13 November 1747), in Draper, p. 26; Draper, p. 145; *Letters Concerning Taste*, 2nd. edn. (1755), pp. 103-4
Shawcross observes that ‘In [Mason’s] hands the ode and the pastoral flourished, though not to high praise from […] later critics.’ Even Draper, however, though regarding Musaeus as ‘a rather trivial performance,’ conceded that it was widely read, being ‘favourably reviewed and admired by a wide circle of readers even down to the end of the century.’ Mason’s elegy was, of course, one of the versifying experiments treated with uncomprehending dismissiveness by his biographer. It was in fact an announcement to the literary world that a poet of worth had arrived to grace it, one for whom the writing of poetry was a moral task inherited from the great poets of the past. Mason would not compose another pastoral elegy, but the genre of the ode became a conduit by means of which he commented on, and partook in, the cultural and political life of the nation.

MASON’S PINDARIC CAREER

Mason wrote a number of odes during his lifetime. Of these, his five discrete Pindaric odes deserve attention not only as manifestations of their author’s desire successfully to transpose the true Pindaric structure from ancient Greek to British poetry, but also for his use of them as vehicles for the expression of eighteenth-century preoccupations: concern with national identity and Britain’s political life in On the Fate of Tyranny, To the Naval Officers of Great Britain and Palinodia; the new romance of trade and the burgeoning privileging of the self in On Expecting to Return to Cambridge; and social virtue, which finds expression of different kinds in all five odes. As I have noted, further Pindaric odes are contained in his tragedies.

Pindaric odes, providing a neat circularity, marked the beginning and the end of Mason’s life as a writer. On Expecting to Return to Cambridge, though first printed in the 1797 edition of Mason’s poems, was written in 1747. His final Pindaric ode, On Wisdom, was sent to Richard Hurd, now Bishop of Worcester, early in March 1797, a month before Mason’s death. An editorial note in the 1811 collection of his works tells us that this last ode was ‘Printed 1797, and now


Shawcross, pp. 79-80; Draper, pp. 145, 29.
first published.’ The letter to Hurd accompanying the copy of the ode is an indicator of the two men’s lifelong friendship, and the collegial nature of Mason’s writerly life. In 1756 his Pindaric ode On the Fate of Tyranny, a transposition of a section of the 14th chapter of Isaiah, had been published in the first edition of his poems, Odes by Mr. Mason. In his letter, Mason explains that his Ode on Wisdom is a modern transcription of the 28th chapter of the Book of Job, ‘versified in the Pindaric mode of strophe, antistrophe and epode, a method which, your Lordship may remember, I undertook near fifty years ago under your critical auspices, with part of the 14th chapter of Isaiah.’

In publishing Musaeus, Mason had gained an entry into, and an acknowledgement from the literary world. His decision to adopt the Pindaric form so early in his poetic career was an equally deliberate act, a further experiment in versifying. The Pindaric ode had declined both in usage and meaning over the last decades of the previous century and the first half of the eighteenth. Mason, however, as modern critics have observed, placed himself in the vanguard of a Pindaric revival. Draper writes that ‘In point of [Pindaric] structure […] Mason may be said to have been ahead of his time […] of true Pindarists he stands at the beginning of a mid-century revival.’ In addition, ‘if we count the [Pindaric] choruses in his Greek plays, which were very much admired, his name must be placed even higher.’ Both Draper and John Butt suggest that Mason’s adoption of Pindaric form may have significantly influenced the generation of his friend Gray’s own Pindarics, the Sister Odes, published in 1757. Robert L. Mack writes that Mason met Gray some time in 1747. In that year, according to Butt, Mason’s ‘strict Pindaric,’ On Expecting to Return to Cambridge, ‘was given […]’ to Gray ‘to read.’ Draper writes that though Gray, as a classical scholar, ‘certainly knew Pindar’s […] structure, he may have ‘taken the first hint from Mason.’

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53 Works, 1, pp. 87, 85; after publishing his odes in 1756, Mason received a letter from Hurd offering encouragement from Hurd’s acquaintance ‘Dr. Macro’, who concluded that ‘the ode is certainly [Mason’s] fort […] if he will indulge himself in Poetry, that is the Province he ought to cultivate.’ (Brewer, p. 294 (3 April, 1756)).
PINDAR AND HIS REPUTATION

Paul H. Fry defines ‘ode,’ a term derived from a Greek word for ‘song,’ as ‘a celebratory form of address in elevated language written on an occasion of public importance.’ Pindar was the supreme exemplar of such a composer. According to Stephen Instone, Pindar probably lived from 518 BC to some time after 446 BC. For succeeding generations he became, as well as an unsurpassed poet, a wise purveyor of moral ideas, expressed through the medium of the epinikia, the victory odes he composed in celebration of athletic triumphs at the Greek Games.55

The Games themselves, as Frank Nisetich observes, were ‘sacred, solemn religious occasions,’ and success in them proof of favour from the gods. An event of such religious importance required a poet able to match its elevation. Pindar succeeded, not just in the quality of his verse composition, but in the spirit of its content. As Instone writes, poets in ancient Greece were seen as ‘repositories of wisdom.’ In giving his rendition of praise for the athletes’ victories, Pindar simultaneously acted as adviser to the listening crowds and their rulers. Charles Segal identifies Pindar as ‘a public voice bestowing praise and blame in communal gatherings […] preserving for the future what is memorable, noble, exemplary, and […] useful.’ In his A Defence of Poetry, Philip Sidney praised a practical result of Pindar’s spoken morality: ‘Certain poets, as […] Pindarus, had so prevailed with Hiero the First, that of a tyrant he became ‘a just king.’56

Pindar’s verse was celebrated throughout antiquity, and into modern times. Horace, much admired by the eighteenth century, compared Pindar’s odes with his own inferior offerings; in the first century AD, Quintilian called Pindar ‘the greatest [of the nine Greek lyric poets] for the magnificence of his inspiration, his […] lavish abundance of matter and words, and river […] of eloquence.’

Dionysius of Halikarnassos, at the turn of the millennium, posited a critique of Pindar that would resonate particularly with post-Renaissance British poets. Such a style ‘chooses stately and grand rhythms; it does not like clauses of equal length, of similar sound, or slaves to a necessary order, but ones that are noble, brilliant and free’, showing ‘frequent disregard for normal sequence.’ The transcendent status of Pindar’s verse in seventeenth-century England was articulated in Milton’s sonnet When the Assault was Intended to the City. The poet refers to the sparing of Pindar’s house by Alexander the Great, when ‘temple and tower/ Went to the ground’ at the sacking of Thebes, Pindar’s birthplace, in 335 B.C.  

Pindar was also mentioned in a classical text deeply valued by the eighteenth century, that of Longinus On the Sublime. For Longinus, sublimity of expression in writing involved possession by the author of a soul noble enough to entertain ‘grand conceptions’ and ‘powerful and inspired emotions.’ In addition to Pindar, Longinus cites as a user of sublime language ‘the lawgiver of the Jews,’ who ‘having formed a high conception of the power of the Divine Being, gave expression to it when he wrote: ‘God said’- what? ‘Let there be light, and there was light; let there be land, and there was land.’”

The ‘high-minded,’ spare and elevated language of the sublime would itself become a factor in the eighteenth-century revival of what Murray Pittock, alluding to its reputation for grandeur, calls ‘the big bow-wow of the Pindaric ode.’ In 1757 the idea of the sublime was endorsed by the publication of Edmund Burke’s A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful. As James T. Boulton writes, by the time the Enquiry was published the sublime ‘had become a mode of aesthetic experience found in literature and far beyond.’ In addition, the work of writers such as Joseph

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58 Longinus: On the Sublime, trans. by Rhys W. Roberts (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1917), pp. 216, 65. The original date of composition of this work is unknown, but ‘internal evidence’ suggests the first century AD (Howatson and Chilvers, p. 316). The identity of the author has never been firmly established.
Addison had resulted in a psychological shift, moving ‘the focus of attention from the sublime object to the experience of the beholder.’

In his early Pindaric *The Fate of Tyranny*, written before Burke’s theory had bestowed a validation on the idea of the sublime, and breaking new ground, Mason was to harness together the odic form used by Pindar with an example of sublime Hebrew text.

**PINDAR’S BRITISH IMITATORS**

Since the exposure during the Renaissance of the *epinikia*, British poets had attempted to emulate Pindar’s verse, with its ‘magnificence of inspiration,’ and the ‘disregard for normal sequence’ of its sudden transitions of subject matter and image. In the seventeenth century, Abraham Cowley set himself up as a purveyor of Pindaric odes, ‘trying,’ in Robert Shafer’s words, ‘to make the spirit and manner of Pindar native to English poetry.’ About his renditions of the second Olympic and the first Nemean odes of Pindar into English Cowley wrote that ‘I have in these two Odes of Pindar, taken, left out, and added what I please; nor make it so much my Aim to let the Reader know precisely what he spoke, as what was his Way and Manner of speaking.’ For Cowley, the great distance between Pindar’s time and his own ‘changes, as in Pictures, at least the Colours of Poetry.’ Moreover, ‘we must consider that our Ears are Strangers to the Music of his Numbers.’

Shafer criticises Cowley’s failure to understand that the spirit of Pindar, which he wishes to capture, is ‘the result of […] emotion controlled and used for the purpose of a complex, highly developed, and conscious art.’ The structure of the great majority of Pindar’s odes conforms to a careful pattern. Almost all are

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written in a varying number of triads, each composed of three stanzas. The first two stanzas of each triad, the strophe and the antistrophe, are equal in number and length of lines, and in metrical pattern. The final stanza, the epode, has a different number of lines from the first two, as well as a different length of line and metrical pattern. In Pindar’s odes, where the poem contains more than a single triad, each epode corresponds in metre, line length and line number, just as each strophe and antistrophe corresponds similarly with the others. It is believed that in choral presentation of triadic lyric poetry the strophe, or ‘turn,’ was sung as the chorus danced in one direction, and the antistrophe, or ‘counterturn,’ as it reversed its movement. The epode, meaning to be ‘sung after,’ was a stationary completion of the poem.\(^1\)

In view of the comments of a critic such as Dionysius, however, believing themselves no longer ‘slaves to a necessary order,’ and taking Cowley as a guide, poets attempting Pindarics commonly rejected regularity of form. Eric Rothstein indicates the lack of understanding of seventeenth and eighteenth-century poets with regard to Pindaric structure: from Cowley onwards, critics complied with the view of John Norris of Bemerton, writing in the 1680s, who claimed that the ode was ‘the highest kind of writing in verse [...] fit only for great and noble subjects; such as are boundless in its own numbers, the nature of which is to be loose and free.’\(^2\) In a Prefatory Discourse to his *Poems on Several Occasions* of 1707, Samuel Cobb writes that ‘What I have attempted [in these poems] is mostly of the Pindaric and the Lyric Way. I have not follow’d the *Strophe* and *Antistrophe*; neither do I think it necessary.’\(^3\)

Dryden gave Cowley partial praise. In his Preface to *Sylva*, he wrote that though Cowley has ‘excell’d all others’ in emulation of ‘the Soul’ of Pindar’s poetry, which consists in ‘the Warmth and Vigour of Fancy,’ a ‘Sweetness in the

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\(^1\) Shafer, p. 155: Howatson and Chilvers, p. 552.
Numbers [...] is yet wanting.’ In the future another poet, with ‘A musical Ear, and a great Genius’, may perfect the Pindaric in English.64

Dryden takes issue delicately with the shortcomings of Pindaric imitators, and of Cowley himself. Exasperation, however, permeates the comments of William Congreve, writing in 1706. David M. Robinson writes that when Congreve was in his mid-thirties, he saw an edition of Pindar, and began to understand true Pindaric metrical structure. In A Discourse on the Pindarique Ode, prefixed to his own ode on ‘The Victorious Progress of Her Majesty’s Arms’ under the Duke of Marlborough, Congreve complains about the present state of Pindaric imitation. ‘There is nothing more frequent among us,’ he writes, ‘than a sort of Poems intitled Pindarique Odes, pretending to be written in Imitation of the Manner and Stile of Pindar.’ He castigates the irregularity of ‘numbers’ in the efforts of contemporary Pindaric imitators, for which Cowley is to blame. ‘I do not know,’ he writes, ‘that there is to this Day extant in our language, one Ode contriv’d after [Pindar’s] model. How can the reader, he wonders, know Pindar, ‘when he shall see such rambling and grating Papers of Verses, pretending to be Copies of his Works?’ Race writes that ‘After Cowley, Pindaric became a label for any poem of irregular form and pretensions of grandeur.’65

In spite of Cowley’s attempts, and the resultant proliferation of irregular English ‘Pindaricks,’ Pindar remained untranslated in England until, in 1748 and 1749 respectively, Ambrose Philips and Gilbert West published their own versions of his work. In the Preface to his translations West, siding with Congreve, declares his intention to remove ‘some Prejudices against [Pindar], that have arisen from certain Writings known by the Name of Pindarick Odes […] very few […] have the least Resemblance to the Manner of the Author […] or if any, ‘tis such a

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65 Robinson, Pindar: A Poet of Eternal Ideas (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1936), p. 17; Congreve, A pindarique ode, humbly offer’d to the Queen, on the victorious progress of her Majesty’s arms, under the conduct of the Duke of Marlborough. To which is prefix’d, a discourse on the pindarique ode (London, 1706) <http://galegroup.com/servlet/ECCO> [accessed 17 December 2005]: see also Spectator 160 (3 September 1711) for disapproval of Pindaric imitators; Race, p. 33.
Resemblance only as it is expressed by the Italian word *Caricatura*, a monstrous and distorted likeness.\(^6\)

Cowley and West both made translations of Pindar’s first Nemean ode. Comparison of the two versions reveals their difference in approach. West’s ode, strictly Pindaric in structure, is composed of four triads, containing strophes, antistrophes and epodes of twelve lines each. The rhyme scheme of each strophe and antistrophe conforms to a single pattern of four- and five-beat lines, ending with an alexandrine. The epodes similarly correspond with each other, the only exception to their pattern of four- and five-beat lines being the eighth line, which contains three. The first epode, as do all of West’s stanzas, demonstrates his methodical rhythmic approach to Pindaric translation:

\[
\begin{align*}
\textit{Sicilia} \text{ with transcendent Plenty crown’d} \\
\textit{Jove to Proserpina} \text{ consign’d;}
\end{align*}
\]

Then with a Nod his solemn Promise bound
Still farther to enrich her fertile Shores
With peopled Cities, stately Tow’rs
And sons in Arts and Arms refin’d;
Skill’d to the dreadful Works of War
The thund’ring Steed to train;
Or mounted on the whirling Carr
\textit{Olympia’s} all-priz’d Olive to obtain-
Abundant is my Theme; nor need I wrong
The fair Occasion with a flatt’ring Song.\(^6\)

In contrast, Cowley’s ode is in nine irregular stanzas, varying in length from eleven to seventeen lines. The first, second, fifth and seventh stanzas, all fifteen lines long, fail to correspond rhythmically, and have dissimilar rhyme schemes. Stanzas three and eight, both sixteen lines long, are only alike in that both end in seven-beat lines, a technical extravagance of which West may well have disapproved. The final, shortest stanza, as different in formation as all the poem’s are from each other, visually and aurally demonstrates a rhythmic scheme, with its insertion of a seven-beat line four lines into the stanza, that seems arbitrary in comparison with West’s careful structure:

\(^6\) Rothstein, p. 214; *Odes of Pindar: With several other Pieces in Prose and Verse. Translated from the Greek. To which is prefix’d a Dissertation on the Olympick Games* (London, 1749) <http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/ECCO> [accessed 16 December 2005].

\(^6\) West, p. 98.
And that the grateful Gods at last
The Race of his laborious Virtue past,
Heaven, which he sav’d, should to him give
Where marry’d to eternal Youth he should for ever live;
Drink Nectar with the Gods, and all his Senses please
In their harmonious golden Palaces;
Walk with ineffable delight
Through the thick groves of never-withering Light
And as he walks affright
The Lyon and the Bear,
Bull, Centaur, Scorpion, all the radiant Monsters there.68

What these stanzas also show, however, is a distinct lexical difference. West’s vocabulary is as conventional as his structure is careful, with its polite diction: ‘Then with a Nod his solemn Promise bound’; ‘And Sons in Arts and Arms refin’d’; ‘Abundant is my Theme; nor need I wrong/ The fair Occasion with a flatt’ring Song.’ In contrast, Cowley’s desire to capture Pindar’s energetically eloquent spirit is evident in, as well as the unpredictability of his metre, his use of phrase and image: ‘their harmonious golden Palaces’; ‘thick groves of never-withering Light’; ‘all the radiant Monsters there’, for example, with their allusions to the splendour of the gods.

MASON AND THE REGENERATION OF THE ODE

The examples above are, of course, translations. In the 1740s, Mark Akenside, William Collins and Joseph Warton each produced books of original odes, all published before the translations of West and Philips. The collections of Collins and Akenside show evidence of attention to Congreve’s strictures. Two of the odes in Akenside’s collection (1745), On Leaving Holland and On Lyric Poetry, are written in Pindaric triads, strophe and antistrophe following the same metric and rhythmic pattern, while the epodes, following a different pattern, agree metrically and rhythmically.

Akenside uses regular stanzaic patterns in place of Cowley’s unequal stanzas and lines. His metric scheme, however, is unremarkable. On Leaving Holland consists of three triads. The strophes and antistrophes begin with seven lines

68 Grosart, p. 12.
consisting of four beats each, followed by an iambic pentameter, and an
alexandrine, as in the following initial stanza:

Adieu to Leyden’s lonely bound,
The Belgian muse’s sober seat;
Where shedding frugal gifts around
On all the fav’rites at her feet,
She feeds the body’s bulky frame
For passive, persevering toils;
And lest, for some ambitious aim

The daring mind should scorn her homely spoils
She breathes maternal fogs to damp its restless flame. 69

The epodes begin with eight lines containing five beats, and are followed by one
line containing four, and a final line containing five. In *On Lyric Poetry*, written
in four triads, the strophe and antistrophe consist of ten lines containing four
beats each. The more metrically varied epode contains a suggestion of chiasmus
in its lines, which begin with an iambic pentameter, and end with an alexandrine.
The second to fourth lines are iambic pentameters; the next two contain four
beats, and the following line, three beats. The stanza then opens out again, with
a line of four beats followed by an iambic pentameter, leading to the final
alexandrine.

The most adventurous of these stanzas, then, is the epode of *On Lyric Poetry*. Others begin with several lines of unvarying metre, with a variation in their final
lines. The strophes and antistrophes of *On Lyric Poetry* are without any metric
variation at all. It is as if Akenside wished to try the Pindaric form, without
paying sufficient attention to the possibility that consistently applied metric
variation within an ordered structure would fail to lend, in view of the approach
of Pindar himself, an appropriate energy to the verse. He eschews Cowleyan
random: in what may have been an attempt to correct it, he renders his own
structure dull.

[accessed 6 June 2007].
Earl Wasserman observes that Collins ‘must have been aware of at least the substance of Congreve’s demand for the regular Pindaric.’ In the collection published in 1746, *Ode on the Poetical Character, Ode to Fear, Ode to Mercy* and *Ode to Liberty*, all owe something to Pindaric structure. The sections of the last three are marked as strophe, antistrophe and epode: although these markings are absent in *Ode on the Poetical Character*, Wasserman emphasises its Pindaric tripartite form.\(^{70}\)

None of these odes strictly follows the Pindaric structure. The *Ode to Mercy* consists of a strophe and antistrophe only; the *Ode to Liberty* has a strophe followed by an epode, then an antistrophe followed by a ‘second epode.’ Both the *Ode to Fear* and the *Ode on the Poetical Character* are tripartite. In both poems, however, Collins places his epode between the strophe and the antistrophe. A section of verse so placed is, in the terms of Greek literature, a mesode. There are no mesodes in the *epinikia*.\(^{71}\) Collins was experimenting with Greek forms, but rejecting the authentic Pindaric model.

Philips and West did not publish their work on Pindar until 1748 and 1749. In 1747, however, Mason had produced the Pindaric ode, *On Expecting to Return to Cambridge*. Unlike Collins, he adopted the strict Pindaric form for his poem. Unlike Akenside, he employed an interesting metrical scheme as a framework for novel and contrasting subject matter, producing a lyrical ‘Harmony’ that, in Dryden’s view, would result if the ‘Ear’ was allowed to ‘preside, and direct our Judgement.’ Dryden had suggested that at some future point a poet with ‘A musical Ear, and a great Genius’ might arise to improve on the Pindaric efforts of Cowley and his followers. In the second letter of those prefixed to *Elfrida*, Mason would later assert that ‘Few men have a strength of imagination capable of pursuing the flights of Pindar.’ In spite of this comment, he was undeterred from writing his own Pindaric odes. What he did possess, as his creative life would continually demonstrate, was ‘a musical ear.’ We cannot be certain whether he had read Congreve, or *Sylvae*; we do not know if he was familiar

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\(^{70}\) Earl R. Wasserman, ‘Collins’ Ode on the Poetical Character’, *ELH*, 34, no. 1 (March 1967), 92-115 (p. 105).

\(^{71}\) Lonsdale, p. 418.
with other poets’ recent ‘Pindaricks.’ If this was so, then here was a challenge fit for an aspiring poet: to restore order and ‘sweetness of numbers’ to a poetic structure which, in spite of its crucial importance to the original Pindaric odes, had been abandoned, and more recently played with, by modern poets.  

It is an indication of the way in which, by unquestioningly repeating the opinions and discoveries of previous scholars, events and facts of importance are missed, that scholarly comments on the influence of Pindar on British poetry fail consistently to mention Mason. Robinson, writing in the 1930s, cites Ben Jonson’s On the Death of Sir. H. Morison and Milton’s Ode on the Morning of Christ’s Nativity, the first as ‘a really Pindaric ode,’ the second as containing ‘features of Pindar’s style.’ Congreve wrote ‘faultless Pindaric odes, the first in English with proper differentiation of strophe, antistrophe and epode.’ Gray’s ‘Pindaric odes,’ The Bard and The Progress of Poesy,’ are ‘the two most famous in the English language.’ Surprisingly, in view of the fact that Akenside and Collins published odes with Pindaric features a decade before the publication of the Sister Odes, Robinson writes that ‘Collins, Akenside and others followed Gray.’ Was one of the ‘others’ supposedly Mason? In view of his role as a revivalist and his faithful adherence to Pindaric form, it is an unjust distinction.

Race, writing as long after Robinson as the 1990s, also mentions Gray’s Sister Odes as descendants of the epinikia; Instone cites Jonson and Cowley as British authors of the ‘Pindaric.’ Surprisingly, given Cowley’s irregularities, he refers to Dryden’s odes as un-Pindaric, pointing to ‘the complete lack of rhythmic correspondence between stanzas.’ He need not have looked very much further to find Mason’s thoughtful rhythmic and metric structures.

Mason’s Pindaric odes are easily identified by their author’s firm adherence to the Greek poet’s triadic structure of strophe, antistrophe and epode, with their inter-stanzaic echoes. On Expecting to Return to Cambridge, for example, consists of two triads. The strophes and antistrophes of each are eight lines long, and the epodes eleven. Cohen comments on the experimentation with meter and rhyme undertaken by mid-eighteenth-century ode-writers: Mason’s chosen verse

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72 Sylvaæ, Preface; Works, II, p. 182.
73 Robinson, pp. 13-19; Race, p. 33; Instone, pp. 26-9.
pattern suggests a young poet eager to flex his literary muscles by an interesting use of metre. The first, fourth, sixth and seventh lines of each strophe and antistrophe are in iambic pentameter; the second and third lines contain four beats, the fifth three, and each eighth line is an alexandrine. Iambic pentameter becomes a support here for lines of lesser and greater length, as the poet tries his hand at metrical variety. The metre of the epodes is less variable. The initial four lines of the eleven have four beats; the fifth to the tenth are in iambic pentameter; the final line is again an alexandrine. Iambic pentameter once more acts as a support in the epodes, not as, in the previous stanzas, a framework for metrical difference, but in providing the solid central section of a stanza that will end in the expansion of an alexandrine:

Hail ye friendly faithful few!
All the streams that Science pours,
Ever pleasing, ever new,
From her ample urn be yours.
When, when shall I amid your train appear,
O when be number’d with your constant guests,
When join your converse, when applauding hear
The mental music of accordant breasts?
Till then, fair Fancy! wake these favourite themes,
Still kindly shed these visionary gleams,
Till suns autumnal rise, and realise my dreams.

The metrical expansion in the concluding line of this final epode corresponds well with the poet’s previously expressed longing to return to ‘Learning’s spiry seats’ and ‘the social charm that most endears.’ At that point, Fancy will be redundant: the poet, warmed, as if he is a growing thing, by the suns of autumn, will finally step out of his imagination into the actual world of his desire.74

Mason’s mid-century use of Pindaric metric order was an innovation which, it has been suggested, was striking enough to claim the attention of Gray. Though the majority of Mason’s later non-dramatic Pindarics would address, as Pindar himself had done, subjects of national concern, this first ode is for the most part an exposition of personal desire. As a note in the 1811 edition of the Works explains, the ode ‘was for the first time printed’ in 1797. It was written,

74 ‘The Return of the Ode’, p. 220; Works, 1, p. 32.
however, in 1747, the year after Mason left Cambridge, as a response to a nomination ‘by the Fellows of Pembroke Hall to a vacant Fellowship,’ and is a personal meditation on the intellectual and social joys anticipated by its author when he returns to Cambridge. Its private quality is reflected in the fact that, though friends and colleagues may have seen it, and Gray certainly had, it was published for the first time in the year of Mason’s death.\textsuperscript{75}

The private nature of Mason’s subject, together with his choice of verse structure, provide a significant, and interesting, paradox. Commenting on the adoption by Thomas Shadwell, poet laureate from 1689, of the Pindaric ode as a vehicle for panegyric addressed to royalty, Robinson writes that it became ‘the recognized costume in which a poet must address his monarch.’\textsuperscript{76} The sentiments of such poems were necessarily elevated, their context public. The structure of the verse, however, remained one submitting to irregularity. In \textit{On Expecting to Return to Cambridge}, Mason reversed this trend, treating a personal theme within a ‘strict’ and rhythmically inventive Pindaric framework, and challenging the view that Pindaric verse was ‘fit only for great and noble subjects, such as are boundless in its own numbers, the nature of which is to be loose and free.’

In treating Pindaric verse as a vehicle most fit for seventeenth and eighteenth-century panegyric, poets had also lost sight of its original tenor and meaning. Pindar’s verse, whether he praised athletic victory or warned and advised overweening kings, was rooted in morality. The poet, touched by the gods, was privileged by his gift to contribute to the moral well-being of the state. And though Mason’s Pindaric was inward-looking, it too had a moral base. Remembering his undergraduate days, the life he anticipates in Cambridge will be one of personal moral enrichment, peopled by ‘fair Learning,’ ‘Contemplation,’ ‘Sincerity with open eye,’ ‘Science’ with her ‘ample urn.’ And as it had in the past, ‘Truth’ itself will attend his meetings with his ‘young compeers,’ ‘flow[ing] from soul to soul.’ Though he may not here ‘Pur[sue] the flights of Pindar,’ Mason presents himself as a poet most content within an

\textsuperscript{75} \textit{Works}, 1, p. 30.
\textsuperscript{76} Robinson, p. 17.
environment conducive to the generation of moral and intellectual truth, making 'the mental music of accordant breasts.'

As if to emphasise the importance of this stance, the ode contains echoes of one of the Miltonic poems which had inspired Mason’s juvenilia, Il Bellicoso and Il Pacifico. The ‘retir’d Leisure’ of Il Penseroso becomes here ‘Sacred Leisure’; Milton’s ‘Cherub Contemplation’ is echoed in ‘Her votary Contemplation meets,’ and his ‘studious cloisters pale’ in ‘Musing in his cloister pale.’

As he did in Musaeus, Mason invests his ode with the imprimatur of the most moral of English poets. When Race defined ‘Pindaric,’ after Cowley, as ‘a label for any poem of irregular form and pretensions of grandeur,’ he had clearly not read Mason.

MASON AND THE DEFENCE OF POETRY

The decline of the Pindaric ode until its eighteenth-century resurrection was only part of a perceived poetic dereliction, an aspect of the fallen state of mankind. It was a common view that the function of the poet had been eroded. When Sidney defended poetry in his famous treatise he had called attention, in its favour, to the respected, long-defunct role of the classical poet as ‘vates […] foreseer or prophet,’ a role which Pindar himself had played. Charles Cleeves wrote at the end of the seventeenth century that poets were now of no ‘Use, or Profit’ except ‘to fill up the Vacuities of the Creation.’

Early in the eighteenth century, however, such decline was challenged by what John Valdimir Price defines as ‘one of the most important contributions to literary theory of its time,’ John Dennis’ The Grounds of Criticism in Poetry (1704). Dennis deplores the moral deterioration of poetry and poets: ‘Many

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77 Works, 1, pp. 31-2.
78 Ibid, p. 31; ll. 49, 54, 156 in Carey and Fowler, pp. 142, 146.
Writers of Verses and Plays debauch and corrupt the people [...] a thing to which Poetry is as directly contrary, as a virgin is to a whore.'

Of all poetry, Dennis writes, ‘the ode is the most degenerated’: the restoration of poetry’s status depended on the poets’ acknowledgement of the supremacy of religious ideas, and a belief in poetry’s capacity to inspire moral behaviour by moving the passions, and so ‘bring[...] Mankind from Irregularity [...] to Rule and Order.’

Dennis foregrounds the expression and experience of the sublime as essential to arousing the kind of passion which will improve mankind. ‘Terror’ is more able than any other passion to ‘giv[e] a great Spirit to Poetry,’ particularly if engendered by ‘the Wrath and Vengeance of an angry God.’ The latter is the subject of Mason’s Pindaric ode On the Fate of Tyranny, his transposition of part of the Book of Isaiah, in which the poet, following the Old Testament author, and expressing his own view of despotism by means of his Pindaric, employs a vocabulary of the terror aroused by ‘the Wrath and Vengeance of an angry God.’

Although, for Dennis, poetry ‘is fall’n and sunk’, it is not yet completely debased in England. Defending eighteenth-century poets against twentieth-century scholarly assertions of a contemporary ‘cultural inadequacy in the face of the extraordinary accomplishments of their mighty predecessors,’ Griffin argues that poets such as Thomson, Gray, Collins and Cowper, among others, were in fact very aware of the social and national issues of the time, to which they responded by engaging in ‘a discourse of patriotism.’ Such patriotism ‘was not simply a celebrative mode,’ but ‘often involved anxiety about the state of the nation and its prospects.’ Griffin fails to include Mason in this poetic list. To exclude him is a regrettable omission: Mason’s The English Garden, and his satires, mainly published during the course of the 1770s, are all concerned with ‘the state of the nation and its prospects.’ In addition to these, Mason’s third Pindaric ode, To the

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Naval Officers of Great Britain, makes a forceful public statement, arising from such an anxiety, not only of relief at the acquittal of the Whig Admiral Keppel at the end of a court-martial that had been brought about by dubious means, but of dismay at the continuation of the war with America, begun three years before, in 1776. In the voice of the ‘Spirit of the Deep’, Mason remonstrates with his country:

Queen of the Isles! With empire crown’d.
Only to spread fair freedom round,
Wide as the waves could waft thy name;
Why did thy cold reluctant heart
Refuse thy blessing to impart,
Deaf to great Nature’s universal claim?
Why rush through my indignant tide
To stain thy hands with parricide?
-Ah, answer not the strain!
Thy wasted wealth, thy widow’s sighs,
Thy half-repentant embassies
Bespeak thy cause unblest, thy councils vain.

This second antistrophe demonstrates an unequivocally open response to the perceived misuse of power by those in authority.83

According to Griffin, Pindar was the most respected classical lyric poet of the time ‘because he stimulated an interest at mid-century in the idea that the poet in ancient Greece played a public and political role.’ It is in this particular ode that Mason most overtly dons Pindar’s mantle, adopting the Pindaric role of the poet as public commentator and adviser, encouraging the return of a moral ‘Rule and Order.’ In the ode, Mason records and comments on unfolding political events.

A note to the poem in Works, 1, explains that the ode was ‘written immediately after the trial of Admiral Keppel,’ on February 11th, 1779. Mason’s opposition to the American war had by now been expressed in his georgic, The English Garden, three of its four books already written. As an eighteenth-century odist, however, To the Naval Officers was as near as he could come to the public declamations of Pindar himself, ‘bestowing praise and blame,’ and ‘preserving

for the future,’ in his record of the honourable seamen who defended Keppel at his trial, ‘what is noble and exemplary.’

Mason’s success in promoting such views, and himself as a writer for whom poetry is indistinguishable from concern with national honour, was indicated by the publication by Robert Dodsley, in the following year, of an anonymous Ode to the Rev. Mr. Mason. It was, in fact, the work of the Irish poet Elizabeth Ryves, whose political viewpoint coincided with Mason’s own, and whose poem appears as a sympathetic reply to his. In her ode, Ryves celebrates with him the ‘free-born mind’ which disdains ‘Flattery’s sweetly-soothing smile,’ and ‘lures from Favour’s glittering sphere,’ but ‘draws/ Its glory from a just applause.’ Shakespeare and Spenser are cited as poets ‘of bright Eliza’s happier reign,’ whose verse respectively ‘glows with more than Attic fire,’ and expresses the ‘sacred precepts’ of ‘Truth […] in allegoric song.’ It is for Milton, however, that the role of poet-hero is reserved. ‘Turn to yon majestic shrine,’ is Ryves’ injunction, ‘to revere [the] honour’d shade’ of the poet ‘Who no inglorious aims betray’d,’ but ‘firm and resolutely just/ Defy’d Ambition’s gilded baits, [and] Passion’s wavering gust.’ By implication, Mason himself, with his adherence to ‘Truth divine’ in the face of perceived political folly, is awarded a place, to which he had already made claim in Musaeus, in an illustrious lineage.

MASON’S PINDARICS: THE PERSONAL AND POLITICAL

Mason’s first Pindaric ode, On Expecting to Return to Cambridge, treated a personal theme. It does, however, contain an element of passion about the state of the nation. The ode is primarily an expression of private longing, but it begins in another vein. The first stanza seems fugitive from a poem far more extrovert in mood and subject, written by a poet less concerned with the expression of the self than with the burgeoning of commerce:

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84 Patriotism and Poetry, p. 64; Works, 1, p. 59.
While Commerce, riding on thy refulent tide,
Impetuous Humber! wafts her stores
From Belgian or Norwegian shores
And spreads her countless sails from side to side;
While from yon crowded strand
Thy genuine sons the pinnacle light unmoor,
Break the white surge with many a sparkling oar,
To pilot the rich freight o’er each insidious sand…

Draper writes that the ode ‘expresses the young poet’s sense of spiritual revolt at the vulgar marts of men.’ The language of the first stanza, however, far from indicating a ‘spiritual revolt’, creates a sense of excitement, of mobile plenitude: ‘Commerce […] spreads her countless sails from side to side’; the oarsmen ‘Break the white surge with many a sparkling oar’ as they ‘pilot the rich freight.’ The Humber itself is energetically ‘Impetuous’, her tide ‘refluent.’ 86

The connection of trade with Pindaric verse was not new when Mason wrote his poem. Edward Young provided an example of this in his ode, ‘written in imitation of Pindar’s spirit’, though not according to his structure, Imperium Pelagi (1730). In it, Young raises trade and the merchants who ply it to heroic heights: ‘Is Merchant an inglorious name?/ No, fit for Pindar such a theme.’ 87

The young Mason’s pride in the swelling sails of commerce was local as well as national. Seventeen years before he wrote his poem, Pope had proposed London’s river as a watery symbol of the new Britain’s commercial and national glory: ‘The Time shall come, when free as Seas or Wind/ Unbounded Thames shall flow for all mankind/ Whole Nations enter with each swelling Tide.’ 88 It as if Mason replaces the Thames, so often favoured by the attention of poets, with an uncelebrated northern river no less equal to the commercial task.

The excitement Mason communicates in the initial stanza can also be seen as the manifestation of the kind of poetic buoyancy for which Pindar himself was noted, and that Cowley had striven to emulate. The subject of Mason’s ode is

86 Works, I, p. 30; Draper, p. 157.
88 Windsor-Forest, ll. 397-9.
similar to that of Akenside’s *On Leaving Holland*. Both poets express a desire to travel to a place of intellectual comfort, Mason to Cambridge and Akenside to his ‘native Albion.’ Akenside’s poem becomes a panegyric on a land ‘where Freedom in the streets is known.’ ‘When to thee/ Shall I return, to part no more?’ he asks, in the same questioning spirit in which Mason wonders ‘When shall I amid your train appear?’

Perhaps Mason had Akenside’s ode in mind when he wrote his own. Of the two poems, however, Mason’s is by far the more interesting. Akenside’s ode, with its unadventurous metric scheme, lacks poetic energy, as if the ‘maternal fogs’ of Leyden to which he alludes in the poem, that blight intellectual ambition, have settled upon his verse. Akenside’s poem becomes a public paean to the country to which he wishes to return: Mason’s desire, as we have seen, is largely expressed in a new way, as an introverted musing on the particularities of a life for which he longs. Akenside’s ode, meant for public attention, as Pindar’s had been, was published the year after it was written. Paradoxically, the poetic energy and variety required for the Pindaric were present in an ode that remained unpublished for fifty years.

It is possible, of course, that in his first stanza Mason intended to create an external scene of just this kind of excitement in order, in the second, to contrast his true felt condition, as he ‘strays[s]’ over what seems to him in reality a ‘bleak plain unblest with shade.’ Whatever his intention, however, the first stanza remains, in the reading, a comment on the activity of a dynamic commercial scene engaged in by a poet who seems genuinely responsive to its interest. Mason presents a picture that is extrovertly romantic rather than repellent, and in doing so sets up a tension between the first stanza and the remainder of the poem, the externally and the internally visualised. ‘Commerce’ is set against ‘fancy,’ ‘impetuous Humber’ against ‘peaceful Camus,’ the freight-bearing ships against a delicate fairy ‘barque,’ the plain ‘unblest with shade’ against cloisters ‘wrapt in a deep solemnity of shade,’ the physical against the intellectual, the ‘alien’ against the familiar.

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89 *Odes on Several Subjects*, p. 40; *Works*, 1, p. 32.
It is possible, too, that the poet is following in the footsteps of the Greek master. Pindar was noted for abrupt transitions in his verse from one theme to another, the ‘sometimes startling […] curtailment or outright rejection of a topic.’ Instone suggests that Pindar’s transitions can seem ‘more abrupt than [they are] because a connection of thought has been omitted.’ What can be noted in Mason’s poem is an omitted ‘connection of thought’ which is the consequence of an application of Pindaric structure to the Lockean precepts familiar to the young poet, a merging of an ancient poetic form with a very modern philosophy. The tabula rasa which is the mind at birth was coloured in, according to Locke, by images experienced through the senses, and by the reflections of the mind. Mason’s poem, in which he delights in both the visual images of the first stanza, and the internalised images which are the work of ‘fancy,’ demonstrates the powerful appeal of each, external set against internal, the romance of ships and men against the intellectual and social joys whose images are made possible by the ‘magic voyage’ of the poet’s mind.

It is possible to see a further example of Locke’s influence in the four central stanzas of the poem, from the antistrophe of the first triad to that of the second. The ‘magic voyage’ of the poet results in a series of images conjured up by the exercise of his memory. In a paper on the influence of Locke on the poetry of Mason’s friend Gray, S.H. Clark suggests that the inspiration for the lines in Gray’s Elegy, ‘But who to dumb forgetfulness a prey/ This pleasing, anxious being e’er resigned’ may be Locke’s idea that the ageing process involves a gradual fading of memory’s colours in the mind. Mason himself wrote an early ode, To Memory, in which he celebrates its subject as the preserver of all the riches that the senses bring to the mind: ‘The senses thee spontaneous serve/ That wake, and thrill through every nerve.’ In On Expecting to Return to Cambridge, the images of the four central stanzas are the products of the remembered pleasures of the poet’s university life, conjured with the aid of ‘Fancy’, that seem to him in those moments of recall more real than the commercial scene he describes in the initial stanza.

In the particular construction of his poem, Mason showed himself as a gifted innovator, a poet of originality. Having already experimented with the little-used form of monody, and before West and Philips had published their translations of Pindar, he took the mistreated structure of the Pindaric ode, and restored it to its controlled beginnings. In the process, he used the form for the most modern of expressions, that of the deeply-felt emotions of the self, mediated through Lockean ideas.

Commerce, celebrated in Mason’s initial stanza, was for many poets the peaceful cause of Britain’s expansion and her increasing wealth: both could benefit, and benefit from, the perceived liberty enjoyed by her populace under a constitutional monarchy. Mason’s second Pindaric ode, On the Fate of Tyranny, addressing a connected but much more fundamental topic, celebrates the downfall of an absolute king hated by his subjects, and by inference the blessing of Britain’s constitutional monarchy. As Pindar had drawn on the narratives of Greek mythology for moral lessons, the young Mason drew on an Old Testament story familiar to his readers.

Having successfully employed Pindaric structure in the personal On Expecting to Return to Cambridge, it is as if, in his second Pindaric, Mason turns his attention outwards, not only in a response to the spirit of the times, but also to try his poetic ability in transposition. The poem was published in a collection of Mason’s odes in 1756. Thereafter, it was re-published many times, frequently in Dodsley’s Collection. That it was admired is evident from a reference to Mason by Thomas Nevile, who had been inspired by Musaeus, in his Imitations of Horace, published in 1758: ‘Mason, who writes not with low sons of rhyme/ But on Pindaric pinions soars sublime.’

The ode itself is a direct transposition of Isaiah, chapter fourteen. The choice of structure and content indicates Mason’s awareness of the contemporary importance being given to ancient Hebrew, as well as classical, texts, both honoured as sources of ancient wisdom. In the eighteenth century, as Earl

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Wasserman writes, the ‘Pindaric ode […] is the genre customarily thought of as like the manner of the Prophetic Books of the Bible, especially that of Isaiah.’ An essay in The Guardian in 1713 had proposed that ‘It is very difficult […] to express violent Motions, which are fleeing and transitory […] in Poetry it requires great Spirit in Thought, and Energy in Stile; which we find more of in the Eastern Poetry, than either the Greek or the Roman. The Great Creator […] hath put into the Mouths of his Prophets such sublime Sentiments and exalted Language, as must abash the Pride and Wit of Man.’

Robert Lowth, Professor of Poetry at Oxford from 1741, foregrounded the value of Hebrew writing in a series of lectures, Praelectiones de sacra poesi Hebraeorum, given through the 1740s, in which he promoted the excellence of Hebrew poetry, and its superiority over that of the classical world. Lowth acknowledges the power of the classical ode in the hands of Pindar: ‘nor did the Olympic crown exhibit a more ample reward to the candidate for victory, than the encomium of Pindar or Stesichorus.’ When, however, Lowth describes Isaiah as ‘the sublimest of poets’, and chapter 14 itself as superior to ‘the whole compass of Greek and Roman poetry’, it is clear that in writing On the Fate of Tyranny the young Mason, in addition to responding to a sympathetic theme, was rising to a considerable challenge. Though the ode was published in 1756, the date of its origin is unclear. Mason wrote to Hurd in 1797 that he had begun it ‘near fifty years ago, under your critical auspices’, and reminds him that at the time ‘certain critics’ believed that he had composed it ‘with a view of rivalling Dr. Louth’s [sic] Alcaic version of the same passage.’ Lowth’s lectures were first published in 1753, so it seems likely that it was about this time that the ode was written. In his letter, Mason denies competing with Lowth: his wish had been to show that in ‘whatever form it was transposed, the lyrical beauties of the sacred original would appear equally manifest.’

In his poetical comment on monarchy, Mason involves both the legacy of Pindar, and that of the unknown author of Isaiah. And in choosing the subject of his ode, the downfall of a despotic king, Mason becomes, not only an aspirational poet, but as Pindar had been, a moral arbiter in the public domain, ‘preserving for the future what is memorable’ concerning the fate of tyrants.

In the autumn of 1713, the Whig Richard Steele, writing in *The Englishman*, had summed up the desirability of a constitutional monarchy: ‘Wretched condition of that nation, who could expect no Good of their Monarch, but of his ingratitude to his beneficiaries.’ Over thirty years later the Whig Mason, writing under the Hanoverian rule Steele was advocating, would articulate, in *On the Fate of Tyranny*, the downfall of such a prince, who ‘crush’d the subject race, whom kings are born to save.’

On the centenary of William and Mary’s arrival in Britain, Mason was to write a commemorative poem in which he recalled himself as a young poet, ‘Who breathed to liberty and truth/ Fresh incense from his votive lyre’, in celebration of ‘the charter’d rights of British liberty!’ The ‘Liberty’ which was made possible by the existence of a civilised contract between prince and people becomes, in *On the Fate of Tyranny*, an active personified force, itself liberated by the death of ‘Oppression.’

A note to the title of *On the Fate of Tyranny* in the *Works* of 1811 explains that it is ‘a free paraphrase of part of the 14th chapter of Isaiah’, the ‘Song of Triumph, which […] the Jews shall sing when [the Prophet’s] prediction is fulfilled.’ The prophet foretells that ‘thou shalt take up this proverb against the King of Babylon, and say, ‘how hath the oppressor ceased, the golden city ceased.’ Footnotes indicate the paraphrased incorporation into the ode’s text, stanza by stanza, of the biblical verses of the triumphal song.

96 ‘Ode XV’ in *Works*, 1, p. 73.
97 *Works*, 1, p. 45.
Dennis had promoted ‘Terror’ as more able than any other passion to ‘giv[e] a great Spirit to Poetry’, particularly where it was engendered by ‘the Wrath and Vengeance of an angry God.’ In his ode, Mason employs a vocabulary of terror predicated on just such a supernatural rage. Mason’s influence on Gray is demonstrated by lexical echoes in Gray’s *The Bard* of Mason’s vocabulary: ‘The Son of Wrath, whose ruthless hand/ Hurl’d desolation o’er the land’; ‘Distain’d with gore/ […] See, where his livid corse is lain’; ‘Shadowy heroes all […] Meet, and insult thy pride’; ‘Where he trod/ Famine pursued’; ‘My Vengeance shall unsheath the flaming sword/ O’er all thy realms my fury shall be poured.’

The ode is divided into three triads. Each strophe and antistrophe consists of eight lines, the first five containing four beats; the sixth and eighth are alexandrines, with a five-beat line in between. Each epode has fifteen lines, and its metric scheme is complex. The first, fourth, fifth and ninth lines contain three beats; the second, third, sixth and fourteenth are iambic pentameters; the seventh, eighth, tenth, eleventh, twelfth and thirteenth have four beats, and the final line, once more, is an alexandrine.

The metric structure of the ode, in particular the epodes, indicates the poet’s willingness to experiment with form, in order to best suit it to the tenor of his text. Mason begins his ode, as the biblical song begins, *in medias res*. ‘Oppression dies: the tyrant falls/ The golden city bows her walls.’ Action and injunction in the poem are largely reflected, dramatically, in its short lines; comment and speech arising from the events of the poem in its longer lines:

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He falls; and earth again is free.
Hark! at the call of Liberty,
All Nature lifts the choral song.
The fir-trees, on the mountain’s head,
Rejoice through all the pomp of shade;
The lordly cedars nod on sacred Lebanon:
Tyrant! they cry, since thy fell force is broke,
Our proud heads pierce the skies, nor fear the woodman’s stroke.
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98 *Works*, 1, pp. 45-9. There are echoes of vocabulary and idea in *The Bard*: ‘Ruin seize thee, ruthless king!’; ‘Smeared with gore and ghastly pale’, ‘Stamp we our vengeance deep.’ Mason’s ‘shadowy heroes’ are matched by Gray’s ‘grisly band’ of poets. ‘Famine’ is echoed in Gray’s poem by ‘Fell Thirst and Famine.’ (II.1, 34, 95, 44, 81).

The tyrant’s sudden fate—‘He falls’—is described here in one rhythmic beat, in two initial, terse single-syllabled words; its liberating result expands into the following three beats of the line, ending with the emphasised ‘free’, the word central to the poem’s theme. The three descriptive lines at the beginning of this first antistrophe are followed by the vocalised relief of Lebanon’s ‘lordly cedars’, expanding into the final defiant alexandrine.

The second antistrophe begins with an injunction couched in the vocabulary of ‘wrath’: ‘Rise, purple slaughter! Furious rise/ Unfold the terror of thine eyes.’ At the end of the stanza the declared purpose of God himself is reflected in the final lines: ‘For thus Jehovah swears; no name, no son/ No remnant shall remain of haughty Babylon.’ God’s decree here echoes the purposeful speech of the ambitious Lucifer of the strophe of the second triad. In this stanza, the poet conflates Babylon’s cruel king with Satan himself: ‘Oh Lucifer! Thou radiant star/ Son of the Morn; whose rosy car/ Flamed foremost in the van of day.’ Lucifer’s own swollen purpose is expressed in the stanza’s final lines: ‘High, o’er the stars, my sapphire throne shall glow/ And as Jehovah’s self, my voice the heav’ns shall bow.’ The verse of Milton again finds an echo here, in the reference to Lucifer’s fall, and the final lines of the first epode: ‘Proud king! Corruption fastens on thy breast/ And calls her crawling brood, and bids them share the feast.’

The epodes, longer than the strophes and antistrophes, are used for comment on the king’s downfall. In the first, ‘mighty kings, the heirs of empires wide’, risen from Hell’s ‘gulf profound’, reject the Babylonian despot, now ‘a flitting shadow light, and vain’, as unworthy to join their ‘ghostly train.’ In the second epode, the poet himself, in the role of chorus, describes the tyrant’s history and end:

Is this the man, whose nod
Made the earth tremble, whose terrific rod
Levell’d her loftiest cities? Where he trod,
Famine pursued, and frown’d;
Till Nature groaning round,

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100 Works, 1, pp. 47-9; Paradise Lost, ll.790-809, which describe the mating of ‘Sin’ and ‘Death’, and the generation of their ‘incestuous brood.’
Saw her rich realms transform’d to deserts dry;  
While at his crowded prison’s gate,  
Grasping the keys of fate,  
Stood stern Captivity.  
Vain man! Behold thy righteous doom;  
Behold each neighb’ring monarch’s tomb;  
The trophied arch, the breathing bust,  
The laurel shades their sacred dust:  
While thou, vile outcast, on this hostile plain,  
Moulders’t a vulgar corse, among the vulgar slain.

The epode’s short lines enable an intense distillation into personification of ‘Famine’ and ‘stern Captivity’, the horrors of the despot’s reign. Its last two lines again expand to describe the tyrant’s present state. The final iambic pentameter of the stanza, followed by an alexandrine, allows the poet to demonstrate at more length the sordid end of an absolute monarch: the repetition of ‘vulgar’ emphasises the lowly nature of an undeserving king, and of his fate. The beginning of the following strophe, its vocabulary adumbrating that of Gray’s Elegy, reinforces the previous two lines: ‘No trophied arch, no breathing bust/ Shall dignify thy trampled dust.’

The poem rises to a climax in the final epode, with the introduction into the verse of the speech of God himself:

Thus saith the righteous Lord:  
My vengeance shall unsheathe the flaming sword;  
O’er all thy realms my fury shall be pour’d.  
Where yon proud city stood,  
I’ll spread the stagnant flood;  
And there the bittern in the sedge shall lurk,  
Moaning with sullen strain;  
While, sweeping o’er the plain,  
Destruction ends her work.  
Yes, on mine holy mountain’s brow,  
I’ll crush this proud Assyrian foe.  
The irrevocable word is spoke.  
From Judah’s neck the galling yoke  
Spontaneous falls, she shines with won’ted state;  
Thus by MYSELF I swear, and what I swear is fate.

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101 Works, 1, pp. 46-50; ‘Can storied urn or animated bust/ Back to its mansion call the fleeting breath?’ (ll. 41-2).
102 Works, 1, pp. 49-50.
In this stanza the poet demonstrates an effective sense of the theatrical, leaving his chief actor in the drama to have the final word. ‘Thus by MYSELF I swear, and what I swear is fate’, is God’s concluding statement, suitably housed in an extending alexandrine. This final epode paraphrases verses twenty-two to twenty-seven of chapter fourteen. Verse twenty-seven, the last verse used in Mason’s transposition, objectively describes God’s ultimate power: ‘For the LORD of Hosts has purposed it, and who shall disannul it? And his hand is stretched out, and who shall turn it back?’ Mason, however, chooses to end his poem with God’s word in the earlier verse twenty-four, a paraphrase of the only verse in which God himself declares his ineffable mastery: ‘Surely as I have thought, so shall it come to pass; and as I have purposed, so shall it stand.’ The rearrangement of the verse order ensures that the ode ends in the most climactic way possible, the actors in the story giving way to its chief character, as God articulates the absolute power that He, unlike earthly kings, alone possesses. In contrast with the mighty voice of numinous power, the only earthly sounds now heard are the mourning notes of the lurking bittern’s ‘sullen strain’, lamenting kingly folly across the waters of the ‘stagnant flood.’

In writing his poetic paraphrase, Mason had added, to his ability to handle the Pindaric form, a capacity to appropriate what was considered sublime verse, and to transpose it into an eighteenth-century literary context. A further proof of the success of his ode came thirty years later in Gregory’s translation of Lowth’s lectures into English. In his original publication, Lowth had paraphrased examples from biblical text in Latin; Gregory rendered them into English himself, or inserted English versions from contemporary writers. He is particularly complimentary about one, a ‘Paraphrase of the 14\textsuperscript{th} of Isaiah’, which he describes as ‘one of the most beautiful lyric productions in our language.’\textsuperscript{103} The paraphrase in question is Mason’s \textit{On the Fate of Tyranny}.

Far from being the negligible writer the nineteenth-century critics would consider him, Mason engaged significantly, in both a literary and a political sense, with the preoccupations of the \textit{zeitgeist}. His five ‘discrete’ Pindaric odes, in political

\textsuperscript{103} Lowth, p. 6.
terms, trace an arch-like trajectory. The stanza-long reference to the nation’s commerce in On Expecting to Return to Cambridge was followed by a biblical transposition whose theme was the downfall of a tyrant who failed to hold ‘the Sword and the Scales, under the good Pleasure of the People.’

Crowning the arch is the Ode to the Naval Officers of Great Britain, written and published in 1779, in which the poet makes a statement of praise and blame about an actual event, and turns it into a plea for reconsideration of Britain’s present military and political situation. The ode, in which the poet rejects the American war, and urges, instead, war on the French, represents a widely-held viewpoint. As Griffin notes, ‘Patriotism was not simply a celebrative mode.’

The poem’s political and moral certainties, in addition to its public nature, render it the most Pindaric in spirit and style of Mason’s Pindaric odes. The broad political viewpoint of The Fate of Tyranny is applied to particular actions in real time. It is easy to imagine that, for Mason, the heroic virtue displayed by the naval officers in support of their commander could be celebrated most appropriately within a Pindaric structure, with its noble associations.

In March 1778, during the war with the American colonies, Viscount Keppel was given command of the Grand Fleet. Sir Hugh Palliser commanded its rear division. In a foray against a fleet of France, which was about to join the war on the American side, Keppel signalled for Palliser to come to his support. Palliser failed to do so, claiming later that he was unable to see the signal. Palliser had been controller of the navy and a member of the Board of Admiralty headed by Lord Sandwich, frequent butt of Mason’s satires. When Palliser’s apparent dereliction of duty was publicised in newsprint, he called upon Sandwich to have Keppel courtmartialed, suggesting that any fault was Keppel’s. The trial began in Portsmouth on the 9th of January, 1779. The bulk of the naval officers ‘expressed outrage’ at the event. At the end of five weeks, during which many fellow officers had spoken in his defence, Keppel was discharged. According to Walpole, ‘Keppel stood to hear his own praises sounded higher than even he had

grounds to expect’; Palliser became ‘the opprobrium and outcast of his profession.’

Mason begins *To the Naval Officers of Great Britain* with a dramatically imperative reference to Milton’s *Paradise Lost*: ‘Hence to thy Hell! Thou Fiend accursed/ Of Sin’s incestuous brood, the worst/ Whom to pale Death the spectre bore.’ The ‘Fiend accurst’ is the personified ‘Detraction’, who is to be banished ‘by Truth’s command.’ Mason’s dramatic beginning, his reference to the dark powers of ‘Hell’ and ‘Death’, indicates both the strength of the poet’s feeling about Keppel’s accusers, and his wish to arrest the attention of readers in its service. More than this, his initial poetic reference to *Paradise Lost* links both him and the event he celebrates to the Miltonic sublime, so synthesising the acquittal of the wronged admiral with a perceived imaginatively- and morally- unsurpassed British literary artefact. The composition of such an artefact was for Mason, perhaps, as near as humankind can artistically come to the power of the idealised, personified ‘Truth’, who is led, in this initial strophe, by ‘Old England’s Genius’ to ‘vindicate his darling Son’.

In one of his lectures on Hebrew poetry, ‘Of the Prosopopeia, or Personification’, Lowth refers to the passage from Isaiah rendered as a Pindaric by Mason as a ‘beautiful lyric drama’ played out by personification and characterisation of ‘The Jewish nation, the cedars of Lebanon […] [and] Jehovah himself.’ He comments on the success of Hebrew writers in ‘assign[ing] character and action to an abstract or general idea.’ Wasserman writes that in the eighteenth century, ‘creation of the personified abstraction’ was seen ‘as one of the most energetic activities of the imagination and the passions’, and so ‘an aspect of the rhetorical sublime.’ In *The Fate of Tyranny*, Mason had followed the Hebrew poet in his use of personification. In his ode to the naval officers, he was to put this respected poetic device to use in a poem that was a piece of political propaganda.

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106 *Works*, 1, p. 59; see note 101, above.

inspired by the writer’s own anger at what he saw as the fallen condition of his nation.

In the ode, praise for the conduct of the naval officers, represented as friends to ‘Truth’, and inheritors of the noble passions of their ancestors, paves the way for a message about present hostilities which is articulated by the powerful ‘Spirit of the Deep.’ The actual makes way for the abstract. The ‘Spirit’ himself personifies ‘Britannia’ as ‘Queen of the Isles!’; addressing her, and in so doing elevating her to supernatural stature, as ‘Sisters sovereign of the wave.’ The poet presents himself as the conduit between the ‘ancient honour’ of the ‘gallant Train’ of officers and the ‘giant Deity’ who will add ‘prophetic fervour to his strain’: he stands between reality and the powerful world of imagination. By referring to himself as ‘your poet’, Mason aligns himself with the officers and their virtues. Only he, however, with his poetic power, is able to summon the ‘giant Deity’ to give supernatural chastisement and support to ‘Britannia’ herself.

The ode consists of two triads. In the first, the poet addresses the event of Keppel’s acquittal, praising the moral worth of ‘those […]/ Ordain’d, with steady helm, to guide/ The floating bulwarks of [their country’s] reign.’ The naval officers are depicted, in plain words, as plain men, ‘steady’ and ‘honest’ in the face of the powerful, several-syllabled abstractions, ‘Corruption’, ‘Ambition’ and ‘Interest’, that surround them. Praise of the ‘gallant Train’, as the epode draws to a close, becomes a springboard for the poet’s broader political message, delivered throughout the second triad by the personified ‘Spirit of the Deep’:

Lo! at your poet’s call,
To give poetic fervour to his strain,
Forth from the mighty bosom of the main
A giant Deity ascends:
Down his broad breast his hoary honours fall;
He wields the trident of th’Atlantic vast;
An awful calm around his pomp is cast,
O’er many a league the glassy sleep extends.
He speaks; and distant thunder, murmuring round
In long-drawn volley rolls a symphony profound.108

108 Works, 1, p. 60.
Iambic pentameters and a final expanding alexandrine, all articulated with ‘long-
drawn’ vowels—‘broad’, ‘hoary’, ‘awful’, ‘league’, ‘sleep’, ‘rolls’, ‘profound’—suggest a being of ponderous power, in whose presence all earthly beings and their quarrels are diminished. The employment of such a majestic embodiment who, ‘wield[ing] the trident of th’Atlantic vast’, represents the ocean itself, across which hostile British ships sail to America, indicates the force of the poet’s feeling, his alarm for his country in its pursuit of the colonial war, and his abhorrence at its ‘fraternal strife.’ The sea itself, the poet seems to say, so necessary to Britain’s global predominance, rises up at the injustice of a war which threatens ‘Britannia’s doom.’

The poet has more to say. Linda Colley comments on the reluctance of many in the Protestant British nation to go to war with their ‘co-religionists’ across the Atlantic. The Catholic countries France and Spain were the ‘regimes that could easily be seen by […] Protestant eyes as enemies to liberty.’ Mason’s final epode contains the Spirit’s/ poet’s advice:

Sister sov’reign of the wave
Turn from this ill-omen’d war:
Turn to where the truly brave
Will not blush thy wrath to bear;
Swift on th’insulting Gaul, thy native foe,
For he is Freedom’s, let that wrath be hurl’d
To his perfidious ports direct thy prow,
Arm every bark, be every sail unfurl’d…

Britain will then have vanquished, on behalf of ‘Freedom’, the true earth-bound enemy of their nation, the protector of pretenders to the British throne.109

Mason’s poem to the naval officers begins with a moral celebration, the banishment of ‘Detraction’ and the appearance of ‘Truth’, and gradually opens out, first to praise of the officers and the dismissal of the ‘venal peers’, and then to criticism of Britannia’s military behaviour, voiced by the ‘giant Deity.’ At the end of the poem, Mason is not only advising, through the conduit of imaginative invention, a re-directed course of military action, but also suggesting, by its

means, another, greater, celebration: ‘The Gaul subdued, fraternal strife shall cease/ And firm, on Freedom’s base, be fixed an empire’s peace.’ This gradual poetic expansion also contains a circularity. In the final epode the vindicated Keppel, England’s ‘darling son’, makes a triumphant re-appearance:

...bright as gold from the refining flame,  
Flows the clear current of thy Keppel’s fame,  
Give to the hero’s full command  
Th’imperial ensigns of thy naval power:  
So shall his own bold auspices prevail…

is the instruction of the sea god. After the first two lines of the epode, however, in which he calls on ‘Britannia’ to end the war, the god himself, in spite of his continuing speech, seems forgotten. The final fourteen lines belong to the poet, and the ‘Deity’ is not referred to directly again, is now redundant: it is as if Keppel, a British hero made in the mould of noble sires, purified by ‘the refining flame’ of his trial, has stepped into his place. In such dishonourable times, the poet suggests, it is only in the actions of men such as Keppel that Britain’s honour is retained. Personification itself, the magisterial ‘Spirit of the Deep’, fades in the presence of this real, accessible upholder of British virtue.

Mason would not write another Pindaric ode for fifteen years. During that time, his political position had undergone an unexpected change. At the end of 1779, the year in which his last Pindaric had been written, Mason had played a central part in the formation of the Yorkshire Association. The need for parliamentary reform advocated by the Association was supported by William Pitt, to whom Mason addressed a complimentary ode in 1782. In 1783, the King dismissed the Coalition government then in power, installing Pitt in office. Consequently, the Whig Mason found himself on the side of the King.

Five years after the beginning of the French revolution, in March 1794, Mason wrote *Palinodia*. Like *On Expecting to Return to Cambridge*, it was not

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published until 1797, the year of his death. Like the Cambridge poem, *Palinodia* is the result of personal musing. The latter, rather than a series of images and feelings created by pleasurable recall and anticipation, is an expression of revulsion at the course taken by the revolution in France. Youthful hope is replaced by experience of reality. In his poem, Mason questions his lifelong adherence to the cause of ‘Liberty’, in whose name ‘seas of blood’ have run.112

Though Mason had written other political odes over the preceding years, this was the first for over a decade that he wrote in the Pindaric form. Like many in Britain, Mason hailed the Revolution as an event in the spirit of England’s own of 1688. In his centenary ode, written to commemorate the arrival of William and Mary, he had referred to ‘British liberty’ inspiring ‘the patriot steel’ of France, a country oppressed by a despotic monarch who ‘withdraws/ His own allegiance from the laws/ That guard the people’s right, that rein the sovereign’s sway.’ Events in France, however, had taken a bloody turn. Early in 1793, Louis XVI was executed; as 1794 progressed, the actions of the revolutionaries, led by Robespierre, became increasingly vengeful. Foreigners, including, of course, the English in Paris, were imprisoned, many becoming victims of the guillotine. Even Thomas Paine, who had supported the Revolution, but defended the King at his trial, was detained, and was to escape narrowly with his life. *Palinodia* denotes a poem written to retract views previously expressed. Five years into the revolution, Mason acknowledges the destruction of his hope for a France ‘freed from despotic thrall.’113

The *Ode to the Naval Officers* was a comment on the condition of a nation; in *Palinodia*, just as political a poem in tenor, the poet turns inward to examination of his political and creative self. It is another example of Mason’s willingness to merge the old with the new, to express the experiences of the self within a classical structure.

*Palinodia* is written in three triads. In his opening lines, the poet synthesises his creative and political *personae*: from the time of the emergence of the first, he

112 *Works*, 1, p. 79.
113 Ibid, 1, pp. 75, 80.
has been exercised by the moral, political and national issue of ‘Liberty.’ The first strophe begins with an invocation couched in personal terms:

Say, did I err, chaste Liberty!
When warm with youthful fire
I gave the vernal fruits to thee
That ripen’d on my lyre?
When, round thy twin-born sister’s [Independency’s] shrine,
I taught the flowers of verse to twine
And blend in one their fresh perfume;
Forbade them, vagrant and disjoin’d,
To give to every wanton wind
Their fragrance and their bloom.

The vocabulary of the first strophe suggests nature in tune with the young poet’s own burgeoning love of his craft, which he has dedicated to the cause of ‘Liberty’: ‘youthful’, ‘vernal’, ‘flowers of verse’, ‘fresh perfume’, ‘fragrance’, ‘bloom.’ These epithets and nouns, with their soft vowel sounds and intimations of untried innocence, will appear to wither, as if they are ‘flowers’ themselves, in the face of the political reality of later stanzas. From questioning the validity of the subject of his poem, Mason goes on in the antistrophe to consider his own poetic behaviour. His ‘voluntary Muse’ had been led, not down a ‘gainful road’, but to where ‘I swept my lyre enough for me/ If what that lyre might warble free/
My free-born friends might praise.’ The message of the antistrophe is mixed and self-conscious. Though the poet questions his past actions, he knows that he rejected courtly corruption: by articulating the wisdom of his choice, he contextualises himself, in the second stanza, within the innocence suggested in the first. ‘Fragrance’ and ‘fresh perfume’ clung not only to his verse, but also to the making of it for the scrutiny of ‘friends’ who like the poet, he implies, are not taking the ‘gainful road’, but enjoy a ‘free-born’ status unknown across the Channel.114

The image created by the strophe and antistrophe, of innocent and retiring lives, is shattered in the epode, as the poet asks himself if he has misunderstood the true nature of ‘Liberty.’ The four single-syllabled words that initiate the stanza echo the beginning of the strophe: ‘Say, did I err.’ In place of gentle questioning,

114 Works, 1, pp. 78-9.
however, the poet is now accusatory- ‘And art thou mute!’ A five-beat line consisting only of terse single-syllabled words begins a contextualisation of ‘Liberty’ in violence:

And art thou mute! Or does the fiend that rides
Yon sulphurous tube, by tigers drawn,
Where seas of blood roll their increasing tides
Beneath his wheels while myriads groan,
Does he with voice of thunder make reply:
‘I am the Genius of stern Liberty,
Adore me as thy genuine choice;
Know, where I hang with wreaths my sacred tree,
Power undivided, just equality
Are born at my creative voice.

The sudden expansion into iambic pentameter of the epode’s first lines, following the three- and four-beat lines of the previous stanzas, provides space for the poet’s horrified reaction. Is ‘Liberty’, thus re-imagined, such a being? The soft ‘f’ and ‘l’ sounds of strophe and antistrophe, and its gentle images- ‘youthful’, ‘flowers of verse’- are replaced by hard ‘d’s and ‘t’s- ‘rides’, ‘tube’, ‘by tigers drawn’, and by striking images of terror- ‘seas of blood’, the ‘fiend’ astride a ‘sulphurous tube’- all indicating the pitiless actions of the revolutionaries. It is a plunge into hellish nightmare, where the nature of ‘Liberty’ itself is questioned amongst the confused and bloody action of revolution. In the initial two stanzas, the poet considers the choice he made in the political dedication of his verse to ‘Liberty’ and the manner in which he chose to write, ‘Disdain[ing]’ the ‘gainful road.’ The normality of choice seems an impossible blessing in the very different dispensation articulated in the epode, with its cruelties, and groaning ‘myriads.’ Can this version of liberty which now drives the revolution be the true one, the ‘Genius’ that advocates ‘Power undivided, just equality’?\footnote{\textit{Works}, 1, p. 79.}

In the second triad, the poet answers his own questions. In the strophe Mason, rejecting ‘abhorr’d Democracy’, welcomes the Whiggish ‘True Liberty on Seraph wing’ who ‘shed[s] that blessing rare/ Of equal rights an equal share/ To People, Peers and King.’ The constitutional monarchy by means of which
Britain and its people have experienced their ‘liberty’ is a ‘flattering dream’ for France. The epode of this section provides an image to which the whole poem has been moving, and which is central to it:

When Ruin, heaving his gigantic mace,  
(Call’d to the deed by Reason’s voice),  
Crush’d, proud Bastile, thy turrets to their base,  
Was it not virtue to rejoice?  
That power alone, whose all-combining eye  
Beholds, what he ordains, futurity,  
Could that tremendous truth reveal,  
That, ere six suns had round the zodiac roll’d  
Their beams, astonished Europe should behold  
All Gallia, one immense Bastile?

The stanza contrasts idealism and reality. In its ten lines, the Bastille becomes the forbidding focus of hope and its destruction, and of the changing moods of revolutionary Paris. Its destruction was a catalyst for celebration, its present purpose the catalyst for a palinodia. A footnote to page 80 claims that ‘There were in the prisons of Paris alone, when this was written, above 6000 prisoners.’ Mason’s lexical references indicate the overwhelming impact of the application of such a situation of horror to the whole of ‘Gallia’: ‘tremendous’, ‘immense’, the ‘astonished’ attention of all Europe given to events in France. And instead of a personified presence, such as the ‘Spirit of the Deep’, God Himself, ordainer of ‘futurity’ of which these terrible events had become a part, enters the stanza. It is as if at this point, for the poet, confronted by his own stark, iconic image of the Bastille, no lesser being can be called upon for an explanation of the horror, or to teach the lessons the poet is now required to learn. In view of this human and political disaster, ‘Is it not virtue’ now ‘to repine’, asks the poet, as the third triad begins.116

The appearance of the personification of true ‘Liberty’, ‘The heaven-descending queen’, marks a turn, in the final triad, from the events occurring in France to a seminal political consideration, the conditions under which true ‘Liberty’ can be found. Like the ‘Spirit of the Deep’, ‘Liberty’ now becomes a commenting

116 Works, 1, pp. 79-80.
voice. Those ‘Who share my delegated aid’, she says, are those ‘in whom the passions pleas’d obey/ The God within the mind’: Pope, at his most moral, makes an appearance in Mason’s poem. In the final epode, ‘Liberty’ contrasts ‘fair Albion’ and her ‘sober patriot band/ True to their own, and nation’s weal’ with ‘France’, whose ‘coward princes’ and ‘luxurious peers’ are responsible for the generation of the ‘hell-born hydra’ which has taken their place, and for their own destruction. The aristocracy, who for the Whigs held the middle ground in a balanced partnership of ‘People, Peers and King’, have unleashed the fury of the mob, plunging their country into unspeakable horror.\footnote{Works, 1, pp. 81-2; An Essay on Man, II.204.}

In 1790, Edmund Burke had published his \textit{Reflections on the Revolution in France}. In his second epode, Mason refers to the personified ‘Ruin, heaving his gigantic mace’, who has been ‘Call’d to the deed by Reason’s voice.’ Burke saw that an abstract ‘Reason’, devoid of the influence of experience, was the destructive guiding principle of the revolutionaries. ‘It is vain to talk to [the French legislators]’ wrote Burke, ‘of the practice of their ancestors, the fundamental laws of their country, the fixed form of a constitution, whose merits are confirmed by the long test of experience.’ By the time Louis XVI was executed, to the horror of many of the revolution’s supporters in Britain, Burke’s words, unattended at first, must have seemed prophetic. In his second epode, Mason had written that the destruction of the Bastille was commanded by ‘Reason’s voice.’ In the final epode, ‘Liberty’, articulating Britain’s version of freedom against that of France, asks ‘Why seek for Reason in delirious dreams?’ Burke had foretold the dangers in the employment of reason by the revolutionaries. Here, the poet dismisses the idea of its existence in the nightmare world of contemporary France. A delusion at best, it now seems an enfeebled quality lost among the horrors of ‘anarchy and blood’ which are the revolution’s ‘delirious dreams’, terrifying distortions of the sublime.\footnote{Edmund Burke, \textit{Reflections on the Revolution in France, and on the proceedings in certain societies in London relative to that event} (London, 1990), pp. 114, 85-6 <http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/ECCO> [accessed 19 August, 2007]; Works, 1, p. 82.}

In contrast to Mason’s ode of fifteen years before, ‘Albion’ is here portrayed, not as a misguided, fratricidal nation, but as the keeper of the purity of ‘Liberty[‘s]’
‘hallow’d name’, once more the trusted guardian of ‘fair freedom’, won from England’s own bloody events of the previous century. Within the parameters of his palinodia, the poet indicates his changed view over time of the political situation of both France and Britain, even as he questions the validity of his own understanding of the term ‘Liberty.’ The conservatism of Burke, which inspired his *Reflections*, must now have made sense to a Whig poet who had once believed in the capacity of France to loose bloodlessly, as England had done, the chains of despotism.

Why did Mason choose to write a politically-driven Pindaric that would remain unpublished until the year of his death? His first Pindaric ode, also unpublished for years, had been almost entirely personal, an essay in the genre. Two of his later odes dealt with events of immediate national importance, the trial of Keppel, and the outcome of the French revolution. His second Pindaric had addressed the subject of tyranny itself. By the time Mason wrote *Palinodia*, he was producing little poetry: the poetic energy of the 1770s had long ago diminished. It seems, however, that for him it was still appropriate that an overwhelming political event, in this case the French revolution and its ghastly consequences, the execution of a king and the rise of a bloody-handed mob, should, even in the form of a palinodia, find articulation within the most respected of classical structures, originated by a poet whose word was noted even by tyrants. What other form could more appropriately contain the images of terror through which the poet articulates his own amazed revulsion at events in France? Within the poem, Mason’s own questionings are articulated against a backdrop of violence, of ‘anarchy and blood.’ In the *Ode to the Naval Officers*, he had been able, in the guise of the ‘Spirit of the Deep’, to advise publicly on the course his nation should take. In *Palinodia*, he can only, privately, respond to the events he describes, mediating his response through examination of the self.

In *Palinodia*, Mason makes a significant reference to Milton, champion of ‘Liberty’: in a footnote to the antistrophe of the third triad, in which ‘Liberty’ discourses upon ‘Wisdom’, her conduit to the actions of humankind, he writes, ‘So Milton in his 12th Sonnet, speaking of liberty, says, ‘But who loves that,
must first be wise and good.’ Had the revolution in France been undertaken in what British Whigs such as Mason would have viewed as the acceptable way, the outcome may have been very different. As H.T. Dickinson writes, for Whigs the ‘sovereignty of the people’ meant that a government could not flourish for long without ‘the tacit support of the bulk of the population or at least of the middling and upper ranks of society.’ Any attempt, however, to create a democratic system that resulted in ‘Power undivided, just equality’, could only end in disaster. Mason’s imagined French revolution would no doubt have occurred in much the same way as England’s own Glorious Revolution in 1688. His palinodia suggests shock not only at the outcome of events in France, but his own failure of imagination in considering the form such revolution might take. The momentous event itself requires a noble poetic structure for its expression, but the poet can only muse privately on French folly, and his own.

At the beginning of his poetic career, Mason had written an ode To Memory, which is described, together with ‘Experience’, as the parent of ‘Wisdom’. His final Pindaric, appropriately, was to be an Ode on Wisdom; or, the Twenty-Eighth Chapter of the Book of Job, attempted in Lyrical Verse. It was written only months before Mason died. As I have noted, a copy was sent to Hurd, Mason’s mentor when he wrote the first of his biblically-themed Pindarics. Now he became the recipient of Mason’s second and last.

The subject of the ode seems appropriate for an elderly cleric who has lived a long and full life. Mason’s dedicatory letter to Hurd, however, reveals a wish not to poeticise an abstract, but to fill a gap left by Lowth in his lectures: ‘I find, that the poetical Professor […] has almost entirely overlooked the passage in his celebrated Prelections.’ Unlike the passage of On the Fate of Tyranny, it appears that Mason did not intend his new ode for public perusal. In the month before his death, he wrote to Hurd that ‘I have only taken off a single Dozen copies’ for private distribution. The ode was eventually published in the Works of 1811.

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120 *Works*, 1, pp. 19, 83.
As the chapter of Job that inspired Mason to write was an example of sublime Hebrew poetry, the Pindaric structure, as in the case of *On the Fate of Tyranny*, seemed for Mason its appropriate vehicle. He ‘pronounced’ that the chapter was in fact ‘an Ode of the most perfect lyrical form, diversified in its imagery, bold in its transitions, and rising […] in its conclusion, to the sublime […] I conceived that it might be versified in the Pindaric mode.’

In a footnote to the ode’s title, Mason writes that the biblical passage was a ‘poetic illustration’ of mankind’s inability, in spite of its capacity to discover the secrets of the earth, to understand the wisdom of God:

[Man] can those depths profound descry,  
Where never pierced the vulture’s eye…  
Can make all nature to his prowess bend:  
But did this bold, this all-pervading man  
That dread mysterious region e’re explore,  
Where Wisdom dwells? Does he presume to scan  
The place, where she exerts her sacred power?  
What if he asks the deep abyss below,  
If in its realm she dwells? its Genius answers, ‘No!’

Mason had lived in a century of scientific exploration and discovery, and of the commercial exploits celebrated in the initial stanza of his first Pindaric. The subject of the biblical ode, the human mastery of the earth, and the richness of its images of man’s discovery- ‘bright sapphires’, ‘the gold of Ophir’s mine’, ‘the Ethiop’s pearly store’- of his poem’s first strophe, are apposite for a century during which, by means of global exploration, such mastery had been emphatically demonstrated. In old age, however, Mason now celebrated the idea of a divine wisdom beyond all human adventure.

The ode is divided into two triads, the strophes and antistrophes of twelve lines, the epodes of six. As in *On the Fate of Tyranny*, footnotes refer the reader to each analogous section in chapter twenty-eight. The political messages and concerns of the bulk of Mason’s earlier Pindarics are absent from a poem which

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122 *Works*, 1, p. 85.  
123 Ibid, pp. 87-8.
addresses the relation of the human to the ineffable. The ‘rising to the sublime’, which Mason notes as a trajectory in the biblical ode, is matched in his own: both conclude with the ‘Eternal’s awful voice’ pronouncing, in Mason’s words, ‘That all of wisdom to thy race allow’d/ Is to refrain from sin, and venerate thy God!’ It is a fitting conclusion to the final Pindaric ode of a poet whose time on earth was almost at an end. At the same time, Mason’s desire to fill a gap left by Lowth demonstrates that, in spite of dwindling poetic energy, poetic ambition was still alive.

**MASON AND THE DRAMATIC PINDARIC**

Mason’s two tragedies, *Elfrida* and *Caractacus*, were laced with Pindaric odes which, as Draper wrote, were greatly admired. The influence of the sublime is present in the most effective of these odes, the final one in *Caractacus*. Gray was so impressed by it that, in a footnote to his own Pindaric, *The Progress of Poesy*, he referred to it in most generous terms. Of ‘odes of the sublime kind’, he asserts, that ‘of Dryden on St. Cecilia’s day’ is the only one ‘in our language.’ However, ‘Mr. Mason […] of late days has touched the true chords, and with a masterly hand, in some of his Choruses,- above all in the last of Caractacus.’ Even Draper considers it to be ‘as good poetry as Mason ever wrote.’

A.L. Owen has referred to *Caractacus* as ‘the most outstanding heroic drama of the eighteenth century’; George Yost writes that ‘in 1759, the Celtic revival came to full flower in William Mason’s *Caractacus*.’ Elizabeth Ryves’ reference, in her poem written in reply to the *Ode to the Naval Officers*, to ‘our hardy sires’, reflects an eighteenth-century mindset consequent upon a perception of Britain’s history as the source and inspiration of a contemporary moral and military ascendency. Such an ascendency was concomitant with the emergence, via the works of Chaucer, Spenser and Milton, of a literature of equal worth.

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124 Works, p. 90.
125 Draper, p. 149; Lonsdale, n. 175; Draper, p. 187.
Fairer observes that ‘the mid-century return to the literary tradition of Spenser and Milton was not a move away from the classical, but towards a ‘classic’ literary past of great originals.’ In Caractacus, as in the earlier Elfrida, Mason combined native subject matter with classical style. He kept ‘a strict adherence to the Unities’, and employed a Chorus. His use of such apparatus is an attempt to return to the ‘simplicity, nature and pathos’ of classical tragedy in the face of the inferior ‘bustle, and business’ of modern drama. Once again, Mason wishes to articulate contemporary taste within an ancient, tried structure: his intention, as he had written in the letter attached to Elfrida, was to attempt to use ‘the antient method’, as a ‘Greek poet’ would do, while ‘adapt[ing] himself to the genius of our times.’ His attempt was successful. As a dramatic poem, Caractacus was read with enthusiasm, and audiences called for revivals of its stage performance.127

The reverence for a noble British past was predicated on the notion of ancient Britain as the cradle of liberty. Sambrook refers to the ‘blend of monarchy, oligarchy, and democracy’, the ‘Gothic institution’ brought across the sea by the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes in the fifth century. Kings were ‘appointed […] and prescribed their powers and duties under the law.’ The English never willingly rendered up these Gothic liberties. In Cooper’s Hill, published in 1642, John Denham had referred to the power of the signing of the Magna Carta, the removal from monarchy of absolute power:

Here was that Charter seal’d, wherein the Crown
All marks of Arbitrary Power lays down:
Tyrant and Slave, those Names of hate and feare,
The happier Style of King and Subject bear:
Happy, when both to the same Center move,
When Kings give Liberty, and Subjects Love.128

Records of British courage under earlier Roman rule, and the struggle for liberty, were found in the writings of the Roman historian Tacitus, in his account of the uprising of the Iceni under Boudicca, and his comments upon the people

127 Fairer, English Poetry, p. 150; Works, II, pp. 179, 185, 177; Draper, p. 191.
themselves. ‘They are restive under wrong’, Tacitus writes, ‘for their subjection, while complete enough to involve obedience, does not involve slavery.’ He makes reference to the British king Caratacus [sic], ‘the man who defied our power for so many years’, and who was eventually captured and taken to Rome. ‘If you want to rule the world’, Caratacus had said to the emperor Claudius, ‘does it follow that everyone else welcomes slavery?’¹²⁹

Making Caractacus his chief protagonist, in his play Mason addresses issues of national pride, freedom and slavery, calling on history for an example of native fortitude. The theme of ‘Liberty’ is, for the Whig Mason, the driving abstract of his tragedy. As the play begins Caractacus, defeated in battle by the Romans, has taken ‘sanctuary amongst the Druids in Mona’, and is about to become one of their order. The arrival of Aulus Didius, the Roman general, with his forces, disrupts the ceremony. After hope and betrayal, the play ends with the captivity of Caractacus who, ‘after struggling/ Nine years, and that right bravely ‘gainst a tyrant’, departs for Rome.¹³⁰

Mason’s Chorus is composed of ‘Druids and Bards’, characters appropriate for his view of a Chorus as ‘a graceful and natural resource to the embellishments of picturesque description [and] sublime allegory.’ The Chorus is a continual commentator on the action of the play. Its speeches contain references to Druidic customs and mysteries, themselves fascinating to eighteenth-century antiquarians in search of Britain’s past.¹³¹

Caractacus was published initially as a dramatic poem. When it was staged in 1776, its four odes were set to music by Thomas Arne, another of Mason’s notable cultural acquaintances. The last, and most striking ode, is sung by Mador, the chief Druid, and is a call to arms against the Romans. It consists of two regular triads, in which each stanza is nine lines long. Its effectiveness as a war cry, and its claim to sublimity, is created by not only the dramatic

¹³⁰ Works, II, pp. 79, 173.
introduction of ‘Death’ itself into the poem from its first line, but also the poet’s use, in strophe and antistrophe, of simple, forceful, single-syllable words; the repetition, particularly in the initial strophe, of hard ‘d’ and ‘t’ sounds indicating the ‘tread’ of ‘Death’, and the arresting brevity of the two-beat third and fourth lines, which suggest the sudden blow of death itself, and are the shortest in Mason’s Pindarics. These are followed by a three-beat line which begins a detailed description of Mador’s vision of ‘Death’ armed as a ‘warrior’:

Hark! heard ye not yon footstep dread,
That shook the earth with thund’ring tread?
‘Twas Death.- In haste
The warrior past;
High tower’d his helmed head:
I mark’d his mail, I mark’d his shield,
I spy’d the sparkling of his spear,
I saw his giant arm the falchion wield;
Wide wav’d the bick’ring blade, and fir’d the angry air.  

The six lines from ‘The warrior past’ consist of one of two beats, one of three, two of four, one of five and one of six. As the lines extend in length, so the picture of ‘Death’ increases in dramatic effect. The poet employs alliteration and anaphora to emphasise the effect: ‘High’, ‘helmed head’, ‘spy’d’, ‘sparkling’, ‘spear’, ‘bick’ring’, ‘blade’; ‘I mark’d’ repeated in the same line, followed by repeated ‘I’s at the beginning of the next two lines. The insistent lexical repetition suggests the repeated ‘tread’ of ‘Death’ himself, as he strides out to conquer. Even the ‘air’ becomes angry in the seductive presence of such a figure.

The first six lines of the epodes are rhythmically further extended than those in the strophe and antistrophe, with four beats to a line. This extension provides ‘Death’, in the last stanza, with space to elaborate, paradoxically, on his own brief ‘moment’s power.’ After these lines, the stanza opens out into a five-beat seventh and eighth line, followed by an alexandrine. The metric expansiveness here provides a suitable vehicle for description of the renewed, unconquerable

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The centrality to the play of ‘liberty’ is articulated forcefully twice in the culminating alexandrine- ‘Again for freedom fights, again for freedom dies.’ ‘Death’ may stride out with measured tread, but the British ‘warrior’, however fearsome the sight, will unfailingly give his life for his country. The repeated vowel sound in both final verbs- ‘fights’ and ‘dies’- and the echo in the second half of the line of the first, emphasise the idea of the Briton’s undying courage in the face of his country’s enemies, his constant return to the field of battle. The warrior’s soul will live on, freeing itself from oblivion.

As in Nordic lore, which was of great interest to both Mason and Gray, the warrior’s soul does not perish, but immediately inhabits ‘a kindred frame.’ Caractacus’ response to such rousing words, to the power of poetry, is immediate: ‘It does, it does! Unconquer’d, undismay’d/ The British soul revives- Champion, lead on.’

Both *Elfrida* and *Caractacus* were staged in the 1770s, in Mason’s most significant decade of poetic production. *Caractacus* was performed the year after the beginning of the war with the colonies, when the second book of *The English Garden* was also published. Mason’s tragedy was a celebration of the liberty-loving Briton, and the moral triumph made possible by his fidelity to the cause of freedom. Its influence spread: The *Gentleman’s Magazine* recorded that

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134 Ibid; Whibley and Toynbee, II, p. 553: Mason assures Gray that he has read Keysler’s book on ancient customs, including ‘the notions the northern nations had of a future state […] he talks of the Metempsychosis which everybody allows Druidical.’ (January 1758).
at an anti-war meeting held by Shropshire Whigs in 1776, additional lines to *Caractacus*, though apparently not written by Mason, were read out: they urged ‘conciliation and greater liberty for the colonies.’\(^{135}\) By the end of 1779, the year in which the third volume of his georgic appeared, Mason’s own disgust at Britain’s political condition would involve him, actively, in the quest for political reform.

\(^{135}\) *Gentleman’s Magazine*, XLVI, p. 427 in Draper, p. 177.
CHAPTER TWO: MASON AND THE GEORGIC

INTRODUCTION

Mason’s choice of Pindaric structure as a vehicle for his verse, made at the earliest stage of his adult life as a poet, demonstrated a willingness not only to rise to a literary challenge that was predicated upon classical excellence, but also to align himself with the moral imperative contained within that verse. As we have seen, it was in the composition of the Ode to the Naval Officers of Great Britain, with its criticism of the actions of contemporary political authority, that he was at his most Pindaric. In the composition of his georgic and his satires, as in the Ode to the Naval Officers, Mason adopted, by means of political comment on events and personalities, the Pindar-like role of moral adviser to his readership.

The English Garden, Mason’s major work, was a practical text. That it was of real, even inspirational, use for gardeners has been shown, for example, by Mavis Batey in her paper, ‘The English Garden in Welsh’, in which she refers to Thomas Johnes, owner of the Welsh estate at Hafod, designing his garden according to Mason’s text. Johnes was, she writes, ‘one of the few creators of landscape gardens who made a definite acknowledgement of the book from which he took his ideas.’ Tim Richardson asserts that Hafod subsequently found itself ‘in the vanguard of fashion.’ Mason was an expert gardener, whose designs and suggestions were taken up by friends such as Richard Hurd, Frederick Montagu, and Lord Jersey. He encouraged the ideas of William Gilpin, the promoter of the ‘picturesque.’ Gilpin dedicated his Wye Tour of 1782 to Mason, who had helped him in getting it published. Mason’s and Gilpin’s views concurred in several particulars: like Mason, Gilpin believed in improving scenery ‘with a painter’s eye.’ Richard Payne Knight’s poem The Landscape of 1794 ‘shows Mason’s influence’; in 1788, the notable garden designer Humphry Repton asked Anna Seward if she would introduce him to Mason.¹

THE ENGLISH GARDEN

The four books of *The English Garden* were published in 1772, 1777, 1779 and 1781 respectively. The form Mason chose for his poem was the didactic one of the georgic, a form which, as J.C. Pellicer writes, ‘burgeoned in the eighteenth century as never before or since.’ In the Postscript to the fourth book of his poem, part of which was reproduced in the Preface of the 1811 edition, Mason explains his ‘method’, making clear that his inspiration is the *Georgics* of Virgil.\(^2\) As I noted in the introduction, blank verse was the preferred mode of his hero Milton, whose republican politics found echoes in Mason’s Whig sympathies. Following Milton, he would make his poetic attempt within a synthesised context of stylistic and political ideals.

The four books of *The English Garden* were published together in a new edition in 1783, together with a commentary by Mason’s Whig friend William Burgh, whose wish, Burgh claims, is to elucidate the poem’s didactic text for the benefit of the reader.\(^3\) I have chosen the 1783 edition as the text to be examined in the thesis. Its interest is reinforced by the addition of a new Preface composed by Mason, Burgh’s commentary, and extensive notes on both poem and Commentary contributed by their respective authors.

Between 1772 and 1781, the years in which the first and fourth books of the poem were published, the political scene in Britain underwent an enormous change, reflected in an analogous alteration in tone and mood between the two texts. At the conclusion of his Commentary on Mason’s poem, Burgh points to ‘the interval of more than ten years’ between their composition. At the time Mason began his first book, the Seven Years War had been over for several years, and Britain was enjoying, as Langford observes, ‘a rapid economic recovery after the spasmodic recessions of the sixties.’ In the first book, Burgh writes, the poet ‘exhorts [his countrymen] to practice for the embellishment of a

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\(^3\) Ibid, p. 316.
then prosperous country.’ The poet’s initial robust appeal to the youth of ‘Albion’, to undertake the task of gardening for the horticultural and political good of their country, underpins its didacticism. ‘In the latter’, Burgh continues, Mason recommends gardening ‘for the purpose of amusement and self-consolation’ in a country ‘oppressed by the weight of an immoral […] and desolating system.’ As Mason wrote his fourth book, the garden becomes a means of personal comfort for those readers dismayed, as Mason and Burgh had been, by the political turn of events that led to war with the American colonies, and its moral and financial consequences.

The final paragraphs of the postscript Mason attached to the last book of his poem are addressed to certain readers who, he believes, will feel that the text of his fourth book, which largely takes the form of a narrative, is informed with ‘too much of the spirit of party.’ ‘The puny term’, Mason asserts, in the midst of the degenerate politics of the present time, ‘has little or no meaning.’ ‘In a matter of such magnitude as the American war’, he is certain that there is nothing in his poem that contradicts the author’s adherence to the only party that matters, ‘THE PARTY OF HUMANITY.’ In his role as preacher, Mason enlarged on this reference to ‘The Party of Humanity’: ‘By Patriotism and public spirit, I mean that active and fervent passion to promote the real welfare of our country, which, superior to all the narrow and mistaken views of self-interest, superior to the call of party […], prompts a man […] to support those measures […] which his maturest reason convinces him are most likely to be of service to it, and as resolutely to oppose whatever may tend to its disadvantage.’

By 1782, however, the year in which Burgh completed his notes, the political situation in Britain had become a more promising one for the two men. The entire text, if its prose additions are included, can be seen, from their political viewpoint, as following a trajectory that begins and ends in optimism.

Mason’s poem, as his comments on ‘The Party of Humanity’ indicate, was a great deal more than the practical manual of an experienced garden designer.

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4 Works, 1, p. 374; Langford p. 532.
Stephen Bending defines it as ‘one of the fullest accounts of the English garden as an image of constitutional liberty.'6 In this chapter, I shall first outline the content of the poem’s four books. I shall then, by exploring its text, demonstrate how Mason’s poem answers Bending’s definition. I shall also show that, of all his poetical works, it is in The English Garden that Mason most clearly foregrounds the nature of the poet’s art, and most self-consciously claims a place for himself as its worthy purveyor.

THE CONTENT OF THE ENGLISH GARDEN

In Book One of his georgic, Mason explains that he began writing his poem as a distraction from grief at the death of his young wife in the spring of 1767. The book begins with an invocation to ‘divine Simplicity’, the ‘best arbitress of what is good and fair’, and the poet’s plea that, along with the ‘Sister Powers’ of poetry and painting, she will help him in his task. His ‘Song’ is for the attention of certain of ‘Albion’s sons’, who will succeed the best of contemporary gardeners. He warns them that ‘Great Nature’ cannot be over-regulated by the activity of art: the outdated ‘cube and cone’ of ‘mechanic Order’, favoured by previous gardeners, must be rejected. ‘Art’ must be subject to the demands of ‘Nature.’7

Book Two begins with a reference to the Horatian dictum, utile dulci, the praise of estate owners who now permit their herds to crop their lawns, and who have banished the ‘useless terrace’ and the ‘wasted crystal’ of the fountain. He recommends the gentle curve, what is in fact Hogarth’s ‘line of beauty’, as a desirable model for garden planning, in place of straight lines and ‘paths’ that ‘writhe in convulsive torture.’ Such a line is a residence of ‘Simplicity’, the poem’s presiding goddess. ‘Art’ must partner ‘Nature’, not control it, and respect be given to ‘the Genius of the scene.’ The poet expatiates on the construction of appropriate fences to separate the estate’s animals from growing ‘saplings’ and ‘flow’rets’, and the desirability of employing children, ‘Glowing

7 The English Garden, 1.1-2,18,50,74, 313-4.
with health and beauty’, as its shepherds. The book ends with praise of rural retirement as preparation for office, in the form of the story of the deposed Sidonian king Abdalonimus, who was restored to his throne by Alexander the Great.

A personal lament for Mason’s friend Thomas Gray, who died in 1771, begins Book Three. Gray had believed in the supremacy of ‘all-majestic Nature’, and the poet promises that he will be ‘guided by [Gray’s] judgement sage.’ He goes on to advise on methods of planting, the necessity of the gardener’s knowledge of plants’ ‘general properties’, and their suitability for a particular environment. He discourses on the appropriate treatment of water in the landscape, and ends the book, as he did the second, with a narrative. In it, ‘Lineia’, a ‘Naiad’, complains to the poet of the misuse of water, which becomes here a symbol of liberty, by unsympathetic gardeners.

The fourth book begins, as the first had done, with an appeal to ‘Simplicity’ for her continued assistance with the poet’s work. He declares his intention of presenting his advice, in this final book, in the form of a narrative: ‘This fastidious age’, he claims, ‘rejects the strain didactic.’ The story is set in the garden of ‘Alcander’, who rescues from shipwreck, and falls in love with, ‘Nerina.’ She rejects his love, but a year later, when a strange young man, ‘Cleon’, appears in the garden, Alcander discovers that this is the man to whom Nerina had already been promised by her beloved father. Overcome by the appearance of Cleon, and exhausted by the suppression of her real love for Alcander, Nerina dies. Cleon reveals that British troops in Boston, during the colonial war, had been responsible for the death of Nerina’s father: ‘Fraternal hands, and Christian’ had perpetrated the deed. Alcander mourns his lost love until his own death.

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9 *TEG* 3.22,58,97,492.
10 Ibid,4.1,49-50,564.
Following a last address to ‘Simplicity’, and a statement that the ‘reed’ must now pass to ‘youthful bards’, Mason offers his overt feelings about the American war. The times are beset by ‘Corruption.’ His country’s ‘throne, her altars, and her laureat bowers’ are all under threat. As Mason’s georgic reaches its conclusion, poetic attention has been switched from the hope offered for her cultural and political life by Albion’s sons, to the wish to comfort, through the activities of gardening delineated in the poem, those as alarmed and alienated as the writer himself by Britain’s fallen political condition. His sole hope now is that ‘Old England’s Genius’ will arise to right his nation’s wrongs.11

**MASON, ‘LAND’, AND THE GEORGIC**

Mason’s poem foregrounds several ideas concerning gardening and landscape prevalent at the time: the desirability of ‘use’ allied with ‘beauty’; the rejection of the architectural forms of ‘cube’ and ‘cone’ in shaping trees and shrubs, and of all that was rectilinear, whether pathways or avenues of trees; the adoption, in place of such arrangements, of Hogarth’s ‘line of beauty’; the siting of plants, buildings and ornamental features in appropriate contexts; the approximation of garden and landscape design to landscape painting, exemplified in the work of ‘great Poussin!’, ‘Nature’s darling, Claude’and ‘Salvator’; the release of water from artificial constraints into useful partnership with the land.12

The garden is one manifestation of what Bending designates as ‘the most patriotic of all things, the land itself.’ For the eighteenth century, as Richardson asserts, the land was ‘a source of national pride […] synonymous with liberty.’13 At the time Mason was writing, land was increasingly passing from the possession of aristocracy, its traditional owner, to the untitled bourgeoisie, whose growing wealth, in this age of commerce, allowed them a new kind of access to property.

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11 *TEG*, 4.665-7, 676, 692, 582.
12 Ibid,1.218,233.
13 ‘A Natural Revolution,’ p. 245; Richardson, p. 111.
All the gardening ideas contained in Mason’s poem are predicated upon his own Whig ideology. He detested and feared the threat of an absolutism made manifest in the highly controlled, ornate gardens of the Tudor monarchs and Louis XIV, where ‘Nature’ became the servant of artifice. The ‘divine Simplicity’ Mason evokes as his poem begins, which had become part of an eighteenth-century aesthetic, had been linked with ‘Nature’ in the previous century by the influential Isaac Newton, who had written that ‘Nature is pleased with simplicity, and affects not the pomp of superfluous causes.’ In William Collins’ *Ode to Simplicity* (1746), he had addressed her as ‘Thou by Nature taught/ To breathe her genuine thought.’ The flowers of the garden, he had written, in an image that chimed with Mason’s gardening philosophy, ‘Still ask thy hand to range their order’d hues.’ Such an ‘ordering’ was very different, in Mason’s view, from the intricate plotting of a gardening style as outmoded as the rule of absolute monarchs: the landscapes that he admired, created by such men as ‘Capability’ Brown, although thoughtfully planned, bore no relation to the over-organised plots linked with unregulated autocracy.

In contemporary England, the gardening ideas of the King’s Comptroller of Works, William Chambers, threatened a subjection of ‘Nature’ to ‘Art.’ Chambers, as I shall demonstrate further in the following chapter, was inspired by the gardens of China, a country under imperial rule. To Mason, such ideas could only encourage the return to England of despotism itself, the rule of an ‘absolute prince […] who […] is yet corrupted with flattery, and armed with power’, as Locke had written. The idea that water must be freed to become a symbol of liberty as well as of practical use; that ‘the Genius of the scene’ is to be respected in all gardening undertakings; the notion, expressed through the narrative of Abdalonimus, of rural retirement as a preparation for committed political life: all are mediated through the poet’s continual appeal to the ‘Sons of Albion’, those who will be rendered abler caretakers of the land by the teaching, dispensed through the medium of didactic georgic, of a Whig gardener and poet.

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15 Goldie, p. 60.
In his book on the English georgic, John Chalker refers to the familiar view that eighteenth-century writers were ‘great and conscious users of past literature’, and points to the practice by which ‘old ways of coming to terms with experience [were] adapted and made new by the transforming power of the writer.’ Though Mason is an obvious example of such a writer, he is excluded from Chalker’s list of poets who either adapted the genre of georgic, or wrote poems in a georgic vein. Chalker cites Denham, Philips, Dyer and Thomson as belonging to the first group, and Gay, Pope, Cowper, and Edward Young to the second. ¹⁶ Mason and The English Garden are ignored.

Such an omission is the outcome of the effect on twentieth-century scholarship of the decline of Mason’s reputation during the nineteenth, rather than a reflection of the importance of Mason’s georgic to his contemporaries. Draper writes that the popularity of The English Garden in its time ‘is amply attested by magazine reviews’, as well as diaries and letters of the time. Thomas Warton’s comment in his History of English Poetry (1774-81), written over the years when Mason’s poem was being published, was that didactic poetry in English ‘was brought to perfection by the happy combination of judicious precepts and the most elegant ornaments of language and imagery in Mason’s English Garden.’¹⁷ For contemporary readers, Mason’s georgic was clearly a notable addition to the century’s versions of the genre.

The history of the georgic was a venerable one. The Georgics of Virgil, written, as Mason’s poem was, over the period of a decade, from about BC 39 to 29, was modelled on the Works and Days of the Greek poet Hesiod, in which he had given advice on agricultural practices. Virgil’s Georgics was written at a time of civil war in Rome. After much unrest, Mark Antony and Octavian, who had eventually become two thirds of a ruling triumvirate in the period following the assassination of Julius Caesar, became involved in mutual hostilities. Antony was finally defeated by Octavian, the future Caesar Augustus, at the battle of

¹⁷ Draper, p. 233; The History of English Poetry, from the close of the eleventh to the commencement of the eighteenth century. To which are prefixed two dissertations, 4 vols (London, 1774-1781), 1, p. 229 <http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/ECCO> [accessed 24 October 2006].
Actium in 31 B.C. Virgil’s poem, as Hesiod’s had done, takes agriculture as its theme, but the verse also refers, overtly and metaphorically, to the catastrophe of civil war, the benefit of good government, and the glory of the nation. It is the poem that initially establishes a link between contemplation of the landscape and politics. Similarly, Mason’s was to be a political as well as a practical text. In the decades following civil war in England, and the execution of a king, there were resonances for writers in poetry which deplored civil unrest. Such verse offered a vision of the land at peace, tended by farmers who represented both stability and the promise of regenerative growth, as they worked their acres far from the febrility of courts: ‘O fortunatos [...] agricolas’, as Virgil deemed them.18

In 1642, on the eve of civil war, John Denham had published *Cooper’s Hill*. Though the quotidian activity of the farmer depicted by Virgil is absent in his poem, Denham synthesises, in a way new to English poetry, a vision of landscape with political comment. Virgil had dressed much of his comment on politics in metaphor: his image in Book Four of the ordered society of bees, for example, is a picture of a content and organised people. Denham, however, is overt. As he ponders the issue of British liberty, he makes reference, as I noted in the previous chapter, to the historic signing of the Magna Carta.

Denham’s rhyming couplets anticipate Dryden’s. Though his poem had broken new ground, it was over fifty years later, as Chalker indicates, that the genre of the georgic was given distinctive publicity by the appearance of Dryden’s own translation of Virgil’s *Georgics*, and an essay on the *Georgics*, written by Joseph Addison, which was appended to it. In praising Virgil’s verse- ‘he breaks the clods and flings the dung about with an air of gracefulness’- Addison also invests the genre with all the elevating dignity of art: ‘A georgic [...] is some part of the science of husbandry put into a pleasing dress and set off with all the beauties and embellishments of poetry [...] The precepts of a husbandman are not to be

delivered with the simplicity of a plowman, but with the address of a poet.’ 19
Following Addison, eighteenth-century writers such as John Philips (*Cyder*, 1708), John Dyer (*The Fleece*, 1757), and James Grainger (*The Sugar-Cane*, 1764), were to exemplify the poet as purveyor of precepts in the georgics they wrote on varying aspects of husbandry. James Thomson, in *The Seasons*, was to lift the form to a previously unknown level of descriptive and philosophical discourse.

In *The Seasons* Thomson, as eighteenth-century writers of georgic consistently did, would also foreground the glory of the nation, exemplified in Virgil by his praise in Book Two of Italy’s beauty and productivity: ‘nor any foreign Earth of greater Name/ Can with sweet Italy contend in fame.’ Her harvests ‘are heavy with their fruitful Weight’, and she is blessed by the presence of ‘mighty Caesar, whose victorious Arms/ […] Triumph abroad, secure our Peace at home.’ In similar vein Thomson, together with others from Denham onward, was to eulogise ‘Happy Britannia!’ who, ‘Inspiring Vigour, Liberty, abroad/ Walks through the land of Heroes unconfin’d/ And scatters Plenty with unsparing hand.’ 20

Such praise of the native land was reiterated in the georgics published in the decade before Mason began writing his own, notably in Dyer’s *The Fleece* and in Grainger’s *The Sugar-Cane*, both of which extolled a national glory predicated on Britain’s prowess in productivity and international trade. Both, particularly Grainger’s, are also works of precept, written in blank verse, and in four books, in the Virgilian manner.

Dyer’s poem exudes nationalistic self-confidence, as he synthesises the benefits of trade with the global eminence of ‘Britannia’, who ‘pours/ The fruits of plenty from her copious horn’, and the moral life of those who deal in trade. They ‘the

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A poem that owed its existence to the georgic tradition, although it was descriptive rather than prescriptive, was Richard Jago’s *Edge-Hill*, published in 1767, the year that Mason began writing *The English Garden*. The inclusion of an epigraph taken from the *Georgics* of Virgil, in which he praises his homeland, indicates Jago’s source of inspiration. The poem, as others had been, was in four books, and written in blank verse. In it, as previous writers of English georgic had done, Jago marvels at the productivity of British industry; there are ‘frequent Introduction[s] of general Sentiments, and moral Reflections’, as he writes in his Preface, many of them inspired by historic events and circumstances. The poem is mainly concerned, however, with the landscape of the poet’s native Warwickshire, which includes its estates. In Book One he issues a series of instructions on modern landscaping: ‘Let no terrac’d Lines your Slopes deform/ No barb’rous Walls restrain the bounded Sight’; ‘The winding stream and stiffen’d line avoid/ To torture’; ‘To ev’ry structure give its proper site.’

In the Preface, Jago is at pains to indicate that in writing his poem, he has ‘divest[ed] himself as much as possible of all Partiality in Matters of a Public Nature’, but has contented himself with ‘private ones.’ For him, the worth of such a composition depends ‘upon the Plan, and Execution of it’, not its ‘Universality.’ He quotes John Philips, the author of *Cyder*, as ‘one, whose manner [he has] endeavoured to imitate’, though unlike his poem, Philips’ had

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been preceptive. In doing so, Jago is calling on a georgic composed sixty years earlier, only a decade after the appearance of Dryden’s translation and its accompanying essay, a poem which was both preceptive and uncomplicatedly patriotic. ‘Where shall we find/ Men more undaunted, for their country’s weal/ More prodigal of life?’ Philips had asked in the course of his poem. Jago’s description of the workers in a mid-century iron foundry echoes his admiration: ‘See, how they strain/ The swelling nerve, and lift the sinewy arm/ In measur’d time.’

It is possible that Mason had read all these versions of georgic. Grainger’s confessed surprise that the topic of sugar cane had never been poeticised resonates with Mason’s decision to write about gardens, a subject untreated in previous georgics. It is likely that he had read Jago’s attempt at the genre, published in the year that he began his own. Such a poem may have prompted or influenced the very different composition of The English Garden. In place of brief injunctions about the arrangement of landscape, Mason, drawing on his experience as a designer of gardens, provides detailed precepts in the manner of Virgil. Jago privileged ‘Execution’, believing that good management of a poem’s structure could help to increase its subject’s interest. Mason, in the postscript, informed the reader of his own ‘Plan’ for his poem’s structure. Unlike Jago, however, he also privileged ‘Universality’. As Jago’s was not, his is a public poem meant for the instruction of the times. In place of extolling the practical evidence of Britain’s growing industry and trade, he offers his subject as a metaphor for good government. Nor, as previous writers of georgic had commonly done, was he to extol Britain’s virtues unreservedly. His poem was to balance, even from its first book, Britain’s perceived excellence with her shortcomings. Unlike that of other writers, Mason’s praise of his country is tempered by a political view that will see and grieve over a national fall from grace. Once again, Mason puts to use, in a novel way, an ancient genre in the service of contemporary comment. In the light of such an innovative approach, it

24 Ibid, p. vii; Works, 1, pp.204-7.
is regrettable that Mason fails to feature in Chalker’s list of eighteenth-century writers of georgic.

In addition to this, Mason’s relationship with his georgic is personal. During its course he openly mourns the loss of his young wife, and of Gray. In the narrative of ‘Lineia’, the water-nymph, he becomes an imagined participant, charged by her to become her protector and that of his country. In this way, he presents himself as ‘Albion’s’ poet, his elevated role to articulate his country’s condition, and to instruct his readers. Some of his verse, as in *Palinodia* and *On Expecting to Return to Cambridge*, is self-referent; his odes on The Fate of Tyranny, and *To the Naval Officers of Great Britain*, are written as moral instruction; in his satires he takes on the role of enemy to his country’s ills. Though, in the ode *To the Naval Officers*, he pronounces himself the ‘poet’ of the ‘gallant Train’ of seamen, it is only in *The English Garden* that he presents himself openly as ‘Thy Poet, Albion!’ in a role made transcendent by the power of poetry and ‘Albion’s’ noble history.25

Mason, then, not only addressed a subject previously neglected by writers of georgic, gardening, but also approached the ancient genre in a new way. Accenting the inner life of the individual, as the teachings of Locke and the increasing interest in ‘sensibility’ allowed, he placed himself in the poem, from its beginning, in a variety of expressions of self: as practical gardener, as Albion’s poet, and as bereaved and vulnerable man. In a passage in Book Three, which John R. Nabholz suggests as an influence on the young Wordsworth’s poetic career, Mason describes his childhood evolution into studentship at Cambridge, where he missed ‘What young Fancy deems/ The life-springs of her being’, the ‘rocks and caves/ And huddling brooks, and torrent-falls divine’ of the northern landscape.26 The meaning and articulation of the text cannot be separated from the author who has invested himself so personally in it.

25 *TEG* 3.372.
26 Ibid.3,520-2; ‘Wordsworth and Mason’, *Review of English Studies*, 15 (1964), 297-302 (p. 301.) Nabholz indicates Wordsworth’s familiarity with Mason’s works, and their possible influence on, for example, *Descriptive Sketches* (1793), where Wordsworth quotes directly from *Caractacus* in a passage on the Grand Chartreuse: Mason writes, ‘Surely there is a hidden power, that reigns/ Mid the lone majesty of untam’d nature/ Controlling sober reason’ (*Works*, II, p.81): Wordsworth writes ‘Where now is fled that Power whose frown severe/ Tam’d ‘sober Reason’
In Mason’s poem, too, though it springs from and references the classical past, he is looking, unlike Jago, not consistently to history for moral lessons, or to an early-eighteenth-century georgic for emulation, but to the present and future. The precepts he offers his addressees are for now and the time to come. Even at the poem’s subdued conclusion, he is awaiting the appearance of a saving spirit, ‘Old England’s Genius’, to heal his country’s wounds. Again, he is using an ancient form to foreground and address pressing national issues.

Though Mason’s first book demonstrates his dissatisfaction with George the Third, the horrors of the war with the American colonies were unforeseen when it was published. Throughout the century there were voices ready to praise gardening’s modern embrace of nature as evidence of a particularly English art. In his essay *On Modern Gardening*, Walpole claimed that the pioneering landscape gardener William Kent had ‘leaped the fence, and saw that all nature was a garden.’ ‘Art’ was co-opted by Kent, rather than allowed her head. An anonymous ‘poetic epistle’ which eulogised Lancelot ‘Capability’ Brown, successor to Kent, as possessing ‘the finest genius this nation has produced’, declared that ‘At last […] the charms of art decay/ And lovely Nature re-assumes her sway/ As erst in Greece, she now in Albion reigns.’ Thomas Whately wrote that ‘Gardening, in the perfection to which it has been lately brought in England, is entitled to a place of considerable rank among the liberal arts […] it is an exertion of fancy, a subject for taste.’ In view of such comments, the time was ripe for Mason to work on a georgic for his time, on a subject appropriate for the attention of Albion’s countrymen.

Mason began writing his georgic in 1767, in the year of publication of *Edge-Hill*. In that year, also, Mason’s old friend and admirer, Thomas Nevile, published a

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verse translation of Virgil’s *Georgics*, in rhyming couplets. Considering their old acquaintance, it seems very possible that Mason would have read Nevile’s new work. If so, he would have seen its dedication, which took the form of a letter to the author’s nephew Christopher, in which he exhorts the young man to heed the moral message of the verse, a message that resides, Mason would no doubt have approved, in its simplicity of style, as well as its content. Nevile mourns the mood of ‘a Public which’, in his eyes, ‘seems little dispos’d to favour any well-conducted plan.’ It is for this reason, he believes, that the *Georgics* ‘is not enough considered’, possibly because of ‘the seeming severity of its didactic form’, of such little influence in the face of ‘the gross and gorgeous decorations of licentious composition.’ His comments chime with Jago’s emphasis on the importance of well-organised ‘Plan and Execution.’ Concerned for ‘the moral character of the rising Generation’, Nevile recommends to his nephew the example of ‘our great masters, the Ancients.’ Though Mason does not mention Nevile’s dedication in his Preface, it is possible that he would have seen it as another reason to call upon Virgil’s *Georgics* as an exemplar for his own didactic poem. As he had in his Pindaric odes, he will promote an ancient genre, one which Nevile believes is in danger of neglect- as the true Pindaric had been- to promote moral ideas mediated through a Whig viewpoint.

In his tragedies, Mason had eschewed the ‘bustle and business’ of the modern stage in favour of the ‘simplicity’ of the classic Greek structure. Here, as Nevile had done, he again promotes ‘simplicity’, the absence of ‘gross and gorgeous decorations’ in the garden. In addition, he lays his poem before the young ‘sons of Albion’ who, as inheritors of their country’s noble past, must take responsibility for the horticultural, and by inference political, well-being of their country.

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28 *The Georgics of Virgil* (London, 1767) <http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/ECCO> [accessed 27 October 2008]; ‘the gross and gorgeous decorations of licentious composition’ may have included *Genuine Memoirs of the Celebrated Miss Maria Brown*, attributed to John Cleland, Hugh Kelly’s *Memoirs of a Magdalen: or, the history of Louisa Mildmay*, or Christopher Anstey’s *The Bath Guide* (1766); in 1767 William Mickle’s *The Concubine* was published, as was volume 9 of *Tristram Shandy*. 
MASON, MILTON AND BLANK VERSE

In writing a Georgic for modern times, Mason was following, in a number of ways, the example of his predecessor Milton, whose mind, as Thomas Warton observed, was always ‘deeply tinctured with the excellencies of ancient literature.’ For many in the eighteenth century, Milton was seen as ‘a personal example of individual integrity and purity of motive.’

Mason, as we have seen, was ‘a devoted Miltonian.’ The tenor of The English Garden was inspired, not by the overtly nationalistic example of so much eighteenth-century Georgic, but by the politically pedagogic one of his seventeenth-century forebear. The poetic task for both was not eulogy, but instruction.

As I noted in the introduction, Mason’s devotion to Milton is made clear, in the context of his Georgic, partly through his comments on the adoption of blank verse for his poem. His desire to apprise the reading public of the importance to him of his choice of genre and verse form can be inferred from the fact that only the paragraphs concerning these topics were reprinted in the preface to his Georgic in its 1783 edition. Having ‘balanced’ for ‘some time’, in choosing a genre for his subject, the Horatian Epistles against ‘the regular Didactic Poem, of which the Georgics of Virgil afford so perfect an example,’ Mason had eventually selected the latter for his poem’s model. This was in part because the ‘wit’ and ‘satire’ he felt were required for his subject by the former genre had already been supplied with great success by Pope in the Epistle to Burlington. He continues, ‘This matter once determined, I did not hesitate as to my choice between blank verse and rhyme.’ The rhyming couplets of Nevile’s translation were to be ignored. Blank verse was the clear choice for a poet writing about

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29 Poems upon Several Occasions, English, Italian, and Latin, with translations by John Milton […] with notes critical and explanatory, and other illustrations, trans. by Thomas Warton (London, 1785), p. xiii <http://galeg.net.galegroup.com/servlet.ECCO> [accessed 1 January 2009]. This is a collection of Milton’s early poems, which for thirty years ‘before the appearance of the Paradise Lost’ were so neglected, Warton asserts, as ‘scarcely to have conferred on their author the reputation of a writer of verses; much less the distinction and character of a true poet.’ Warton comments on Milton’s poetic revival over the 18c., noting that ‘Lycidas was imitated by Mr. Mason: as L’Allegro and Il Penseroso had been before, in his II Bellicoso and II Pacifico.’ (pp. iii, x); Regaining Paradise, p. 21.
landscape gardening, and consequently about a ‘nature’ that ‘scorn[s] control.’ Such a subject as the latter requires ‘a versification for that end as unfettered as itself.’ Having chosen the strict structure of the true Pindaric in which to write odes, Mason now turned to the flexibility of blank verse, matching his subject, gardening in all its variety, to an appropriate form. Though he believed that his choice would not be popular with readers, he asserted that such a consideration counted little with ‘a writer, who meant to combat fashion in the very theme he intended to write upon.’ Besides, ‘so many good poems, with Paradise Lost at their head’, had now been written in blank verse, that if prevailing fashions meant such verse was overlooked, ‘it would not be worth any writer’s while, who aimed at more than the reputation of the day, to endeavour to amuse the public.’ Mason’s comment rebukes those who prefer to amuse themselves with the ‘decorations of licentious composition.’

Mason explains his choice of blank verse at some length. The writers of recent georgics had themselves, of course, chosen blank verse in which to write their poems. For Mason, however, the mode is a conscious representation of liberty itself, and once deliberately adopted for his georgic, its use must be overtly explained and defended.

In a chapter on ‘Milton and the Georgic Ideal’, Anthony Low writes that Milton, who applied himself ‘incessant[ly] […] to the task in hand’, knew ‘the value of literal georgic activity in improving one’s people and nation.’ Referring to Milton’s approval of the useful ‘experiences of Hunters, Fowlers, Fishermen, Shepherds, Gardeners’, Low writes that Milton’s plan ‘to train the nation’s future leaders in nation-building activities reflects the very essence of the georgic spirit.’ In his poem, addressed to such future leaders, Mason too commends labour in the garden, properly undertaken, as a means of moral improvement, and of assuring the progress of a nation:

For tell me, where’s the desert? There alone
Where man resides not; or, if chance resides,
He is not there the man his Maker form’d,
Industrious man, by heav’ns first law ordain’d
To earn his food by labour. In the waste

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Place thou that man with his primaeval arms,
His plough-share, and his spade; nor shalt thou long
Impatient wait a change; the waste shall smile
With yellow harvests; what was barren heath
Shall soon be verdant mead. 31

In the lines, we hear echoes of Genesis, Hesiod and Virgil, through to Dryden and *Paradise Lost*.

Mason’s choice of blank verse, like Milton’s, was a political one. His comments on selecting it for his medium echoed Milton’s own famous political rejection of rhyme in the Preface to *Paradise Lost*. Milton’s rejection became synonymous with the recovery of an ‘ancient liberty’ in the face of ‘the troublesome and modern bondage of rhyming’, which was ‘no necessary adjunct or true ornament of poem or good verse.’ More than this, the use of the blank verse ‘of Homer […] and of Virgil’ was a way of reconnecting with the most sublime of writers, whose non-rhyming supremacy could be seen as making them appropriate as poets for a people freed from the yoke of despotic monarchy. And as Milton had shaken off the chains of rhyme, his descendant Mason would also set aside ‘the invention of a barbarous age’, setting free his poem, a symbol for the liberty of nature itself, and of Albion’s freeborn people.32 He would save *The English Garden* from the unnatural bands of rhyme, while within it discoursing on good gardening as a manifestation of the moral- that is, Whig- life.

A passage in Book Three, in which Mason contrasts the correct and incorrect treatment of water, demonstrates the partnership within the poem of subject and form:

Blest is the man (if bliss be human boast)
Whose fertile soil is wash’d with frequent streams,
And springs salubrious: he disdains to toss
In rainbow dews their crystal to the sun;
Or sink in subterranean cisterns deep;
That so, through leaden siphons upward drawn,

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Those streams may leap fantastic [……………]
[………………] Thy Poet, Albion! scorns,
Ev’n for a cold unconscious element
To forge the fetters he would scorn to wear.
His song shall reprobate each effort vile,
That aims to force the Genius of the Stream
Beyond his native height.

The initial statement, ‘Blest is the man’, carries echoes of the classical image of
the ‘happy man’ in the rural landscape, whose contentment is referenced by
Horace, by Virgil in his Georgics, and by Mason in his story of Abdalonus.33
In the list that follows of unacceptable treatments of water, each aspect is
confined within the punctuation of separate lines: ‘he disdains to toss/ In rainbow
dews their crystal to the sun’; Or sink in subterranean caverns deep’; ‘through
leaden siphons upwards drawn.’ The vocabulary that describes each aspect
indicates its negative nature: ‘disdains’, ‘sink […] subterranean’, ‘leaden’: this
last word, in its oxymoronic contrast with the properties of water, a reference to
both the practical material used for such an enterprise, and to its life-denying lack
of imagination.

Mason deliberately chose the ancient form of the georgic for his poem. His
diction and lexis, as this passage makes clear, are further evidence of his wish to
reach back into the past for a present purpose. As was so commonly the case
with Milton, Latinate diction and lexis lace the text. The epithet ‘frequent’ carries
the old meaning, derived from Latin, of ‘full’ rather than ‘often’; ‘reprobate’ is
used in the Latin sense of ‘reject’ or ‘disallow’, as Johnson defines it in his
dictionary.34 The reversal of verb and epithet in ‘springs salubrious’; ‘effort
vile’; ‘subterranean cisterns deep’, epithets placed before and after a noun, are
typical examples of Latinate syntax.

As if released himself from what is ‘subterranean’ and ‘leaden’, the poet then
appears in his lines, in the transcendent condition of his country’s cultural

33 TEG,3.359-377.
34 Samuel Johnson, A Dictionary of the English Language: in which the words are deduced from
their originals, and illustrated in their different significations, 4th edn., 2 vols (Dublin, 1775), II
representative: ‘Thy Poet, Albion!’ In rejecting the restraint of water, he also rejects the restraints of verse: ‘the fetters he would scorn to wear’ are those of the ‘bondage’ of rhyme. Water here becomes a symbol of poetic liberty: though it is a ‘cold unconscious element’, its nature, as in the case of poetry, demands an unchained freedom for its proper expression. The ‘Genius of the stream’, as the genius of Milton, is not to be disregarded.

Setting the scene for Alexander’s search for Abdalonus, in order to restore him to his throne, Mason uses a different strategy to match subject to form, employing ‘unchained’ run-on lines, or lines barely stopped by commas, and simpler diction, to create the impression of a rich and peaceful natural background to the action:

‘Twas at that early hour, when now the sun
Behind majestic Lebanon’s dark veil
Hid his ascending splendour; yet through each
Her cedar-vested sides, his flaunting beams
Shot to the strand, and purpl’d all the main,
Where Commerce saw her Sidon’s freighted wealth,
With languid streamers, and with folded sails,
Float in a lake of gold. The wind was hush’d;
And, to the beach, each slowly-lifted wave,
Creeping with silver curl, just kist the shore,
And slept in silence. At this tranquil hour
Did Sidon’s senate, and the Grecian host,
Led by the conqueror of the world, approach
The secret glade that veil’d the man of toil.35

The epithets ‘majestic’ and ‘ascending’ are employed in the lines that describe the glory of the rising sun, the first to the bulk of Lebanon, the second to the sun itself. They are the only three-syllabled epithets in the passage. The sun in its ‘splendour’ reveals a peaceful picture of ships and waves at rest. The ships carry ‘languid streamers’ and ‘folded sails’, while each ‘slowly-lifted wave’ ‘Creep[s]’, and ‘kist’ and ‘slept’, ‘At this tranquil hour.’ Sibilant sounds in, for example, ‘hush’d’, ‘slowly’, ‘silver’, ‘silence’, and long vowel sounds- ‘freighted’, ‘folded’, ‘Float’, ‘lake’, ‘Creeping’- add to the sense of a quiet calm, which will be shortly reprised and extended in the description of Abdalonus’

35 TEG, 2.485-498.
garden, and his own dignified serenity. Even the conqueror Alexander steps quietly to seek out the gardener-king.

Milton was seen by his eighteenth-century heirs as the champion not only of liberty, but also of the good gardening which was one of its representations. In his essay *On Modern Gardening*, Walpole is full of praise for the Eden of *Paradise Lost*, going so far as to compare that imagined collection of natural beauty with Stourhead in Wiltshire, the estate of the banker Henry Hoare, and with Hagley Park, that of Lord Lyttelton. ‘[Milton] seems with the prophetic eye of taste […] to have foreseen modern gardening’, Walpole writes. Milton had evidently ‘judg’d unworthy’ the ‘mistaken and fantastic ornaments he had seen in gardens’, choosing instead to plant in Eden, as he writes in *Paradise Lost*, ‘Flow’rs worthy of Paradise, which not nice art/ In beds and curious knots, but nature boon/ Pour’d forth profuse on hill and dale and plain.’ The italics are Walpole’s; his emphasis is on the ‘simplicity’ that is to be revered in the works of ‘nature’, and the redundancy of the gardening methods which have promoted artificiality, the forcing into shapes and patterns of natural growth.36

In the preliminary Address to the anonymous *The Rise and Progress of Taste in Modern Gardening*, published in 1767, Milton is included in the author’s comment on garden style, alongside ‘Capability’ Brown, of ‘finest genius.’ ‘Milton’s description of Eden [is] admirable’, declares the writer. There is a further allusion to Milton’s skills of garden design in the poem that follows: ‘Milton alone of either Charles’ time/ In horticulture hits the true sublime.’ To serious Whig gardeners, such a conflation of excellence in Milton, of poetic power with the best of garden plans, would appear entirely reasonable. Mason himself, in a note to the first book of *The English Garden*, writes that ‘Milton [was] the herald of true taste in gardening […] on account of his having made […] natural wildness the leading idea of his exquisite description of Paradise.’37

36 Walpole, pp. 249-50; *Paradise Lost*, IV. 241-3; Richardson describes Stourhead as ‘one of the greatest of all Arcadian landscapes’ (p. 98); John Loveday commented on the ‘perpetually varying scenes’ of Hagley (in Richardson, p. 362).
37 Address, p. 9; *Works*, 1, p. 394.
A clear identification with Milton on Mason’s part is demonstrated in the lexical choices he makes in writing the preface to the 1783 edition. Before introducing the paragraphs from the 1781 postscript, in which he explains his selection of georgic form, and of blank verse, he writes that he has undertaken some revisions of the 1781 edition. His ‘original sin’ of the use of blank verse, however, he has ‘still ventured to retain.’ ‘It is a fault’ to which, he avers, ‘I must own myself blind.’ The words ‘original sin’ connect him with *Paradise Lost* and its subject; the use of ‘blind’ connects him with Milton himself, who was both blind in reality and blind, as Mason professes himself to be, to the detractors of blank verse. Mason’s choice of lexis here is deliberate. In making it, he again presents himself as a poet who not only admires Milton, his works, and his political stance, but also regards himself as a fit advocate, as Milton had been, of the moral life through poetry. More than this, once again he makes a claim for himself as a worthy successor in the task.

Milton as the supreme gardener of the imagination has a place within Mason’s poetic text. References to passages from *Paradise Lost* frame his georgic, appearing in his first and fourth books. In the first, Mason includes Milton, ‘chief of Bards […] / With inward light irradiate’, in a list of champions of good gardening, and quotes the Miltonic lines referred to by Walpole in his essay *On Modern Gardening*: ‘not nice Art in curious knots/ But Nature boon pour’d forth on hill and dale/ Flow’rs worthy of Paradise.’ Using Miltonic lexis, Mason compares this picture of freed ‘Nature’ with the depredations of ‘miscreated Art/ Offspring of Sin and Shame’, whose misguided supremacy in the garden has denied ‘Nature’ hers. In Mason’s final book, Cleon, enraptured by the sight of Alcander’s garden, quotes from *Paradise Lost*: ‘Oh Paradise! […] / Groves whose rich trees weep odorous gums and balm’ […] / Thus, in Milton’s phrase/ […] the youth his admiration pour’d.’

In both these instances, Milton’s imprimatur is conferred by the poet on his own work, first by the use of Miltonic imagined example, free of horticultural coercion, as a guide for those gardeners who must remain unmoved by the

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38 *Works*, 1, p.204.
temptations of ‘miscreated Art’; secondly, in making Cleon a mouthpiece for the ultimate literary horticultural accolade, the favourable comparison of Alcander’s garden with Milton’s vision of paradise. The flower garden Mason imagines in his final book was modelled on that of Lord Harcourt, which he himself had helped to design in the early 1770s, and which was greatly admired by such disparate personalities as Horace Walpole, John Wesley, Joshua Reynolds, and Mrs. Siddons, ‘who found it did her more good than any church service.’ The superlative garden of seventeenth-century poetry had become an eighteenth-century reality, the ideal condition of which was offered once more, in Mason’s poem, to the imagination of the reader. As Walpole, Mason’s staunch admirer, wrote of *The English Garden*, Mason ‘will be the second of our great Bards and Patriots, who has left a poem on Paradise Lost.’

A more politically overt use of Miltonic phrase occurs in Book Two, in the passage in which the poet regrets the passing of the ancient golden age ‘ere slavery sunk the world’, and when the animal world was at peace:

The barbed shaft
Had then no poisoned point; nor thou, fell tube!
Whose iron entrails hide the sulphurous blast,
Satanic engine, knew’st the ruthless power
Of thundering death around thee. Then alike
Were ye innocuous through your ev’ry tribe,
Or brute or reptile; nor by rage or guile
Had giv’n to injur’d man his only plea
(And that the tyrant’s plea) to work your harm.

As Mason notes, ‘the tyrant’s plea’ is a direct reference to Milton’s lines in Book Four of *Paradise Lost*: ‘So spake the Fiend, and with necessity/ The tyrant’s plea, excus’d his dev’lish deeds.’ So the depredations of mankind, and the irreversible destruction of perfection in nature, are linked to the disingenuous manipulations of the fallen prince, Satan himself. For Mason, as for Milton, the

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40 *The Genius of the Place: The English Landscape Garden, 1620-1820*, ed. by John Dixon Hunt and Peter Willis (London: Elek Books, 1975), p.308: in 1778 Lord Harcourt’s garden was painted by Paul Sandby, who considered it ‘one of the most delightful scenes that the power of imagination could form or fancy paint.’; Mavis Batey, ‘Two Romantic Picturesque Flower Gardens’, *Garden History*, vol. 22, no. 2 (1994), 197-205 (p. 197); Toynbee, p. 45.
41 *TEG*, 2.206, 214-222, p. 401; ll. 393-4.
danger of tyranny, subject of one of Mason’s earliest Pindarics, cannot be ignored, exaggerated, or forgotten.

As well as aligning himself with Milton, Mason does not hesitate to compare his own poetic activity to that of a much older poet. In the ‘General Postscript’ he appended to Book Four on its initial publication in 1781, Mason explicates his original plan for the structure of his poem. The first book, which might in itself, he writes, ‘have been considered in the light of an entire work’, contains ‘the general Principles of the Art [of gardening]’, of which ‘the three following are to be considered only as illustrations and amplifications.’ Mason also makes a claim for a difference of construction which he hopes, ‘without appearing arrogant’, compares favourably with that of Virgil’s own georgic. Virgil’s four books are written on four different agricultural topics. ‘He has’, however, ‘no introductory book’ devoted to ‘the general Art of Agriculture.’ Mason’s own poem about gardening, in contrast, ‘employs the first book entirely on that general subject.’

Draper’s startlingly inept comment on Mason’s georgic that ‘Even when Mason remains didactic, he is just as likely to talk politics […] or what-not, as stick to fences and barnyards’, is an indication of early-twentieth-century misapprehensions about the poetry of the eighteenth. Though political reference in Mason’s postscript occurs only in the final paragraphs, the first book of his poem delineates not only the general principles of the gardening task, but also, as Bending asserts, a vision of the garden as representation of the state. Following his preliminary address to ‘Simplicity’, and having apprised the reader of his personal reason for embarking on his poem, Mason enjoins ‘Albion’s sons’ to

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42 The English Garden. A poem. In four books (Dublin, 1782), p.147
‘Attend.’ The ‘sons’ he will address throughout the poem are a select group, those who ‘Preserve that purity of soul/ Whence genuine taste proceeds.’ As the book ends, he promises the young men who have heeded his advice, the ability to use their gardening talent to bestow upon the land each ‘grace appropriate.’ If they do,

hand in hand,
Vertumnus and Pomona [will] bring their stores,
Fruitage, and flower of ev’ry blush and scent,
Each varied season yields; to you they bring
The fragrant tribute; ye, with generous hand
Diffuse the blessing wide, till Albion smile
One ample theatre of sylvan grace.  

This vision is not of a final static tableau: Albion’s well-being, in the right hands, is projected as a continually blessed and fruitful future state.

A sense of movement through time is transferred, following Mason’s initial address to ‘Albion’s sons’, to historical narrative:

To you, blest youths,
I sing; whether in academic groves
Studious ye rove; or, fraught with learning’s stores,
Visit the Latian plain, fond to transplant
Those arts which Greece did, with her liberty,
Resign to Rome. Yet know, the art I sing
Ev’n there ye shall not learn. Rome knew it not
When Rome was free: Ah! hope not then to find
In slavish superstitious Rome the fair
Remains.

The fall of empires was a familiar eighteenth-century concern. What is new about Mason’s presentation of it here is his reference to the art of gardening, which had no place in the arts of the ancient world. British ‘youths’ will ‘transplant’ to their country the arts of antiquity, as Rome did those of Greece, but they will also inherit an art considered original to England, ‘the only proof of

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43 Draper, p. 205; TEG, 1.50-4:555-561.
our original talent in matter of pleasure’, as Gray described it. For Mason, however, this ‘original talent’ is far more than a ‘matter of pleasure.’ It is a mark of national progress, a homegrown art to add to the inherited wealth of antiquity, and one which can be used to elucidate the desired political composition of modern Britain.

A quarter of the way into the first book, Mason produces a passage in which he articulates a clash between gardening styles which is also political. In doing so, he makes clear his own political attitude, and sets the tone and direction for the rest of his poem. Batey comments on the desire for ‘prospect’, or ‘stare views’, popular with contemporary landlords, who wanted unhindered views over their estates, and on Mason’s dislike of such a feature. His preference was for ‘the breaking down of prospect into a series of framed peephole scenes.’ Recommending the gentle winding of the pathways which lead the onlooker to such pleasures, Mason asserts that along such a ‘path/ How long so e’er the wanderer roves, each step/ Shall wake fresh beauties’, ‘different picture[s]’ seen at intervals through trees, shrubs and glades. In Book Two, he expatiates on the desirability, in place of straight lines and exaggerated curves, of ‘Nature’s’ own gentler ‘curve’, applied to the creation of paths, groups of trees, water features, or any other appropriate aspect of landscaping. Having dismissed ‘the long-drawn lines/ Of straight formality’, along with ‘the quick, acute, perplex’d, and tangled paths’ which, when ‘Taste’ was ‘an infant yet’, ‘writh[ed] in convulsive torture’, he celebrates the skill of the enlightened gardeners who

Mark the form of that peculiar curve,
Alike averse to crooked and to straight,
Where sweet Simplicity resides, which Grace
And Beauty call their own […………………]  
‘Tis Nature’s curve, instinctively she bids
Her tribes of Being trace it […………………]

44 TEG,1.54-63; on pp. 404-5 (Works, 1), Mason quotes from Gray’s ‘letter to Mr. How’, which he included in the Memoirs of Mr. Gray (1775): ‘the only taste we can call our own; the only proof of our original talent in matter of pleasure, I mean our skill in Gardening, or rather laying out grounds’; In his Commentary, Burgh writes ‘It is my purpose […] to confirm the assertion of the Poet, who vindicates the art he sings to his own country […] this […] I have sufficiently done, by inquiring into its state upon the Continent […] down to the time about which it seems to have had its commencement in England […] The art is […] our own, and consequently the Poem […] has a right to entitle itself the English Garden’ (p. 386).
The peasant, driving through each shadowy land
His team, that bends beneath th’incumbent weight
Of laughing Ceres, marks it with his wheel
[..........................] the scudding hare
Draws to her dew-sprent seat, o’er thymy heaths
A path as gently waving [..........................]
[..........................] go then, convinc’d
That Art’s unerring rule is only drawn
From Nature’s sacred source.45

Such a ‘line of beauty’ is home to the ‘Simplicity’ which, linked here with
‘Grace’ and ‘Beauty’, is the presiding goddess of the poem. Mason draws a
distinction between, and at the same time syntheseses, ‘Nature’ and ‘Art.’
‘Nature’ behaves ‘instinctively’ in arranging her curving lines; ‘Art’, by her
‘unerring rule’, demands them. The demand of ‘Art’, however, is subordinate to
‘Nature [s]’ supreme instinct. Mason’s subsequent use of ‘sacred’ as an epithet
for ‘Nature’s […] source’, emphasises his poem’s message: though ‘Nature’ and
‘Art’ must combine to create the perfect garden, ‘Nature’, in company with
‘Simplicity’, is the spiritual fount from which inspiration flows.

Mason’s dislike extends from the ‘stare view’ itself to those who favour it.
Having discoursed on the ability of ‘Fancy’ to aid the gardener in all the tasks he
undertakes- ‘can Fancy fail/ In sweet delusions, in concealments apt/ And wild
creative power’- he avers that even when all is perfection, there will come, from
some quarter, an insensitive demand for ‘prospect.’ The central culpable figure
displaying such tastelessness, as Mason’s references to Richmond and Windsor
indicate, is the king himself, together with his gardener, William Chambers.
Mason could not reach higher to demonstrate his disapproval:

Some vain fastidious eye
Shall rove unmindful of surrounding charms
And ask for prospect. Stranger! ‘tis not here.
Go seek it on some garish turret’s height;
Seek it on Richmond’s or on Windsor’s brow;
There gazing, on the gorgeous vale below,
Applaud alike, with fashion’d pomp of phrase,
The good and bad, which, in profusion there
That gorgeous vale exhibits. Here meanwhile

Ev’n in the dull, unseen, unseeing dell
Thy taste contemns, shall Contemplation imp
Her eagle plumes; the Poet here shall hold
Sweet converse with his Muse; the curious Sage,
Who comments on great Nature’s ample tome,
Shall find that volume here. For here are caves,
Where rise those gurgling rills, that sing the song
Which Contemplation loves; here shadowy glades,
Where through the tremulous foliage darts the ray,
That gilds the Poet’s daydream; here the turf
Teems with the vegetating race; the air
Is peopled with the insect tribes, that float
Upon the noontide beam, and call the Sage
To number and to name them. Nor if here
The Painter comes, shall his enchanting art
Go back without a boon…

The imagined ‘pomp of phrase’ of the ‘Stranger’, who for the poet is a stranger to ‘genuine taste’, and by implication must also be to Mason, together with Mason’s own use of ‘gorgeous’ to describe the ‘vale’, provide a verbal analogy to the gardening artifice he deprecates. ‘Gorgeous’ is defined in Johnson’s dictionary as ‘fine’, but also as ‘showy’, ‘glittering in various colours.’ Its use here implies a sacrifice of thoughtful horticultural arrangement for the sake of superficial dazzle and display. By association, the personalities responsible for its genesis, king and gardener, are similarly defined.

Mason contrasts the general terms ‘gorgeous’ and ‘glimmering’ with the natural particularities of the ‘unseen […] dell’: the ‘shadowy glades’, ‘tremulous foliage’, ‘the vegetating race’, ‘the insect tribes.’ Epithets and verbs, ‘shadowy’, ‘tremulous’, ‘float’, with their suggestion of delicate ephemeralness, emphasise the mobile nature of the imagination, as it is deployed in the service of the ‘Poet’ and ‘Painter.’ Unlike the king, passively gazing at a view, such beings are active, as vocabulary descriptive of their environment indicates: ‘Rills’ are ‘gurgling’, the ‘ray’ ‘darts’, ‘the turf/ teems’, ‘the air’ is ‘peopled.’

46 TEG, I.132-4.142-166; Dictionary, I.
Leslie Mitchell points to the Whig belief that George the Third and his sons intended to undermine parliament and its procedures. As one of the royal chaplains, a post he would resign in 1772, Mason had preached a sermon in the presence of the king on “the Sunday immediately preceding his Coronation,” September 20th, 1761. Taking his text from Corinthians, ‘Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is Liberty’, he had issued a veiled warning to George: ‘It has been said that there is a nation on the globe’- a reference to Britain- ‘the very fundamental object of whose constitution is political freedom […] In order to produce which, it is necessary that the mode of government be such, that no single citizen in it can stand in dread of another.’

Mason’s concern about the threat of despotism under a new dispensation is evident in his sermon. In Book Two, he will introduce the reader to an ideal monarch who, deposed by violence, ruled once more with the consent of his people: Abdalonimus had, in his garden, listened, as a wise king should, ‘to Nature’s voice/ That preach’d from whispering trees, and babbling brooks/ A lesson seldom learnt in Reason’s school.’ The garden that was his only kingdom after his fall from power was in a ‘close’ and ‘shady’ valley, watered by a river, where fruit, spices and flowers grew in abundance, their variety representing, in miniature, the ordered variety of an ideal state.

Implicated in his criticism of Britain’s monarchy is Mason’s view of his country’s cultural life. The admirer of prospect on the turret is a stranger to discernment. Such an individual, Mason suggests, is insensitive, unreliable as any kind of representative of a nation. The poet opposes the ‘garish turret’ and the ‘gorgeous vale’, with their epithets’ hard, unsympathetic initial ‘g’ sound, to an ‘unseen […] dell’ of imagination, found with more difficulty and reward by the sensitive disciples of true taste. The visitors to this place, among the ‘shadowy glades’, embody, for the poet, all that is most worthy, imaginative and progressive in Britain’s cultural life. Unlike the king and his ilk, content to view


48 *TEG*, 2.467-9, 509.
nature at a distance, they engage with, and their undertakings are enhanced by, the natural world.

At this point in the text, Mason has already introduced into the poem a character he sets up in stylistic opposition to the king and Chambers. In warning gardeners of the folly of carrying out similarly inappropriate garden plans—‘wish not [...] the level lawn’ where ‘mountains frown’, for example—he enjoins the gardener to ‘dare with caution’, lest ‘the Genius of the place [...] rise/ In self-defence’, and destroy all the gardener’s work. Tory kings and gardeners, at their peril, may ignore nature, or try to force her into some desired shape or way of being, as they might do with a subjugated people: in contrast, Whig gardeners, artists, and scholars understand and respect ‘the Genius of the place’, and will work with it in pursuit of a perceived natural perfection that reflects British national integrity. Johnson defines ‘integer’, a Latin word absorbed into the English language, as meaning ‘the whole of any thing’, and gives a meaning of ‘integrity’ as ‘intireness; unbroken whole.’ His first definition of the word includes the abstracts ‘Honesty’ and ‘uncorruptedness.’ For the Whig Mason, a conflation of these meanings defines the integrity required in public life that is echoed in the balance in the garden of ‘Nature’ and ‘Art.’ It is present in Mason’s reference to the ‘harmonious force of shade and light/ Which makes the landscape perfect.’ To partner the ‘Genius of the place’ in the recommended way is properly to honour the land.

The idea of partnership underpins the concept of a constitutional monarchy. Mason’s use of the denomination ‘Albion’, at intervals in his poem, indicates his own sense of Britain’s long history: those to whom he entrusts her must be worthy of their future task. He begins a passage in Book One with an address to ‘my Albion!’, which is repeated several lines later, with an added epithet: ‘My lov’d Albion!’ In such a way, the poet lays personal claim to his country, investing himself emotionally as well as intellectually in the passage he writes.

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49 TEG, 1.78-85; Pope refers to the ‘Genius of the Place’ in the Epistle to Burlington (l.57); John Lucas, writing about the Epistle, says that where the ‘genius of the place is ignored, there is an entire failure of ‘sense’ and responsibility. Harmonious relations between man and nature have [...] an obvious political resonance.’ (England and Englishness: Ideas of Nationhood in English Poetry, 1688-1900 (London: Hogarth Press, 1990), p. 27; Dictionary, I.

50 TEG, 1.348-356.
In it, he contrasts Britain’s present liberty, mediated through a vision of her untamed places, with the historical depredations of uncontrolled power.

**NATURE AND ‘ALBION’**

In *Edge-Hill*, Jago, in his historical musings, had referred to the mediaeval nobility who ‘o’er defenceless Tribes, with wanton Rage/ Tyrannic rul’d, and, in their castled Hall/ [...] with wild Excess their Revels kept’, and had contrasted such scenes with ‘Freedom’s’ present ‘gen’rous Reign.’ Mason expands on this theme, placing ‘Nature’ at its centre:

> In thy fair domain,  
> Yes, my lov’d Albion! many a glade is found,  
> The haunt of wood-gods only; where if Art  
> E’er dar’d to tread, ‘twas with unsandal’d foot,  
> Printless, as if the place were holy ground,  
> And there are scenes, where, tho’ she whilom trod,  
> Led by the worst of guides, fell Tyranny,  
> And ruthless Superstition, we now trace  
> Her footsteps with delight; and pleas’d revere  
> What once had rous’d our hatred. But to Time,  
> Not her, the praise is due; his gradual touch  
> Has moulder’d into beauty many a tower,  
> Which, when it frown’d with all its battlements,  
> Was only terrible; and many a fane  
> Monastic, which, when deck’d with all its spires,  
> Serv’d but to feed some pamper’d Abbot’s pride,  
> And awe the unletter’d vulgar…

As with the ‘unseen […] dell’, where true cultural value is to be found, this ‘haunt of wood-gods’, the poet suggests, is the ancient heart of free ‘Albion.’ In such apparently uncorrupted places, however, paradoxically, can sometimes be found the ruins of the ‘fell Tyranny’ and ‘ruthless Superstition’ of a former unenlightened age. ‘Nature’ has asserted herself over these representations of apparently unassailable control; ‘Time’ has leached such dark structures of their potency, rendering them additions to a view. ‘Happy’ the landscape designer, Mason continues, when a scene of sublimity, ‘where a scatter’d host/ of antique oaks darken thy sidelong hills’ and ‘rifted cliffs/ Dart their white heads, and glitter through the gloom’, contains ‘the shiver’d fragment […] / Of some old
Norman fortress.’ For Jago, such an object is a relic of past injustices; for Mason, it accrues particular value not only as a reminder of unmourned history and laudable human progress, but also as a partner with ‘Nature’ and enlightened man.

If untouched ‘Nature’ is where Albion’s true spirit resides, the perceived torment of the landscape into unnatural shapes and scenes by some gardeners must be the product of wills interested in control rather than partnership, hostile to the particular ‘Genius of the place’ and to ‘Old England’s Genius’ itself. Mason’s first book contains several references to such a gardening style, to plants and trees robbed of any possibility of normal organic development, or ordered in a way vehemently opposed to nature’s own habit.

Many years before, in his *Epistle to Burlington*, Pope had animadverted on the misguided fashion for an aspect of such gardening, topiary: ‘Trees cut to statues, statues thick as trees’, as his chiastic line runs. In an essay written for the *Guardian*, published in 1713, he poked fun at ‘the modern Practice of Gardening’, whereby ‘we seem to make it our Study to recede from Nature […] We […] are […] better pleas’d to have our Trees in the most awkward Figures of Men and Animals, than in the most regular of their own.’ At the end of the 1760s, Mason, who knew the *Epistle* and Pope’s essay, was complaining in his georgic about such gardening custom: for him, however, the interference with natural process was interference with the state itself. It was as if, to Mason, the plants were themselves representatives of Britain’s own citizens, deprived of their freedom to grow as they would by a dictatorial, disfiguring authority.

Indeed, the land itself had been tortured by such a damaging approach, instigated by uncomprehending ‘Folly’ and ‘Wealth’:

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51 Jago, 1, ll. 394-6, p. 26; l. 416, p. 27; *TEG*, 1.355-382.
52 *Burlington*, l. 120; in *The Guardian* 173 (29 September 1713) Pope describes ‘a Catalogue of Greens to be disposed of by an eminent town Gardiner’ which includes ‘St. George in Box; his Arm scarce long enough, but will be in a Condition to stick the Dragon by next *April*’ (pp. 496-7) <http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/ECCO> [accessed 29 September 2008]. Mason comments in Notes to his georgic: ‘nothing went further towards destroying the absurd taste of clipped evergreens than the fine ridicule upon them in the 173rd *Guardian*, [of] Mr. Pope’ (*Works*, II, p. 394).
Britain still
Bears on her breast full many a hideous wound
Given by the cruel pair, when, borrowing aid
From geometric skill, they vainly strove
By line, by plummet, and unfeeling sheers,
To form with verdure what the builder form’d
With stone [.....................................................]
Hence the sidelong walls
Of shaven yew; the holly’s prickly arms
Trimm’d into high arcades; the tonsile box
Wove, in mosaic mode of many a curl,
Around the figur’d carpet of the lawn.
Hence too deformities of harder cure:
The terras mound uplifted; the long line
Deep delv’d of flat canal; and all that toil,
Misled by tasteless Fashion, could atchieve
To mar fair Nature’s lineaments divine.

Mason uses nouns and epithets in tension with each other to underline the unnatural procedures he describes: ‘verdure’ with ‘stone’, ‘shaven’ with ‘yew’, ‘Wove’ with ‘mosaic.’ The image of the holly suggests anthropomorphic torture, its ‘prickly arms’ forced upwards into ‘high arcades.’ ‘Britain’ here is conflated with ‘Nature’ herself. Mason goes on to link these gardening atrocities with a pre-enlightenment age of monarchical despotism, the ‘degenerate reign’ of Elizabeth, citing Francis Bacon, ‘sagest Verulam’, as the bringer of relief to the gardening habits of the time. Bacon had recommended the cultivation of open lawn, and promoted the idea of natural wilderness, where, Mason writes, ‘Nature glads our eye/ Sporting in all her lovely carelessness.’

Mason had already made reference to attack upon the land in his discussion of the linearity which he so much disliked. For him, the arrangement of natural growth into straight lines was a two-fold crime, consisting not only in the imposition of a perverse human will upon ‘Nature’ itself, but also in a demonstration of the failure of imagination, whereby ‘Art’ rides roughshod over natural tendencies. In a passage about the necessity of irrigation for the land to be fruitful, he considers the versatility of water, and the resultant choices for its

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53 TEG, 1.387-406,402,412,430-1; Mason notes Bacon’s ‘46th of his essays’ in which he claims that ‘nothing is more pleasant to the eye than green grass kept finely shorn’, and describes ‘a natural wilderness’ in ‘the most picturesque terms.’ (p. 390).
use: ‘whether’ it should ‘spread/ Broad as a lake, or […]/ […] weave its irriguous way/ Through lawn and shade alternate.’ ‘Fancy’, the exercise of imagination, must ‘Preside […] o’er the task.’ If she does not:

the narrow drains
Will run in tedious parallel, or cut
Each other in sharp angles; hence implore
Her swift assistance, ere the ruthless spade
Too deeply wound the bosom of the soil.  

It is an uninspiring visual prospect. Its effect upon the land, however, is of greater importance. In the previous passage, Mason had written that ‘Britain still/ Bears on her breast full many a hideous wound’; here, he refers to ‘the ruthless spade’ which may ‘Too deeply wound the bosom of the soil.’ They are stark images, in which the land of Britain, and ‘Nature’ itself are conflated as a vulnerable female entity, defenceless against the violation of those for whom she is, rather than a respected partner deserving of sensitivity, merely a commodity. It is the ‘bosom’ that contains the heart: in making such an assault on the land, the thoughtless gardener, unaware of any connection to it, is represented as emotionally, and so patriotically, alienated from the country that sustains him. 

There is one example of linearity, however, which compromises the poet’s certainty about its undesirability. Having asserted that ‘Nature’ and ‘Art’ ‘own no charm/ But those that fair Variety creates’, he poses a question concerning the destruction of the tree avenues that traditionally shaded the approach to country houses: ‘Such sentence past, where shall the Dryads fly/ That haunt yon ancient vista/ […] Those spreading oaks that in fraternal files/ Have pair’d for centuries?’ The oak is the denizen and representative of Albion, her narrative through time, and her enlightened present. Avenues of such trees may have ‘heard the strains/ Of Sidney’s […] reed’, may indeed, the poet suggests, be rendered almost sacred by their ancient witness as guardians of Albion’s history. 

54 TEG, 1.114-128.
55 Ibid,1.297-325.
Mason has a practical answer to the problem. An attempt can be made, though the task is one of ‘difficulty and danger’, to move some of these trees, planting them elsewhere, or to surround some with ‘saplings tall, discreetly plac’d’, in order ‘To break th’obdurate line.’ Such oaks will retain their role as ‘old protectors of the plain.’ Indeed, the action will enhance their role. Each tree, surrounded by smaller trees, ‘in patriarchal pride […] becomes the father of a tribe’, the horticultural analogy of a king and his people.56

A little earlier in the text, Mason had employed another anthropomorphic image of trees, in which oaks and their meaning for ‘Britannia’ were foregrounded. The poet advises the use of afforestation to ‘veil with woods [the] barren summits’ ‘of distant hills.’ The gardener should, in this instance, plant ‘elm [and] chesnut’, trees of suitable grandeur for the situation. Particularly useful are ‘sapling oaks’: combining ‘beauty’ and ‘use’, Mason refers to their double bounty. These trees, when grown, may ‘at Britannia’s call/ […] heave their trunks mature into the main/ And float the bulwarks of her liberty.’ So what Mason elsewhere presents as guardians of the land itself, and its history, he foregrounds here as the practical preservers of ‘Britannia’: ‘Hearts of oak are our ships’, as David Garrick’s song celebrating the annus mirabilis of 1759 ran.57

A subsequent image defines further the idea of the poet’s country sustained by native growth. In Book Three, he will compare exotic plants unable to withstand ‘Winter […] with […] Boreas in his frozen shroud’ with those ‘of hardy class indigenous’ which can brave ‘Albion’s’ climate, ‘the veteran troop who will not for a blast/ Of nipping air, like cowards, quit the field.’ Now, he recommends the use of fir trees to protect the saplings. The picture is again a martial one:

But if the fir, give it its station meet;  
Place it an outguard to the assailing north  
To shield the infant scions, till possesst  
Of native strength, they learn alike to scorn

56 TEG, 1.330-347.  
57 Ibid, 1.241-252; Pope had also imagined such a patriotic destiny for trees, in Windsor-Forest: ‘Thy Trees, fair Windsor! now shall leave their Woods/ And half thy Forests rush into my Floods’ (ll. 385-6); ‘Hearts of oak’ was first sung on New Year’s Eve, 1759, at the Garrick Theatre, in ‘Harlequin’s Invasion’, with music by William Boyce.
The blast and their protectors. Foster’d thus,  
The cradled hero gains from female care  
His future vigour; but, that vigour felt,  
He springs indignant from his nurse’s arms,  
Nods his terrific helmet, shakes his spear,  
And is that awful thing which heav’n ordain’d  
The scourge of tyrants, and his country’s pride.  

The trees themselves anthropomorphise into human protectors of the country from which they grow, becoming ‘The scourge of tyrants.’ To emphasise the idea of energised, powerful maturity, the poet confines each action of the ‘hero’ to a line or half-line, creating a sense of restraint overcome: ‘Springs indignant from his nurse’s arms’, ‘Nods his terrific helmet’, ‘Shakes his spear’, and is ‘The scourge of tyrants’, ‘his country’s pride.’

Mason promotes the idea of trees, particularly the oak, not only as essential features of the British landscape through time, but also as representatives of the development of ‘Albion’, itself grown from a state of infancy, via the overthrow of Stuart absolutism, to the maturity of a constitutional monarchy, and its present global status. The images contrast quietude with activity, the past with the future. The trees of the avenue are ancient, their silent part in their country’s history to be honoured; the saplings belong to Britain’s current and future state. Both spring from a land whose ‘liberty’ must be protected against enemies without and within.

Progress towards political maturity is echoed, later in Book One, by an account of the progress of gardening to its present enlightened state. ‘Long was the night of error’, the poet asserts, during which ‘tasteless Fashion’ approved of linear arrangements, ‘The terras mound uplifted’, and the ‘flat canal.’ The change wrought by ‘sagest Verulam’, who ‘banish[ed] from the royal groves/ Each childish vanity of crisped knot/ And sculptur’d foliage’, was continued and praised by a succession of notable gardeners and poets including Spenser, Milton, and Pope, the dramatis personae of Musaeus. The line culminates in the contemporary figure of Lancelot ‘Capability’ Brown: ‘Bards yet unborn’, Mason

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58 TEG, 3.280, 244-251; 1.253-63.
writes, ‘Shall pay to Brown that tribute [...]/ [...] the beauty of his scenes inspire.’ In such a way, the development of gardening ideas from the ‘childish’ notions of Elizabethan gardeners, the unenlightened vassals of despotism, to a maturity that allows ‘Nature’ proper acknowledgement of her ‘primaeval honours’, follows, and is an expression of, the political trajectory.\(^{59}\)

The only ‘charm[s]’ desirable in the best of gardens, then, are ‘those that fair Variety creates.’ As he moves towards the book’s conclusion, Mason exhorts the ‘sons of Albion’ to visit those gardens in which the best principles of the art have been followed. He has already bidden his pupils, for the finest examples, to ‘turn thy eye’ to the masters of landscape painting, in whose ‘immortal works thou ne’er shall find/ Dull uniformity, contrivance quaint’, but ‘Careless lines, whose undulating forms/ Play through the varied canvass’, just as paths should wind through the garden. More than this, Mason places the best of gardens on a level with the best of works of art:

\begin{center}
feel ye there
What REYNOLDS felt, when first the Vatican
Unbarr’d her gates, and to his raptur’d eye
Gave all the godlike energy that flow’d
From MICHAEL’S pencil; feel what Garrick felt,
When first he breath’d the soul of Shakspeare’s page.
So shall your Art, if call’d to grace a scene
Yet unadorn’d, with taste instinctive give
Each grace appropriate……\(^{60}\)
\end{center}

It is as if the poet and painter of Mason’s imagined ‘unseen, unseeing dell’ have stepped, in the guise of Shakespeare and Michelangelo, out into the light, and become one with the best of garden scenes. The most talented gardener, in the poet’s view, is a genius, an invaluable contributor to his country’s cultural life, capable of creating art at its most sublime.

\(^{59}\) TEG, 1.403-4,407-535.

\(^{60}\) Ibid, 1.265-276,540-548.
MAISON, WALPOLE AND THE AMERICAN WAR

Though the third and fourth books of *The English Garden* followed the second at two-yearly intervals, there was a gap of five years between the publication of the first and second. During this longer interval, Mason was composing in other genres. His *Memoir* of Gray, Mason’s homage to his friend, was published in 1775. He was also working on the lyrical sections of his tragedy *Caractacus*, and was deeply involved in writing satire.

Walpole, Mason’s aid and confidant in the production of the satires, also encouraged him in writing his georgic. With a letter written to Mason in June, 1775, he includes two French essays on gardening, which Mason had asked Walpole to acquire for him. Walpole is derogatory about their contents. Of Claude-Henri Watelet’s *Essai sur les Jardins* he writes that he ‘does not conceive helping or improving nature, but would make puppet-shows.’ Certain of his friend’s ability to outclass any French writer or gardener, he is ‘send[ing] you straw, that your brick kiln may blaze.’

In the same letter, Walpole deplores the action of British troops against the American colonists at the Battle of Lexington, two months earlier: ‘By the waters of Babylon we sit down and weep, when we think of thee, O America!’ The clash of arms at Lexington proved a watershed: debate still continues concerning from which side the first shot was fired, but the shot’s significance is undisputed. The action marked the beginning of the war of Independence, and was followed in the August of 1775 by a Proclamation of Rebellion by the British government. The years between the publication of *The English Garden*’s first and second books witnessed what to Mason and to Walpole was a political slide from grace, the events culminating in the Declaration of Independence of July 1776.

The Boston Tea Party of 1773 was, for many, final proof that the colonists were resolved to face down British authority. The penal measures subsequently

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61 Lewis, p. 200 (18 May 1775), pp. 205-6 (12 June, 1775). Mason was asking for Watelet’s essay (1774) and Chabanon’s *Sur la manie des jardins anglais* (1775).

imposed by the British government in the following year on the colony of Massachusetts Bay only succeeded in increasing colonial resentment against the mother country. In a letter written in February, 1775, Walpole wrote to Mason that ‘both Houses […] flatter themselves they shall terrify the Colonies into submission in three months, and are amazed to hear that there is no such probability.’

Mason’s political and moral sensibilities were deeply offended by the current situation. ‘A man in these days’, he wrote to Walpole some months before the Proclamation of Rebellion, was not permitted ‘to do what he thinks right, unless he is as callous as a prime minister and as unfeeling as his master.’ Later that year he complained to Walpole that ‘Political matters now seem to be in such a state, as to resemble the reign of chaos and old night.’

The effect on The English Garden of such a deterioration can be seen in the difference in Mason’s treatment of monarchy within the first two books. His disapproval of uncultured kingship, and the misguided notions of Tory gardening, was expressed in Book One by his animadversions on the ‘stare view’, and the implied criticism of the tastelessness of those attached to Windsor and Kew. References to monarchy in Book Two, however, are in the context of the corruption of courts in the face of monarchical bribery, and the book ends with the narrative of the ideal monarch Abdalominus. The length of the narrative, a hundred and forty lines, and its culminating presence in the text, emphasise the importance to the poet of its message. Criticism of monarchy is no longer enough: Mason’s readership is to be shown a picture of what monarchy, upheld by the genuine will of the people, should be.

Even in his passage on constructing fences, Mason is aware of political analogy. He refers to the necessity for their firm construction, for

\[
\text{……… oft the ram} \\
\text{And jutting steer drive their entangling horns}
\]

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63 Lewis, p. 178 (18 February 1775).
Through the frail meshes, and, by many a chasm,
Proclaim their hate of thraldom. Nothing brooks
Confinement, save degenerate man alone,
Who deems a monarch’s smile can gild his chains.

The last word connects with the situation of mankind: only the human race is willingly corralled—‘gild’ used here as a reference to bribery, by money or favour. A hundred lines later, Mason discourses on the inevitability, in life’s ‘momentary dream’, of misery and pain, and wonders why men of integrity ‘would mix in hireling senates, strenuous there/ To crush the venal hydra, whose fell crests/ Rise with recruited venom from the wound!’

These last lines introduce the story of Abdalonimus, banished from his throne by the usurper Strato, and restored to it by the conquering Alexander. Where George III had been depicted in Book One as gazing down at a ‘prospect’ from a ‘garish turret’, Abdalonimus has made his horticultural kingdom in a shady valley, the equivalent of the ‘unseen, unseeing dell’ of Mason’s praiseworthy cultural compeers. The garden of Abdalonimus, through which Alexander and ‘Sidon’s senate’ travel to find the deposed king and invite him to resume monarchy, is described in ideal terms. It contains features of Mason’s perfect garden, in which ‘Art’ has assisted ‘Nature’:

Close was the vale and shady; yet ere long
Its forest sides retiring, left a lawn
Of ample circuit, where the widening stream
Now o’er its pebbled channel nimbly tript
In many a lucid maze. From the flower’d verge
Of this clear rill now stray’d the devious path,
Amid ambrosial tufts where spicy plants,
Weeping their perfum’d tears of myrrh, and nard,
Stood crown’d with Sharon’s rose; or where, apart,
The patriarch palm his load of sugar’d dates
Shower’d plenteous; where the fig, of standard strength,
And rich pomegranate, wrapt in dulcet pulp
Their racy seeds; or where the citron’s bough
Bent with its load of golden fruit mature.
Meanwhile the lawn beneath the scatter’d shade
Spread its serene extent; a stately file
Of circling cypress mark’d the distant bound.

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65 TEG, 2.343-8.459-462.
66 TEG, 2.509-525.
The integrity and maturity of the garden are at one with the integrity and maturity of the gardener. Lines five to fourteen of the passage comprise a single sentence, helping to create a sense of expansiveness. Nouns and epithets suggest a rich sweetness: ‘myrrh’, ‘nard’, ‘Sharon’s rose’, ‘sugar’d dates’, ‘rich pomegranate’, ‘dulcet pulp’, golden fruit mature’, ‘perfum’d’, ‘plenteous.’ All the images combine to indicate the qualities of Abdalonimus’ own soul. The full ripeness of the garden fittingly symbolises the royal state he, learned now in Nature’s lessons, will shortly reassume.

The crowd find their deposed king before an altar ‘pil’d’ with ‘rich Sabaean gums’, praying to the ‘Parent of Good to ‘free my captive country.’ In Book One, Mason had exhorted the ‘sons of Albion’ to make all Britain a garden: here, Abdalonimus’ garden, in all its gently ordered variety, is itself a kingdom.67

Hearing the ‘raptur’d crowd/ Murmur applause’ at his prayer for his country’s freedom, Abdalonimus turns to it, and to the ‘King of Macedon’, Alexander the Great, who stands with it:

The King of Macedon, with eager step
Burst from his warrior phalanx. From the youth,
Who bore its state, the conqueror’s own right hand
Snatch’d [a] rich wreath, and bound it on his brow.
His swift attendants o’er his shoulders cast
The robe of empire, while the trumpet’s voice
Proclaim’d him King of Sidon. Stern he stood,
Or, if he smil’d, ‘twas a contemptuous smile,
That held the pageant honours in disdain.
Then burst the people’s voice, in loud acclaim,
And bade him be their Father. At the word,
The honour’d blood, that warmed him, flush’d his cheek
[......................] graciously he bow’d his head,
And was the Sire they called him [................]
Oh grant me, Gods’, he answer’d, ‘so to bear
This load of Royalty. My toil was crown’d
With blessings lost to kings; yet, righteous Powers!
If to my country ye transfer the boon,
I triumph in the loss. Be mine the chains

67 Mason is innovative here: the usual subject of the rural retirement theme was Cincinnatus, described by Thomson in The Seasons as ‘awful from the plough.’ (‘Summer’ (1746), l.515, p. 204 <http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/ECCO> [accessed 28 January 2011]). Having left his farm, in 458 B.C., to defend Rome, Cincinnatus afterwards returned to the countryside.
That fetter sov’reignty; let Sidon smile
With, your best blessings, Liberty and Peace.’

The most politically significant lines in the narrative concern Abdalonimus’ response on being offered his lost kingship. Though he is crowned by Alexander, it is only at the sound of the people’s voice that he consents to re-assume the throne. Locke had written that ‘no government can have a right to obedience from a people who have not freely consented to it’ and are in ‘a full state of liberty to choose their government and governors.’ Here, paradoxically, the people are awarded such a liberty by the conqueror Alexander.

‘Royalty’, however, for the reinstated Abdalonimus, will be not a path to despotism, but a ‘load’ to be responsibly borne. The ‘toil’ in the garden was itself ‘crown’d with blessings lost to kings.’ At the request of the people, Abdalonimus now prepares to wear a different crown. His last words carry most significance: ‘Be mine the chains/ that fetter sov’reignty.’ Earlier in the book, Mason had referred to the ‘chains’ of ‘degenerate man’ worn in servility by the time-serving courtier; here the roles are reversed, and differently tempered. The chains Abdalonimus will wear are those of service to his country and people. The result will be what Mason desired for his own nation, the ‘blessings’ of ‘Liberty and Peace’ bestowed on a genuine partnership of people and king.

In the third book of his georgic, published in 1779, ‘Liberty’ is a recurrent theme. Since the publication of the second book, Britain’s situation with regard to her colonies had become increasingly difficult. What had been assumed at the beginning of hostilities to be a quickly resolvable conflict showed no sign of ending. Nor did the burden of taxation to pay for the cost of the war. So appalled was Mason by the unfolding of events that in September 1777, he had written to Walpole that ‘I cannot submit to call myself an Englishman.’ Five months after, in a letter to Mason, Walpole was referring to ‘the late empire of Great Britain.’ A treaty agreed between the American colonies and France in February 1778, for the purposes of ‘conditional and defensive alliance’, meant that now the British navy must be deployed in her own waters as well as across

68 TEG, 2.576-602; Goldie, p. 213.
the Atlantic. ‘Pray out of all charity and goodness write frequently to me at this crisis’, Mason wrote to Walpole in March that year.69

In the summer of 1778 Walpole, having received from his friend a copy of his work to date on Book Three, wrote to Mason that ‘You have made charming progress in your third book […] Do you not feel satisfied in knowing you shall be a classic in a free and rising empire?’ Having mentally consigned the British empire to the same fate as that of Rome, Walpole now envisaged power of imperial proportions passing to America. More than this, what was most admirable in British culture, including Mason’s poem, would find a natural home in this new land of liberty.70

In his third book, Mason makes reference to loss of liberty in a short passage on ‘England’s laurel’:

swift shall she spread
Her broad-leav’d shade, and float it fair and wide,
Proud to be call’d an inmate of the soil.
Let England prize this daughter of the East
Beyond that Latian plant, of kindred name,
That wreath’d the head of Julius; basely twin’d
Its flattering foliage on the traitor’s brow
Who crush’d his country’s freedom. Sacred tree,
Ne’er be thy brighter verdure thus debas’d!
Far happier thou, in this sequester’d bower,
To shroud thy Poet, who with fost’ring hand,
Here bade thee flourish…71

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69 Lewis, p. 332 (23 September 1777); p. 357 (18 February 1778); p. 375 (21 March 1778). When Walpole wrote his letter to Mason, the war was estimated to have cost £33,000,000; 24,000 men had been lost. (Lewis, n. 358.) Charles McCormick recorded that in February 1778, the prime minister, Lord North, instigated two acts, which included the suspension of all acts of parliament concerning the Colonies since 1763, cessation of hostilities, and pardons to ‘all descriptions of persons.’ Such concessions, McCormick writes, should have been made ‘before the declaration of independency rendered it almost impossible for the congress to recede.’ (The History of England, 3 vols (London, 1795? [sic]), III, p. 206 <http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/ECCO> [accessed 20 May 2009]); Edmund Burke had urged such measures to parliament in March, 1775: see The Speech of Edmund Burke, Esq., on moving his resolution for conciliation with the colonies, March 22nd, 1775 <http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/ECCO >[accessed 4 July 2009].


71 TEG, 3.119-130.
The planting of native laurel becomes a metaphor for the ‘fost’ring’ of freedom. In planting and in writing, ‘thy Poet’, both the laurel’s and his country’s, upholds the virtues lost by Rome under its emperors.

In a later passage on the proper treatment of plants, the issue of ‘liberty’ is again addressed. However involved in didactic exposition Mason may be, he is continually aware of his country’s condition:

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Each plant that springs
Holds, like the people of a free-born state,
Its right fair franchised; rooted to a spot
It yet has claim to air; from lib’ral heav’n
It yet has claim to sunshine, and to showers:
Air, showers and sunshine are its liberty.
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The poet describes, in a horticultural analogy, the ideal of partnership between the governed and the governing. In this passage, is he likely to be thinking not of ‘Albion’ at all, but of a newly created America, when he refers to ‘a free-born state’, its citizens blessed by ‘lib’ral heav’n’? ‘Your poem may transplant [an English garden] to America’, Walpole wrote in his letter.²⁷ Did Mason, in these lines, himself envisage a garden in a country freed from monarchy and the illiberalties of Britain’s present condition, open to the natural blessings of ‘sunshine’, ‘air’ and ‘showers’? ‘Julius’, as Mason lamented, had destroyed the ancient republican ideal, ‘crush[ing] his country’s freedom’: it was in eighteenth-century America that such an ideal appeared to have been re-born.

Mason ends his third book as he had ended his second, with narrative. This time the poet himself becomes a character in his own story, the conduit through which the ‘Naiad’, ‘Lineia’, conveys a moral lesson to ‘thy nation’.²⁷³ It is a further example of Mason calling upon the classical world, in this case in the form of one of its demi-gods, to convey such a lesson to modern Britain. At the same time, he is again taking his own place in the poem as his country’s representative.

²⁷³ TEG, 3.560.
Before the narrative begins, Mason has considered ‘the charm of water.’ In a note to the section, he cites the French Jesuit René Rapin, who in the previous century ‘wrote a didactic Latin Poem on Gardens, in four books, by way of supplement to Virgil’s Georgics.’ Rapin’s manner of treating water, his emphasis on ‘jets d’eau, and such sort of artificial baubles’, is to be shunned as an aspect of the belittling coercion of ‘Nature’, as are ‘long canals’ and ‘trim cascades.’ Lineia embarks on an impassioned monologue in which she extrapolates from her criticism of gardeners’ insensitive treatment of the ‘vital force’ of water, to the depredations of government:

Nor is Lineia silent- ‘Long’, she cries,  
‘Too long has Man wag’d sacriligious war  
With the vex elements, and chief with that,  
Which elder Thales and the Bard of Thebes  
Held first of things terrestrial; nor misdeem’d:  
For, when the Spirit creative deign’d to move,  
He mov’d upon the waters…’  

Water, which Pindar himself ‘Held most high of things terrestrial’, becomes the symbol of liberty; God himself had ‘mov’d upon the waters.’

Mason chooses a water goddess to issue a warning to the nation through his poem. In the national context, water is a significant element: Britain’s commercial prowess rested upon her ships. Thirty years before, James Thomson had written confidently that ‘Britannia rules the waves.’ By contrast, the American war had seen Britain’s water-bound kingdom under threat as her navies became stretched to their limit.

Lineia’s account of the misuse of water by ‘the tyranny of Art’ becomes an analogy for the situation of the hapless British people, at the mercy of both statesmen and its own quiescence:

Who e’er beheld  
Our humble train forsake their native vale

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To climb the haughty hill? Ambition, speak!
He blushes, and is mute. When did our streams,
By force unpent, in dull stagnation sleep?
Let Sloth unfold his arms, and tell the time.
Or, if the tyranny of Art infring’d
Our rights, when did our patient floods submit
Without recoil? Servility retires
And clinks his gilded chain. Oh, learn from us,
And tell it to thy nation, British Bard!
Uncurb’d Ambition, unresisting Sloth,
And base Dependance are the fiends accurst
That pull down mighty empires.\textsuperscript{76}

‘Thy Poet, Albion!,’ as Mason names himself in his poem, is here addressed by Lineia as ‘British Bard!’ Both titles, in the use of the words ‘Albion’ and ‘Bard’, suggest an honourable inheritance from Britain’s ancient past of the courage and primitive nobility associated with druidic and bardic culture, and the birth of British freedom, both of which Mason had addressed in \textit{Caractacus}. In such a way, he stakes a claim for the contemporary role of poet as transcending the earthbound operations of citizen and politician. The force of the claim is highlighted by the use, in both instances, of the emphatic imperative mood.

‘Uncurb’d Ambition’, in this context, was that of parliamentarians eager for position at the expense of their country’s well-being. ‘Dependance’- according to Johnson the state ‘of living subordinate or subject in some degree to the discretion of another’- was the condition in which those hoping for favour from the powerful existed. Both, Mason makes clear, were responsible for Britain’s moral and imperial diminution.\textsuperscript{77} ‘Unresisting Sloth’, however, unlike the other two abstractions, was something that Mason himself could attempt to confront. In the face of what he saw as the unchallenged deterioration of parliamentary conduct, he was before long to become a leading light of a body eager to address the problem, the dynamic, reforming Yorkshire Association.

\textsuperscript{76} \textit{TEG}, 3.550-63.
\textsuperscript{77} \textit{Dictionary}, I.
MASON AND THE YORKSHIRE ASSOCIATION

In 1779 Spain had entered the war on the American side. Taxes rose again to sustain the war effort. ‘An Englishman’, the anonymous writer of A Letter to the Whigs, fulminated that ‘There is an influence in the House of Commons superior to Reason [...] Thirty or Forty Millions of Money squandered in this abominable Project.’ Mercantile concern grew over the navy’s decreased power to protect commercial shipping; fear of invasion was rife. In August, Walpole wrote to Mason that Ireland, considered the likely site for invasion, was badly defended, and that London was no better. Later that month he wrote that ‘I could give you details of unreadiness at home that would shock you, miracles alone can counteract it.’ In November, he reported that ‘Distress and dissatisfaction’ at the conduct of the war, ‘do begin to murmur everywhere.’

_A Letter to the Whigs_, published in November 1779, demonstrates the strength of anti-war and anti-government feeling in some quarters. Declaring that he is ‘a Disciple of Mr. Locke’, who ‘abhor[s] and reprobate[s] the Ideas of Passive Obedience and Non-resistance’, the author declares his intention to consider ‘how far we have deviated from that Rule of Government traced out for us by our British and Saxon Ancestors.’ He complains about the misuse of ‘publick Money’, the disproportionate number of ‘placemen’ in parliament, the existence of long Septennial Parliaments, and the ‘the unjust and impolitic [...] American War.’ He hopes that in forthcoming ‘County Meetings’ there will be opportunity for ‘the Nation at large’ to wash its hands ‘of the innocent Blood of an injured people.’

A county meeting held in York in the following month, attended by Mason, resulted in the creation of a body that was to lobby energetically for economic and parliamentary reform. A letter from Mason to Walpole in December that year has a conspiratorial tone. ‘There are wheels in motion’, he writes, ‘towards bringing this large county together to a general meeting.’ Significantly, in view

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79 A Letter to the Whigs, pp. 4-5, 7, 16, 19-20.
of the rising impatience felt towards aristocratic parliamentarians, Mason divulges that the idea ‘arises entirely from a set of […] independent gentlemen without any lordly leader whatever’: ‘Dependance’ was absent here. The meeting was held, at the instigation of the clergyman Christopher Wyvill, at the end of December, at the York Tavern. It would begin, as George Otto Trevelyan writes, a political agitation unmatched until 1832, the year the Reform Bill was passed. From it was born ‘That remarkable political phenomenon, the Yorkshire Association.’

Mason was heavily involved in the Association’s activities from the outset. Recalling its genesis, Wyvill wrote that ‘Mr. Mason […] with a zeal which well accords with his usual vigour and public spirit, had also given his unsolicited support.’ At the December meeting, Wyvill read ‘a Declaration […] on the distressful State of the Country’: of the committee of seven formed to consider this, Mason was one. His continuing presence at a variety of subsequent meetings, where he often took the chair, is recorded in Wyvill’s papers.

In February, the doughty Yorkshire MP Sir George Savile, to whom Mason had acted as go-between on behalf of the newly-formed committee, presented a petition to parliament on the Association’s behalf. It called for economical reform, including abolition of ‘sinecures and unmerited pensions.’ By August, many members of ‘the gentry, clergy, and freeholders of the county’ were requesting, in addition, reform of parliamentary procedure. Christie writes that the request was now three-fold, for ‘economical reform, triennial parliaments, and the addition of a hundred county representatives to the House of Commons.’


81 Political Papers, chiefly respecting the attempt of the county of York, and other considerable districts […] to effect a reformation of the Parliament of Great Britain, 6 vols (London, 1794-1802), III, p. 113; 1, p. xi <http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/ECCO> [accessed 22 May 2009].

82 Wyvill, 1, p. 53: on 14 January 1780, Mason wrote to Savile’s nephew, ‘The Committee […] request that you present their respects to Sir George Savile, and require him to give you his
In spite of the energetic purpose of the Association, and the size of its support, its bid for reform failed. In early 1781, the advent of the younger William Pitt into parliament brought hope: Pitt’s sympathies were with the Association, and like its members he wanted economic and parliamentary reform. His proposals, too, were outpaced by a parliamentary majority. In this year the final book of *The English Garden* was published, together with the postscript in which Mason criticised those who would feel the text was too permeated by ‘the spirit of party.’

**THE NARRATIVE OF BOOK FOUR**

In his last book, Mason most forcibly expresses his anger at the present political situation. However frustrating the quest for reform might be in the outside world, he could at least express his feelings to his readers through poetry. As I have noted, the garden described in the book is that of Lord Harcourt at Nuneham, for the design of which Mason was partly responsible. This was, for him, a garden which could stand for Britain at its best, a model to be valued in parlous times.

The text is laced with references to gardening and architectural features that are manifestations of their creator’s perceived moral worth. Mason’s initial address is to the ‘divine Simplicity’, the *sine qua non* of his perfect garden, asking for her continued ‘aid auspicious.’ In celebrating a new partnership of ‘use’ and ‘beauty’ in garden design, whereby the landowner now allows his ‘flocks’ and ‘herds’ to ‘browse luxurious o’er those very plots/ Which once were barren’, Mason makes a metaphorical connection with ‘Liberty.’ The ‘birds of air’, who had fled the scene, now return to such natural haunts:

> they perch on ev’ry spray,  
> And swell their little throats, and warble wild  
> Their vernal minstrelsy; to heav’n and thee  
> It is a hymn of thanks…

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opinion as to the most proper time of presenting the petition to the House’; Christie, ‘Sir George Savile, Edmund Burke and the Yorkshire Reform Programme, February 1780’, *The Yorkshire Archaeological Journal*, 40 (1960), 205-8 (p. 206); ‘The Yorkshire Association’, p. 144.
Birds as symbols of freedom appear later in the text. For Nerina, Alcander creates a lake for waterbirds, around which Guinea fowl, Bantam hens and peacocks clamour. Unlike the caged birds in the garden of ‘Verulam’, whose gardening innovations were hampered by the custom of his unenlightened age, they are ‘captive none’ and ‘all the glade/ Is life, is music, liberty and love.’

In the midst of military and financial disaster, Mason creates an avian template of an ideal human world.

That the garden is an encompassing representation of an ideal Albion is emphasised by the poet’s description, in addition to its animate features, of the inanimate objects contained within it, in the form of statues and busts. In Alcander’s garden, however, such ornamentation lacks the vulgar ostentation that denotes Tory garden design. Here, the first task of ‘Simplicity’ had been ‘to combine/ Nature’s own charms’, to please ‘the genius of the scene.’ She now adds to the garden ornaments that ‘the sculptor’s hand in classic days/ Made breathe in brass or marble.’ It is ‘the genius of the scene’ who will direct her ‘how to choose/ The simplest and the best.’ The ‘hermit’s cell’ that Alcander constructs after Nerina’s death will be uncomplicated by the addition of ‘hourglass, scull, and maple dish/ Its mimic garniture.’ There is no place for such artificial ‘emblematic toys’ where ‘Nerina’s bust’ is to be situated. The sincere grief of Alcander in its company, the poet suggests, must be devalued by the presence of props more appropriate for a tragic drama, or for a hermitage such as that at Kew, made for royalty in the name of Queen Caroline.

83 TEG, 4.1-24, 351-60; Mason comments on the influence on this passage of Rousseau’s ‘charming description of the garden of Julie’ in La Nouvelle Heloise: ‘No birds are introduced into Alcander’s Menagerie, but such are domesticated, or choose to visit it for the security and food they find there.’ (p. 420); Batey asserts that Lord Nuneham- Lord Harcourt from 1777- and Mason, were impressed by Rousseau’s belief in a moral sense found in gardens, ‘along with the visual beauty of the scene’ (‘Two Romantic Flower Gardens’, p.199); ‘Verulam’ recommends in the garden ‘little Turret[s] […] with […] Belly enough to receive a Cage of Birds.’ (Francis Bacon, Of Gardens (1625), in Dixon and Hunt, p. 54).

84 TEG, 4.26-42, 646-651; the hermit in his hermitage was a fashionable reference to the idea of ‘philosophical retreat’ so attractive to the eighteenth century. John Dixon Hunt describes Charles Hamilton advertising for a ‘hermit’ who was to remain in his hermitage for seven years, together with ‘hourglass’, ‘Bible’ and ‘water for his beverage.’ (The Figure in the Landscape: Poetry, Painting, and Gardening during the Eighteenth Century (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), pp. 1, 8).
Such simplicity is metamorphosed, in the description of Alcander’s ‘mansion’, into an architectural representation of what the poet sees as Albion’s noble gothic past and putative ideal present:

Crowning a gradual hill his mansion rose
In antient English grandeur: Turrets, spires,
And windows, climbing high from base to roof
In wide and radiant rows, bespoke its birth
Coeval with those rich cathedral fanes
[………………….] where harmony results
From disunited parts; and shapes minute
At once distinct and blended, boldly form
One vast majestic whole.\textsuperscript{85}

The construction is one of variety contributing to an ordered whole, as variety of planting makes a perfect garden. Its composition recalls the order in variety of the garden of Abdalonymus, and so the ideal of partnership between monarch and subject. The ‘Turrets’ and ‘spires’ co-exist with, and are upheld by undelineated ‘shapes minute’, which are at the same time ‘distinct and blended.’ It is a metaphorical representation of a constitutional monarchy, in which the powerful and the lowly also co-exist. Without the support of the latter, however, the former must themselves, collapsing, be rendered powerless. Mason offers an integral picture of a nation at its perceived best. His choice of vocabulary indicates the wealth, both moral and practical, accruing to a nation to whose good all subscribe: ‘grandeur’, ‘radiant’, ‘rich’, ‘harmony’, ‘boldly’, ‘majestic.’

Cleon, introduced in Book Four’s narrative as Nerina’s lover, is the conduit for appreciation of Alcander’s garden as an ideal microcosm of the Britain for which Mason was experiencing such dismayed concern. In addition to his mansion, Alcander has built a version of an ancient castle, which will house his horses and cattle; from ‘old disjointed moss-grown stone’ he has formed ‘A time-struck abbey’, with ‘mitred window’ and ‘cloister pale.’ For Mason, these were the two architectural features most appropriately placed in an English garden, reminders, as we have seen, both of the country’s history and its enlightened progress. In introducing Cleon to the garden, however, Alcander reveals his own sense of its anomalous condition in present times:

\textsuperscript{85} TEG, 4.65-73.
‘Little, I fear me, will a stranger’s eye
Find here to praise, where rich Vitruvian art
Has rear’d no temples, no triumphal arcs;
Where no Palladian bridges span the stream,
But all is homebred Fancy.’ ‘For that cause,
And chiefly that’, the polish’d youth reply’d,
I view each part with rapture. Ornament,
When foreign or fantastic, never charm’d
My judgement; here I tread on British ground;
With British annals all I view accords…’\textsuperscript{86}

Cleon’s response to Alcander is unequivocal. He is the bearer of distressing
news concerning Britain’s conduct in America: in this garden, however, Mason
suggests, he experiences a distillation of Britain at her unequalled best.

The garden is, however, for all its apparent perfection, geographically vulnerable.
Like Britain itself, it possesses ‘One native glory, more than all sublime/ […]
‘Twas Ocean’s self.’ Alcander’s is a coastal garden: the waters of a ‘rill’ flowing
through it empty into ‘the main.’ It is on that ‘angry main’ on a day of ‘sudden
storm’ that the ship carrying Nerina is borne.\textsuperscript{87} As Britain herself in this time of
war, particularly since the involvement of France and Spain on the American
side, the garden is open to whatever fate the sea chooses to bring.

It is because of Nerina’s arrival from the sea that Alcander is forced to hear a
truth concerning his country’s behaviour towards the colonies. Mason had
chosen to write Book Four mainly in the form of narrative. In the preface to his
translation of Virgil’s \textit{Georgics} of 1767, Nevile indicated a public lack of interest
in the didactic form, and though Mason determined upon it for his own poem, in
Book Four he abandoned it in favour of a narrative form more likely to appeal to
an age which, he wrote, ‘rejects the strain didactic.’ ‘Try we then’, he continued,
‘In livelier narrative the truths to veil/ We dare not dictate.’\textsuperscript{88} The poet is
disingenuous here. The ‘livelier’ nature of narrative allows him to tell a true and

\textsuperscript{86} \textit{TEG}, 4.100-6,373-82; Mason notes that Alcander unites the ‘two capital features’ of ‘castle’
and ‘abbey’ […] ‘\textit{with utility}, so exercising true ‘taste’ (p. 411).
\textsuperscript{87} \textit{Ibid}, 4.110-8,134-5.
\textsuperscript{88} \textit{TEG}, 4.50-2.
shocking story about an event of the American war in terms that passionately express his abhorrence concerning it.

Nerina tells Alcander that she has lost both father and brother in the course of the war, and fears that they may have ‘perish’d at Esopus.’ Seeing Alcander blushing for shame, she comforts him: ‘It was not thou, that like remorseless Cain/ Thirsted for brother’s blood: thy heart disdains/ The savage imputation.’ The reference is to the British troops who, in 1776, had billeted at an inn at Esopus, near New York, before putting Kingston to the torch on the following day. Cleon later corroborates to Alcander the truth of this surmise. Nerina’s father, a churchman of Boston, had indeed been burnt to death, too sick to escape the flames:

> those ruthless flames,  
> That spar’d nor friend nor foe, nor sex nor age,  
> Involv’d the village, where on sickly couch  
> He lay confin’d, and whither he had fled  
> Awhile to sojourn. There (I see thee shrink)  
> Was he, that gave Nerina being, burnt!  
> Burnt by thy countrymen! to ashes burnt!  
> Fraternal hands and Christian lit the flame.  

Mason uses the dramatic nature of his narrative text to express his personal anger and repugnance through Cleon’s words. Alcander had been aware of the event: Nerina and Cleon, present with him, force him to face its human truth, as Mason does his reader.

For Mason, as he had indicated in the *Ode to the Naval Officers of Great Britain*, the war was nothing less than fratricide: the reference to ‘Cain’ confirms his view. Virgil, in his *Georgics*, had lamented the desolation wrought by war upon the countryside: ‘The peaceful peasant to the wars is pressed/ […] The crooked scythes are straightened into swords.’ It is a violation of all that the rural life represents in the mind of the poet. Civil war, brother against brother, such as Rome herself had suffered, is a particular evil, destroying cherished fellowship: ‘The neighbouring cities range on several sides/ Perfidious Mars long-plighted

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leagues divides.’ For Mason, as for Virgil, in such an unnatural situation ‘fraud and rapine right and wrong confound.’

Mason has foregrounded himself as Albion’s poet, a conduit for her moral instruction. The final four lines of the poem corroborate his view of the poet’s role. They take the form of a prayer:

Oh return,
Ye long-lost train of Virtues! swift return
To save (‘Tis Albion prompts your poet’s prayer)
Her throne, her altars, and her laureat bowers.

In this final line Mason foregrounds the monarchy, the Church and poetry itself as equally responsible, interdependent partners in the commonweal. ‘Laureat bowers’ refers to the garden itself, where laurel-ed bowers can be found, both in reality and fiction; to Apollo, ancient god of poetry, whose symbol is the laurel; and to the poet himself, crowned with laurel for his skill in verse. In this way, the last two words of Mason’s georgic themselves become a kind of crown for the poem and its writer, who has taken upon himself the wise instruction of his country, by means of his venerable art.

MASON AND BURGH

In the presentation of The English Garden to the public, Mason was eventually assisted by his friend William Burgh, an Irish MP who spent most of his life in York, becoming one of the Yorkshire Association’s prominent members. After moving to York in 1770, he became close to Mason, who described him to Walpole as ‘a young man of the quickest parts.’ He was deeply concerned with politics, taking great interest in the subject of liberty.

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91 *TEG*, 4.689-92.
In his preface to the 1783 edition of his georgic, Mason explains that the ‘Postscript’ he had provided in 1781 has been replaced by ‘a copious and complete Commentary, which the partiality of a very ingenious and learned friend has induced him to write.’ Burgh’s intention, as he writes in the preface to his commentary, is ‘To mark out the connexion, to point out the principles, and […] to extend the application of the precepts delivered by the poet.’ Should his ambition fail, ‘my first pride’, he asserts, ‘will receive its ample satisfaction from seeing my name thus publicly connected with that of Mr. Mason.’

The partnership of Mason and Burgh, poetry and prose supporting each other, emphasised the value and power of literary collaboration. Burgh’s assertion that he merely wishes to elucidate Mason’s didacticisms, however, falls short of the truth. Burgh had attached himself and his views to a respected literary name, and so ensured himself an audience for any political beliefs he should care to express.

Given the nature of the poetic text, which is permeated with politics, it is hard to see how Burgh could have avoided adding some political views of his own. Indeed, the real interest in Burgh’s additions arises from such comment. At the beginning of his Commentary, he expresses his support for Mason’s desire to persuade readers from the seductions of the ‘sumptuous art’ that now ‘solicits the vulgar’ and ‘obtains a precedence.’ ‘To reform this vicious taste’, he writes, ‘is the great Purpose of the Poet.’ The ideas of the Tory gardener appeal to him no more than they do to Mason. It is in his commentary on Books Two and Four, however, that Burgh is unable to resist the expression of overt political feeling.

Book Two ended with the story of Abdalonus. Its lesson is, Burgh indicates, that ‘the well-disposed mind, abstracted from the pursuits of the world’, will abandon ‘every private indulgence’ at the prospect of ‘restoring prosperity to our country, or extending the happiness of our species.’ In the following paragraph, Burgh expatiates on the desirability of gardening and agriculture subsisting together, use and beauty in one. Suddenly, however, the Whig in Burgh takes over. The blessing of such an existence, he asserts, means that ‘the Gardener’

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93 Works.1, pp. 203, 316.
94 Ibid, 1, p.321.
becomes one who ‘is an universal friend […] who vindicates his equality in an equal state, and strenuously opposes himself to the unconstitutional encroachments of aristocratic or monarchical power.’ For Burgh, as for Mason, the true gardener can only subscribe to such a view. He is surely here also implying that a king of England, his country’s ‘Gardener’, should himself, as Abdalonimus was, become a ‘universal friend’, beloved by all. The description failed miserably, for a Whig, to apply to George the Third.

As his commentary on the fourth book ends, Burgh discourses trenchantly on the differing political contexts in which Mason wrote the first and last books of his poem. Having just, in restrained terms, explicated Mason’s verse concerning the placing of buildings in congruent positions in the garden, and made his claim that to ‘elucidate’ Mason’s didacticisms ‘is all that I have attempted’, he abandons restraint for personal polemic. Book Four, he writes, was written when Britain ‘lay oppressed beneath the weight of an immoral, peculating, a sanguinary, and desolating system.’ Burgh seems to create his own political springboard, launching himself upwards on wings of pejorative epithet.

It is Burgh who takes control of the text’s finale and closes a political circle. In completing his fourth book, Mason had expressed his despair at the current state of the nation, and his hope for a different future:

At this ill-omen’d hour, when Rapine rides
In titled triumph; when Corruption waves
Her banners broadly in the face of day,
And shews th’indignant world the host of slaves
She turns from Honour’s standard. Patient there,
Yet not desponding, shall the sons of Peace
Await the day, when, smarting with his wrongs,
Old England’s Genius wakes; when with him wakes
That plain integrity, contempt of gold,
Disdain of slav’ry, liberal awe of rule
Which fixt the rights of people, peers, and prince,
And on them founded the majestic pile
Of BRITISH FREEDOM; bad fair Albion rise
The scourge of tyrants; sovereign of the seas…

95 Works, 1.pp. 351, 353.
96 Ibid, pp.373-4.
97 Ibid, 4.675-688
'Plain integrity’ is the key to Mason’s list of the qualities that define a Britain temporarily lost to its meaning.

It falls to Burgh, however, to articulate a happier ending. He signed his Commentary on May the thirtieth, 1782. In the previous October, Yorktown had fallen to the colonists. Such was the significance of the victory that Lord North considered the war now over: at the king’s insistence it continued. North’s majority in the Commons fell, and in February 1782 Parliament voted to end the conflict. Four weeks later North resigned, to be replaced by a coalition of the foremost Whigs in opposition, those grouped about Lord Rockingham and Lord Chatham. ‘It is reserved for me’, Burgh writes as his contribution ends, ‘to conclude this Commentary in a happier hour: when a great and unexpected ministerial revolution gives us good reason to hope that the sword which was drawn to obliterate the rights of mankind [...] will soon hide its disappointed and guilty edge in its scabbard. [...] I [...] only [...] ask of Heaven to [...] teach us with a manly and patriot pride [...] to aim at lifting our country to that superiority in genuine Arts, which we have so lately begun to vindicate to her in just and honourable Arms.’\(^98\) The striking notes of oratory seem to leap at the reader from the page.

**MASON AND SLAVERY**

In these examples, there is a sense of a political feeling in Burgh that can hardly be contained. There is a sense, too, that for him intense political discourse can best be rendered, notwithstanding his admiration of his friend’s poem, in the immediate language of prose. The poetical language in which Mason tells the story of Abdalonimus, and in which at the end of Book Four he expresses disgust ‘At this ill-omen’d hour, when Rapine rides/ In titled triumph; when Corruption waves/ Her banners broadly in the face of day’, is perhaps, for Burgh, simply not enough. Or perhaps he only wished to emphasise Mason’s poetic politicisings, for which he felt such sympathy, with his prose additions. It is in prose that the two men come most closely together. In further notes to Book Four and its

\(^{98}\) Langford, pp. 554-5; *Works*, 1, pp. 374-5.
Commentary, contributed by both Mason and Burgh, the latter writes that ‘I choose here to reprint the two paragraphs’ of Mason’s ‘postscript to the first edition of his Poem’, for the ‘mere satisfaction of declaring my own concurrence with the sentiments they convey.’\(^9\) It is in his postscript, of course, that Mason avows his allegiance, in the face of ‘Rapine’ and ‘Corruption’, to ‘THE PARTY OF HUMANITY.’

The final book of *The English Garden* was published two years after the formation of the Association to which Mason would devote so much energy. As I shall show in the following chapter, it is at this point that Mason’s poetic energy began to diminish. During these later years, it is through the medium of prose that Mason made one of his most powerful contributions to reform. Burgh was a campaigner for the abolition of slavery, a cause to which Mason and his colleagues in the Yorkshire Association subscribed. Through their involvement with this body, the two men became friendly with William Wilberforce, for whom Mason helped to arrange several anti-slavery meetings in Yorkshire. In 1793 he wrote to Wilberforce that ‘You deserve all the praises due to a true Christian and a good Man for persevering so strenuously as you do against such a Whirlpool of Iniquity as the present times exhibit.’\(^10\) He and Wilberforce would remain friends until his own death in 1797.

In the eighteenth century, as Sharpe and Zwicker write, ‘slavery wrenched the veil from politeness to expose commerce and commodification in their most […] dehumanizing form.’ The force of Mason’s feelings about slavery found a poetic vent in the ode he wrote in 1788 to commemorate the centenary of William and Mary’s arrival in Britain. The ode celebrates the return of ‘freedom in her native charms/ […] Recall’d by Britain’s voice, restored by Nassau’s arms.’ In the final stanza, however, Mason, in Freedom’s voice, elucidates his view on slavery. How, he asks:

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\(^9\) Ibid, p.423.  
\(^10\) Barr and Ingamells, pp. 21, 19.
May then that nation hope to claim
The glory of the Christian name,
That loads fraternal tribes with bondage worse than death?

Tell them, they vainly grace, with festive joy,
The day that freed them from Oppression’s rod,
At Slavery’s mart who barter and who buy
The image of their God.

It is as if the initial eulogy of Mason’s ode transforms itself into a conduit for his heartfelt anger. As he feels and writes, he steps outside party politics. The Tory Samuel Johnson, who had little love for Mason, felt similarly about slavery, as James Boswell tells us. Where this subject was concerned, the only appropriate party to belong to was Mason’s ‘Party of Humanity.’

The subject of slavery, however, occupied only the final stanza of Mason’s ode. It had been through the powerful prose of oratory, from the pulpit of York Minster, that he publicly clarified his anti-slavery stance, using his role as Precentor of the Minster to further the cause. Early in 1788 he preached a sermon on ‘God the universal and equal father of all mankind’, for which he used the New Testament text, ‘For we are also his offspring.’ Its importance is demonstrable: it is the only sermon that was published before several were collected into Mason’s Works of 1811. Its purpose was ‘to promote a Petition to Parliament, then under signature, for the Abolition of the AFRICAN SLAVE TRADE.’ It is a powerfully felt and articulated tract, in which Mason deplores the ‘opinion, which, resting itself on argument that can go no deeper than the very surface and tincture of the skin, has led many, who yet call themselves Christian, to treat beings of the same divine origin with themselves, even worse than they think themselves permitted to treat the beasts that perish.’ ‘Fraternal hands and christian lit the flame’, as this churchman had written about the atrocity at Kingston. Four years later, in 1792, he ‘exhorted the Minster congregation ‘to renew their petitions for the Abolition.’’ In the same year, he spoke on abolition at Rotherham. Mason’s involvement with abolition also had a practical aspect: over a decade before preaching the sermon, he had revealed his

commitment by baptising Benjamin Moor, a young black American, in the Minster. ¹⁰²

Mason was an involved and committed reformer who used his public life and writing to foreground a deeply felt desire for social and political change. His views were mediated through several genres, including ode, drama, georgic and prose, the immediacy of the last pressed into service as a means by which he could publicly reveal the intensity of his abolitionist beliefs. Nor was his social concern with slavery alone. In the same year that he preached his sermon, he published a paper, Animadversions on the Present Government of the York Lunatic Asylum, which publicised his anxiety about conditions there. He was also involved in organising money given to prisoners in York Castle into funds to secure their release. ¹⁰³

In the light of such passionate concern, it is unsurprising that Mason turned, in 1773, to the composition of satire, a genre that offered a more precise focus for comment on the political scene.

CHAPTER THREE: MASON AND SATIRE

INTRODUCTION

Mason began writing satire seriously comparatively late in his poetic career, in the decade during which the war with the American colonies began, at a time of increasing Whig anxiety about a perceived advance towards monarchical absolutism. In 1779 Walpole, who had encouraged Mason in his satirical enterprise, added notes to the main body of the satires, in an attempt to ensure that future readers would properly understand the villainies of the age as they were described in the poems, and the identities of their perpetrators. Like Burgh, Walpole wished no stone to remain unturned, particularly any reference to political corruption in what he saw as ‘a prostitute and sinking Nation.’ So Mason once more found an eager collaborator.

In this chapter I shall briefly examine the progress of satire from the late seventeenth century to the time of Pope’s death, and the context in which Mason began to write his own. I shall consider the effect on his writing in the genre of his friendship with Gray, the satire of Pope and Churchill, and the contemporary interest in notions of ‘freedom’ and ‘slavery’, all of which influenced his writerly life. I shall explore several of the satires, and demonstrate their unrecognised value in the context of late eighteenth-century literature.

FROM DRYDEN TO POPE

In A Discourse concerning the original and progress of satire (1693), Dryden had laid down rules for satirical writing which would influence eighteenth-century satirists. For him, such writing is a moral task, not to be sullied by inappropriate choice of subject or style. The satirist should ‘give his reader some one precept of moral virtue, or […] caution him against one particular vice or folly.’ Nor can this task be undertaken without some finesse, for ‘the nicest

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1 Toynbee, p.32.
and most delicate touches of satire consist in fine raillery […] How easy it is to call rogue and villain, and that wittily!²

Dryden, himself a subject of personally-directed satire, abhors the makers of lampoons, that ‘dangerous sort of weapon […] for the most part unlawful.’ Satirists, he believes, ‘have no moral right on the reputation of other men.’ For Dryden, there are only two sets of circumstances in which lampoon can be justified. One is revenge, ‘when we have been […] notoriously abused, and can make ourselves no other reparation; the other is when an individual is become a public nuisance […] ‘Tis an action of virtue to make examples of vicious men.’ Dryden’s injured self speaks out through his promotion of ‘revenge’ as a justification for personalised satire. He is quick, however, to qualify his statement. Aware of his own human need for God’s forgiveness, he admits a parallel necessity to forgive the actions of his fellow man.³

Aspects of satire continued to be issues of debate. Should satire attack the vice or the man? Was the ‘tragical’ style of Juvenal or the ‘comical’ of Horace more effective for the writer of modern satire? Lord Shaftesbury asserted that ‘The only Manner left, in which Criticism can have its just Force among us, is the ancient Comick, of which kind were the first Roman […] Satyrick Pieces.’ Dennis, though concurring, identified a locus suitable for the perusal of Juvenalian satire. The ‘Tragick satire’ of Juvenal displays ‘the Violent Emotions and Vehement Style of Tragedy’, Dennis writes. It was a manner surely ‘more acceptable to Universities and Cloisters’, to ‘Recluse and Contemplative Men.’ ‘The Comick Satirist’, on the other hand, ‘ […] owes no small Part of his Excellence to his Experience […] to the Knowledge of the Conversation and Manners of the Men of the World.’ ⁴

³ Ibid, pp. 159-61.
⁴ The satires of Horace (65-8 BC) contain ‘no dangerous invective against powerful individuals or serious vices’, but are written with ‘mellow humour’ and ‘gentle irony’, whereas those of Juvenal (2nd. century AD), are ‘notable for their bitter ironical humour [and] power of invective […] the saeva indignatio of Jonathan Swift is perhaps closest to the spirit of Juvenal.’ (Howatson and Chilvers, pp. 301, 480); Anthony Ashley Cooper, 3rd. Earl of Shaftesbury, ‘An Essay on the Freedom of Wit and Humour’ in Characteristicks of men, manners, opinion, times, 3 vols (1711), p. 258 <http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/ECCO> [accessed 29 October 2009]; John
In 1742 Joseph Trapp published his *Lectures on Poetry*: writing about satire, he asserts that ‘the genteel Jokes of Horace […] are less affecting than the […] rage of Juvenal’; moreover, it is ‘fairer’ to attack ‘the Vice, rather than the Man.’ In this year, the fourth book of Pope’s *Dunciad* was published. Like Dryden, Pope had been the subject of personal attack, for his religion, his politics, and his perceived sense of superiority. In the *Dunciad* he retaliated, satirising his enemies, those he saw as ‘uncreating’ writers, despoilers of Britain’s literary glory. Chief of these, Theobald, had dared to criticise Pope’s edition of Shakespeare. In Pope’s revision of his poem, published in 1743, Theobald’s place is taken by Colley Cibber, a successful if uninspiring actor and dramatist who, finding himself portrayed in the fourth book of the Dunciad, had written a letter to Pope, inquiring why a man as harmless as himself should be treated in this manner.\(^5\)

Cibber’s letter encapsulates much of the criticism levelled at Pope as a satirist. Pope wrote *The Dunciad* believing that he had been ‘notoriously abused.’ For many, however, he was guilty of disregarding Dryden’s claim that satire should be reserved for the truly ‘vicious’ among men. Nor does he take Dryden’s tempered view on poetic revenge. The *Dunciad* attacks bad writers, who were frequently poor: ‘Here in one bed two shiv’ring sisters lye/ The cave of Poverty and Poetry/ This, the Great Mother [the goddess Dulness] dearer held than all.’ Cibber, pouncing on both issues, asks Pope what he has gained from publishing his poem other than ‘a Victory over a parcel of poor Wretches […] so weak, it was almost Cowardice to conquer them.’\(^6\) Cibber’s, not Pope’s, he suggests, is the rational voice: unlike the poet’s, it is tinged with compassion. ‘How easy it is to call rogue and villain’, he seems to reiterate, ‘and that wittily!’

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\(^6\) Dunciad , 1.31-2, in Butt and others, pp. 63-4; A Letter from Mr. Cibber, p. 11.
Following the *Dunciad*’s publication in 1729, Francis Atterbury predicted that Pope’s critics would ‘endeavour to hurt him [...] upon the head of good-nature and probity; allowing him all kind of advantages in poetry.’ Cibber’s comment on Pope in his letter exemplified this prediction: ‘How much brighter still might [Pope’s] Genius shine, could it be equally inspired by Good-nature.’ He criticises Pope’s self-presentation of moral rectitude: ‘In your Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot’, he writes, referring to Pope’s description of himself in that poem as a sought-after example to literary aspirants, and a tender son, ‘you slily hook in a whole Hatful of Virtues to your own Character.’ ‘Well-natur’d Garth inflam’d with early praise/ And Congreve lov’d, and Swift endur’d my Lays’, Pope had written of his young self; his task at the time of writing was to assist his remaining parent in her sickness, to ‘With lenient Arts extend a Mother’s breath/ Make Languor smile, and smooth the bed of Death.’ The ‘true Satyrist’, Cibber writes, possesses an integrity unknown to such a self-regarding poet. A writer who comments through satire on his society, as Pope has done, appoints himself a ‘Universal Censor.’ Such a man must therefore be the ‘master of [...] exemplary Virtues.’

Having begun his letter with a deliberate air of rationality, Cibber ends it with a lambasting prediction of Pope’s exclusion from society if he fails to mend his ways. If, however, Pope can improve himself as a man, he will also become a better poet. It was a view that had been promoted by Steele in the *Tatler* in 1710. ‘Good Nature’, he writes, ‘is an essential Quality in a Satyrist’, keeping ‘the Mind in Equanimity [...] never let[ting] an Offence [...] throw a Man out of his Character.’ It was a template to which, for many, Pope failed to conform.

Almost a decade earlier, in *The Christian Hero: an argument proving that no principles but those of religion are sufficient to make a great man*, Steele had indicated a different threat to be feared from the pens of men of ‘Wit.’ His *Tatler* essay pointed to the dependence of authorial effectiveness on the writer’s

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8 *Tatler*, 242 (24-26 October 1710), in *Selections from the Tatler and the Spectator of Steele and Addison*, ed. by Angus Ross (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982), p. 182.
good nature. In *The Christian Hero*, however, he indicates the dangerous power of men of ‘Wit’, whose persuasiveness can ‘misplace our Love, our Hatred, our Desires and Aversions on improper Objects, so that […] we find truth discolour’d to us.’

Pope was widely criticised for the perceived ‘Malignity at Heart’ referred to in Steele’s *Tatler* essay and Cibber’s letter. Samuel Richardson, acclaimed contributor to the new genre of the novel, expressed a different criticism. For Richardson, Pope’s attachment to the classical writers rendered him one of a band of ‘tame imitator[s]’, mere ‘copier[s] of portraits.’ The notion of the superiority of ‘originality’ in writing, in contrast to ‘imitation’, was foregrounded in *Conjectures on Original Composition*, by Richardson’s friend Edward Young. In 1756, Joseph Warton had published his *Essay on the Writings and Genius of Pope*, which he dedicated to Young. For Warton, Pope was a writer lacking the ‘creative and glowing Imagination’ of a true poet. In the *Conjectures*, published three years later, Young himself asserted that though a gifted poet, Pope was ‘an avowed Professor of Imitation’, preferring to ‘triumph in the old world, rather than look out for the new.’ Young’s statement consigned Pope to a worthy, rather than inspired, department of literary history.

At Pope’s death in 1744, however, the field had been left, as Barnard writes, ‘in the possession of Pope’s admirers.’ Five days after Pope’s demise, an anonymous *Elegy by a Friend* typically lamented ‘The brightest Ornament of Albion gone/ Of the poetick World th’illustrious Sun.’ ‘Mr. Pope’s fine poetry’, wrote William Ayre several months later, ‘perhaps never will have any Equal in our Language.’

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It was in this context of praise for the recently dead Pope that Mason composed *Musaeus* in 1744. By the time he began writing his own satires in the 1770s, critics such as Warton and Young had promoted a different definition of poetry’s ‘Illustrious Sun.’ Mason was well aware of the new influence of ‘sensibility’ on contemporary writing, as his own poetry showed. And though his satire was to demonstrate that he was familiar with the comments by writers such as Steele upon both the genre, and the character of those who composed it, he had no intention of abandoning his position as an admirer of Pope, or his wish to be seen as the poet’s worthy heir.

**THE BEGINNING OF MASON’S SATIRE**

In his monody *Musaeus* Mason claimed a place for himself as Pope’s descendant, speaking through the dying poet’s mouth, and investing his speech, as he interrupts the address of ‘Thyrisis’, with a waspish tenor that might be imagined to belong to that famous purveyor of satiric verse. Almost thirty years later, encouraged by Walpole, Mason would himself turn his attention to satire, and place his compositions in the public eye. He would begin with *An Heroic Epistle to Sir William Chambers*, a riposte to Sir William Chambers’ *Dissertation on Oriental Gardening*, which to Mason and Walpole was an attack upon the nature of the British Constitution itself in the face of a feared looming despotism, and follow it with the *An Heroic Postscript to the Public*, a work encouraged by the popularity of his initial satire. Throughout the 1770s, he continued to deliver satiric salvos at the king, and those who supported the royalist view on the American war. So, to the political comment of *The English Garden*, and his outspoken Pindaric ode on the acquittal of Keppel, written as the decade was ending, he added the pointed observation of satire.

Mason’s georgic and his Pindarics were inspired by ancient forms. Now he took up another of those forms, mediated through the example of Pope, himself a poet inspired and enriched by the example of the classical writers. In 1757, Mason’s friend and mentor Richard Hurd had published *A Letter to Mr. Mason, on the Marks of Imitation*. In it, Hurd expatiates on the value of the classical heritage for English writers. It is evident that in *A Letter* he is re-engaging in a previous
discourse with Mason, who ‘understand[s] so well,’ Hurd writes, ‘in what manner the Poets are used to imitate each other.’ Mason has evidently previously asserted to Hurd that ‘The English […] are original thinkers.’ Hurd concedes that they may have a ‘larger share’ of ‘Genius.’ Even so, they are assisted by ‘the discipline of art and the helps of Imitation.’ For Hurd, ‘the Greek and Roman stamp is still visible in every work of genius, that has taken with the public.’

Mason had written his first Pindaric ode, *On Expecting to Return to Cambridge*, ten years before. In it, he set very personal subject matter within an ancient framework, synthesising the contemporary and the classical in a new way. His georgic, concerning a subject previously untreated in this manner, had been inspired by an ancient poetic structure. From the triads of Pindar, and the blank verse of his georgic, he now turned to the satire made notable by classical writers such as Horace and Juvenal, and inherited by Dryden and Pope.

The satires of the 1770s were not Mason’s first attempt at the genre. Early in 1758, he had sent Gray a satirical *Ode to Mr. Jolliffe*, asking both for Gray’s response, and his promise that he would show it to no one: the Ode ‘is that upon which I trust all my future fame will be founded.’ Jolliffe, Mason explains, is a purveyor of the fashionable art of making silhouettes, who ‘takes profiles with a candle better than anybody. All White’s have sat to him, not to mention Prince Edward.’ Criticising the actions of Britain’s failed military leaders, Mason writes:

Let connoisseurs of colouring talk,
What is it best but skin?
You, Jolliffe, at one master-stroke
Display the void within.

The burden of Mason’s *Ode* anticipates the satires that would follow fifteen and more years later. Gray’s response to the poem was positive and playful: ‘I am extremely pleased with your fashionable Ode’, he writes, ‘I have observed your orders, but I want to shew it everybody […] You are in the road to fame; but do

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not tell your name at first, whenever you may venture to do afterwards.'

Mason was, of course, already known to the world through the publication of poetry and his tragedy, *Elfrida*. He now gained Gray’s approval as the creator of a poem in a different genre, at which Gray himself, though his output was small, was to excel. The correspondence of the two men respecting the *Ode* was the beginning of a concern with satire that would live on after Gray’s death.

**MASON, GRAY AND SATIRE**

In view of Mason’s connection with Gray, it is interesting to consider the timing of his later serious foray into satire. In 1771 Gray died, leaving Mason executor of his will and curator of his papers. In 1775, Mason’s *Memoirs* of Gray, containing an edition of his poems, were published. In 1773, the year after the first book of *The English Garden* came out, Mason published his first satire, *An Heroic Epistle*, his rebuttal of the gardening notions of Sir William Chambers.

In a letter to Walpole written in May 1772, however, Mason had expressed a different intention. ‘I mean to employ all the time that my frittered days will allow in preparing Mr. Gray’s papers and my account of them for the press. As for gardens, etc., I leave them to the Knight of the Polish star’- a reference to Chambers- ‘and his modern Henry’, George the Third.’

This intention was broken by the composition of Mason’s satire, and its publication in the following year. At the end of 1773 Walpole wrote to him, concerning the publication of Gray’s *Memoirs*, that ‘I think you determined not to reprint the lines on Lord Holland. I hope it is now a resolution.’ His reference was to Gray’s satirical poem *On Lord Holland’s Seat near Margate, Kent*, thought by modern scholars to have been written in the summer of 1768. Though Gray had originally not intended to publish these lines, a satiric indictment of a mendacious peer, they appeared, without his permission, in *The*
New Foundling Hospital for Wit in 1769. Mason may have been the conduit in this matter: in December of the previous year Gray had complained in a letter to Mason that Mason had shared his knowledge of the poem with ‘that leaky Mortal Palgrave, who never conceals anything he is trusted with.’ Walpole’s anxiety about their possible appearance in the Memoirs was that a further publication of them now would ‘aggravate the misery’ of Lord Holland, who was dying, and do little for the reputation of Gray himself, as they did not give ‘a high idea of his powers.’

The subject of Gray’s short satire was Henry Fox, who was made Lord Holland in 1763. In the 1750s, Gray had been an admirer of Fox, Secretary of State in Newcastle’s government from 1755. In an unsent letter of 1756, Walpole had written to Fox that ‘I know you think Mr. Gray the greatest poet we have and I know he thinks you the greatest man we have.’ When Fox was made Paymaster General in the following year, and began to make huge financial profit from the post, Gray’s opinion changed. Lonsdale writes that ‘Gray followed political events at this period with keen interest’, and that Walpole was his well-placed informer.

Mason omitted Lord Holland’s Seat from the Memoirs. What he did do, however, was to produce satire of his own. Gray’s poem is only twenty-four lines long, but it is pithy and trenchant, well worth exposure to the public eye. In his musings on the question of whether to include Gray’s satire in the Memoirs, did Mason determine, as a kind of homage to Gray, to produce some satire of which his friend might have approved, to grasp this particular weapon, which Gray could no longer wield, but which his Whig sympathies had inspired him to put to use at a time when he was deeply concerned with the behaviour of parliamentarians? ‘I really interest myself in these transactions’, Gray wrote to Walpole in 1763, ‘and cannot persuade myself that quae supra nos, nihil ad nos.’ [‘Those things which are above us, are nothing to us.’] Mason missed Gray’s presence as friend and mentor, as his poems indicate: could his satire have found

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15 Lewis, p.118 (1 December 1773); Toynbee and Whibley, III, p. 1052 (29 December 1768); see Lonsdale, pp. 259-264, for details of the poem’s history and disputed date of composition.
16 Lewis, XXX, p.127 (31 July 1756); Lonsdale, p.260.
a voice not only as a literary weapon carried on Gray’s behalf, but as a way of identifying, through politically targeted verse, with the dead poet?\textsuperscript{17}

Such an identification was an outcome of the publishing history of Gray’s poem. Shelburne, Rigby and Calcraft, once Fox’s cronies, are all named in line eighteen: ‘‘Ah’, said the sighing peer, ‘had Bute been true/ Nor Shelburne’s, Rigby’s, Calcraft’s friendship vain.’’ Shelburne, who was close to Fox, and his parliamentary ally, attempted to force Fox’s resignation as Paymaster General when Fox became Lord Holland. Rigby and Calcraft, both enriched, through Fox’s influence, by their positions as regimental agents responsible for pay, took Shelburne’s side. Lonsdale writes that, in subsequent publications of the poem, their names were altered, or misunderstood. Stephen Jones’ revised edition of Gray’s poems, published in 1800, suggested, according to Mitford in his own edition of 1814, a collection of identities based on Jones’ reading of Mason’s \textit{Heroic Epistle}. Lonsdale questions Mitford’s conclusion. If Mitford’s suggestion is correct, however, Jones’ choice indicates an understanding of the close political affiliation of Mason and Gray. Shelburne, Rigby and Calcraft, in Jones’ interpretation, become instead the abbreviations M…., R….and B…. Mitford cites these as Mungo, Rigby and Bradshaw, who were all named by Mason in the \textit{Heroic Epistle}: ‘The R-g-ys, -----‘s, Mungos, B-ds-ws there/ In straw-stuft effigy, shall kick the air.’\textsuperscript{18} So, early in the nineteenth century, the Whig friends became united in verse by means of the translation into satire of their political views.

\textsuperscript{17}Toynbee and Whibley, II, p. 817 (12 September 1763); Mason lamented the loss of Gray in Book 3 of \textit{The English Garden}: ‘He hears me not, nor ever more shall hear’ (3.17), and in his \textit{Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard in South Wales}, its title an echo of Gray’s own \textit{Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard}: ‘The pang, which parting Friendship gave/Thrills at my heart, and tells me he is gone.’ (\textit{Works}, 1, p.115).

\textsuperscript{18}On Lord Holland’s Seat near Margate, Kent, ll.17-18, in Lonsdale, pp.262-3; see also Stephen Jones’ 1800 edition of \textit{The Poetical Works of Thomas Gray… with some account of his life and writings. The whole carefully revised; and illustrated by notes}: ‘Nor M…’s, R…’s, B…’s friendship vain.’ <http://galenet/galegroup.com/servlet/ECCO> [accessed 14 October 2009]; John Mitford edited a collection of Gray’s poems in 1814, in which he followed Jones’ identification; \textit{Heroic Epistle}, ll. 95-6, in Toynbee, p.50. Walpole comments on these ‘Characters’ in his Notes: Rigby is ‘an active Instigator of the American War’; ‘Mungo’ is a nickname for Jeremiah Dyson, a most useful Tool of Lord Bute’; Bradshaw, ‘Son of a Smugler’, became the ‘Confident of Lord Grafton, and Spy on him to Lord Bute.’ (Toynbee, pp. 61-4).
The attention Mason and Walpole paid to satire during the 1770s is further emphasised by Walpole’s response, in 1774, to finding in his possession a copy of Gray’s earlier satiric poem *The Candidate*, which the author had ‘apparently given’ to Walpole, and ‘possibly circulated […] among his friends.’ Overcome with excitement- ‘I tell you, it is what I have searched for a thousand times, and had rather have found than the longitude’- Walpole immediately sent a copy to Mason who had, according to Lonsdale, heard Gray recite the poem, but had not seen it. As in the case of the lines on *Lord Holland’s Seat*, Mason did not print it in the *Memoirs*: ‘I think your decorum will not hold it proper to be printed in the life, nor would I have it’, Walpole wrote. ‘We will preserve copies.’ In his letter, Walpole also identified Mason with Gray as a supremely talented purveyor of satire. ‘I know but one man upon earth’, he asserted, ‘who could have written it, but Gray.’

The subject of Gray’s poem, ‘The Candidate’ himself, is ‘Jemmy Twitcher’, the Earl of Sandwich, who was also satirised by Mason in the *Heroic Epistle*: ‘See Jemmy Twitcher shambles; stop! Stop thief!/ He’s stolen the E[ar]l of D[e]nbig[h]’s handkerchief.’ Toynbee suggests that this description of ‘Jemmy Twitcher’ is a ‘reminiscence’ of lines from *The Candidate*: ‘Such a sheep-biting look, such a pick-pocket air/ […]/ Then he shambles and straddles so oddly.’ In Mason’s poem Sandwich is one of a cast of many; in Gray’s, he is the chief protagonist, satirised for his attempt to procure the High Stewardship of Cambridge University in 1764. The post was previously held by the Whig Lord Hardwicke; Sandwich was the favoured candidate of a king anxious to diminish Whig influence within the university. Sandwich was dissolute, however, and deeply disapproved of by Gray, whose ‘zeal in this cause’, according to Norton Nicholls, ‘inspired the verses full of pleasantry and wit’ of *The Candidate*.  

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19 Lewis, p. 168 (16 September 1774); ibid, n.169; Lonsdale, p.245.  
20 An *Heroic Epistle*, ll.125-6; Toynbee, n. 52:*The Candidate*, ll. 6-9, in Lonsdale, pp.248-9. Walpole writes that ‘Jemmy Twitcher’ was a ‘nickname for John Montagu Earl of Sandwich […] and conferred on him by the unanimous voice of an audience at the Beggar’s Opera, soon after his notorious Information against his comrade John Wilkes’ (Toynbee, p.68). In November 1763, Sandwich had ‘produced in the House of Lords’ a copy of Wilkes’ scandalous *Essay on Woman*, ‘and proceeded to indite him.’ Feeling about this betrayal was strong: at the performance to which Walpole refers, the audience applauded Macheath’s line, ‘That Jemmy Twitcher should peach me, I own surprises me’, applying it immediately to Sandwich (ed.’s note, p. 68). The Earl
Gray’s poem, drawing on Sandwich’s predilections, portrays the three Faculties of the university as elderly women considering the sexual advances of ‘sly Jemmy Twitcher.’ Ironically, the Faculty of ‘Divinity’ is the only one to respond willingly. ‘Never hang down your head, you poor penitent elf! Come, buss me, I’ll be Mrs. Twitcher myself’, she declares. The presence of the word ‘stitches’, a slang term for sexual intercourse, in the next and final couplet of the poem, was to cause consternation in those concerned for Gray’s reputation: ‘Damn ye both for a couple of Puritan bitches!/ He’s Christian enough that repents and that stitches.’

Both Mason and Walpole attempted to replace the couplet with one less offensive. ‘I think with you,’ Mason wrote to Walpole in October 1774, ‘that the lines ought to be altered.’ In the letter, he included his own effort at replacing them: ‘Damn ye both for two prim Puritanical saints!/ He’s Christian enough that both whores and repents (or) that drinks, whores and repents.’ The problem was finally resolved by omitting the final couplet in all public texts. It was eventually included in A. L. Poole’s printing of 1917.

Once more, Mason decided to exclude from his account of Gray’s life and works a satire by his friend which, given its contents, was seen by neither himself nor Walpole as giving ‘a high idea of [Gray’s] powers.’ The reputation of Gray would remain unsullied in the Memoirs by the suppression of his satire. The living Mason, however, bracketed with Gray by Walpole as a gifted satirist, who had heard and read his friend’s satirical offerings of the 1760s, continued to produce satire throughout the 1770s, as if, indeed, he wrote for himself and Gray. Mason was a literary collaborator with the living in the forms of Burgh and Walpole. He can be seen also, by means of his linear and contextual connection through satire with Gray, as a representative of, and collaborator with, the dead.

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of Denbigh was, in Walpole’s words, ‘a Tool and Spy of Lord Bute and the Court’ (p.69); Lonsdale, pp.243, 244.
21 Il.31-34 in Lonsdale, p. 251.
22 Lewis, p.171 (2 October 1774); Lonsdale, p. 246.
23 The Candidate eventually appeared, untitled, in The London Evening Post in February 1777, the final couplet omitted (Lonsdale, p. 246).
MASON AND CHURCHILL

It is likely that such a collaboration also contains an element of rising to a challenge. Gray’s *The Candidate* was written in 1764, the year in which Charles Churchill, leading satirist of the early 1760s, wrote his own poem *The Candidate*, similarly criticising Sandwich’s bid for the High Stewardship. The satires of Churchill, a fervent supporter of Wilkes, made common ground with the later ones of Mason in some of the figures they satirized. Churchill’s poem *The Author*, published in 1763, satirized Sandwich and John Shebbeare, the latter to become the addressee of one of Mason’s best satires, *An Epistle to Dr. Shebbeare*. Churchill satirized Sandwich again in *The Candidate* and *The Duellist*, both published in 1764. *The Duellist* also satirized Sir Fletcher Norton, the corrupt lawyer to whom, over a decade later, Mason would address a satiric ode.

Churchill’s Whiggish predilections, however, did not prevent him referring dismissively to Mason and Gray in *The Author*, and to Mason in *The Prophecy of Famine*. *The Author* is a defence of the power of the poet as it is exercised through the medium of satire, in the face of those seeking to undermine its force. Having claimed, echoing Pope, that ‘...Dulness rears aloft her throne/ [and] Lordly Vassals her wide Empire own’, he compares his country’s glorious past, ‘Where Heroes, Parent-like, the Poet view’d’, and ‘fair Freedom walk’d at large’, with its degenerate present, in which ‘the daring Muse’ is bid not to ‘dare to traffick in ambitious strains.’ Here, Churchill rises to the defence of his art, and his own undaunted willingness to wield the weapon of satire. ‘Should an afflicted Country, aw’d by man/ Of slavish principles, demand his pen’, the ‘English poet’ will rise to the occasion: ‘with what pride I see the titled slave/ [...] smart[ing] beneath the stroke that Satire gave.’ Such a vision, however, belongs chiefly to former times. ‘What are Poets now?’ Churchill asks, ‘as slavish those/ Who deal in Verse, as those who deal in Prose.’

His implication, of course, as the ‘I’ who rejoices in the power of satire, is that it is Churchill alone who continues the honourable tradition of the poets of the past.

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24 *The Author*, pp. 3-6 <http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/ECCO> [accessed 11 November 2009].
Churchill names two modern poets whose art, he implies, has descended into ‘quaint-wrought Ode’ and ‘Sonnet pertly trim’, and whose faint-hearted example is to be avoided. The poets are Mason and Gray. ‘Am I’, Churchill asks, to ‘Along the Church-way path complain with Gray/ Or dance with Mason on the first of May?’ The poem by Gray to which he refers is of course The Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard; a book of elegies by Mason was printed in 1763, and the 1750s had seen the publication of, as well as Elfrida and Caractacus, a book of his odes in 1756.

Various pieces by Mason, including the Ode to A Water-Nymph, were consistently reprinted in Dodsley’s Collection. In A Prophecy of Famine, Churchill takes issue with authors who write about ‘Trifles’ in the terms of the past: ‘Nymphs, Naiads, Nereids, Dryads, Satyrs, Fauns/ Sport in our floods, and trip it o’er our lawns.’ For such ‘bards’, he goes on, ‘a wreath shall Mason bring/ Lin’d with the softest down of Folly’s wing.’

Churchill’s references to Gray and Mason are the result of his belief that, unlike an ‘uncouth’ poet such as himself, who ‘Taste with contempt beholds’, they are insufficiently committed to the power of their art. Churchill is echoing, and is surely influenced by, the publication in 1760 of Two Odes by George Colman and Churchill’s drinking companion Robert Lloyd. Two Odes are parodies of Gray’s Elegy and Mason’s Ode to Memory, the latter of which becomes in their version an Ode to Oblivion. The authors have great fun with both poems, mocking Gray’s and Mason’s use of antiquated diction, seen as an absurdity by Lloyd and Colman. They also mock the poems’ references to primitive cultures, and their authors’ reliance on poetic techniques such as alliteration, all applauded by the ‘fickle Goddess’, ‘tyrant Fashion.’ ‘Heard ye the din of Modern Rhymers’ bray?’ they ask. ‘It was cool M…n: or warm G…y/ Involv’d in tenfold smoke.’ And though their very funny parodies are written in a different

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25 The Author, pp. 6-7.
spirit from that of Churchill’s Pope-like defence of satire, the outcome for Mason and Gray is similar: here are two Whig poets involving themselves in outworn irrelevancies. A poet such as Churchill, on the other hand, has allied his art with the crucial concerns of his country.

In view of the personal comment in these publications, it is notable that Gray produced *The Candidate* in 1764, the year after *The Author* and *The Prophecy of Famine* were published. He was, of course, genuinely angered at Sandwich’s candidacy. When Mason began his decade-long satiric career in the early 1770s, Gray was dead, and Churchill had died nine years before. *The English Garden* became a political text, but it was begun in 1767, as a distraction from Mason’s grief over his dead wife. *An Heroic Epistle*, however, sprang from his real anger at courtly corruption and machination, and was proof that here was a poet, armed with satire, willing to enter the lists against such activity on behalf of himself and Gray. Both were perceived by Churchill as avoiders of the moral poetic task.

Now Mason took that task upon himself.

*An Heroic Epistle* was received enthusiastically by its readers, reaching eleven editions in the first year. In contrast, the *Rosciad*, Churchill’s most popular poem, ran to eight editions in two years. Draper comments on the widespread influence of *An Heroic Epistle*: ‘Many more epistles, ‘heroic’, ‘elegiac’, ‘familiar’, and ‘satirical’ saw the light in the 1780s and ‘90s, most of them more or less under Mason’s influence.’ It was read with approval by Goldsmith and Johnson, though the latter is satirised in it, and by the king himself, until he discovered that he was unflatteringly referred to in the text. In his Preface to *An Archaeological Epistle*, a parody of the Chatterton ‘Rowley’ poems, addressed to the President of the Society of Antiquaries, and published in 1782, Mason himself refers to *An Heroic Epistle*’s ‘numerous host of imitators.’ Its author must have believed himself vindicated as an effective satirist.

Indeed, Mason explicitly places himself in a tradition from both Pope and Churchill, stating his satiric intention, and his worthy status as a writer of satire,

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within his verse. ‘In me the nation plac’d its tuneful hope/ A second Churchill, or at least a Pope’, he writes in An Epistle to Dr. Shebbeare. 29 The placing of first Churchill, and secondly ['at least a'] Pope, in the lines, is ironic: for Mason, Pope was the admired influence, Churchill the challenger who had belittled Mason and Gray, and must be answered.

Mason’s naming of Pope and Churchill in the context of his own production as a satirist is apposite. Encouraged by the popularity of An Heroic Epistle, which had been lent piquancy by the withholding of the writer’s name, Mason published An Heroic Postscript a year later. In it, he expresses gratitude to his readers for ‘the sun-shine of the Public praise’ which An Heroic Epistle had received on its publication. Using the vocabulary of Pope and Churchill, he goes on to declare, as they had done, the power of satire, ‘To cut down Dunces, whereso’er they spring.’ ‘Tremble ye Fools I scorn, ye Knaves I hate’, he writes. ‘I know the vigour of [satire’s] eagle wings/ I know thy strains can pierce the ears of Kings.’ The last line is a reference to George III’s reaction on discovering that he himself was satirised in An Heroic Epistle.30

The final lines of An Heroic Postscript adopt Churchill’s declared attitude as a satirist. Churchill, alone, as he portrays himself, against his country’s ills, had stated his willingness to ‘tear his lab’ring lungs, strain his hoarse throat/ And raise his voice beyond the trumpet’s note’ in defence of his country against ‘men/ Of slavish principles.’ His contemptuous reference to Gray and Mason in The Author is followed by four lines between inverted commas, as if spoken by those two feeble-minded poets:

“All sacred is the name and power of kings,
All States and Statesmen are those mighty Things
Which, howso’er they out of course may roll,
Were never meant for Poets to controul.”31

29 Shebbeare, ll.28-9 in Toynbee, p. 105.
30 An Heroic Postscript, ll. 6,26,30-32 inToynbee, pp.74-5. Walpole wrote that ‘On the publication of the Heroic Epistle, His Majesty sent for it, and began to read it to Sir William […] till presently perceiving his own share in the ridicule, he threw it away in a passion.’ (Toynbee, pp. 53-4).
31 The Author, p.7.
Mason rallies to the defence of himself and Gray by re-stating Churchill’s avowal of service to his country, adopting Churchill’s mantle. In *An Heroic Postscript*, he writes of himself, as its composer, that ‘Whate’er his fame or fate, on this depend/ He is, and means to be, his country’s friend’, the true ‘English poet’ of Churchill’s declaration. In *An Heroic Epistle*, he writes, he ‘sport[ed] with Chinese gardens’, but ‘If real danger’, created by ‘hireling Peers’, should ‘threat fair Freedom’s reign’ in the face of the ‘People’, the poet will retaliate with all the force of satire. Having begun his poem with a good-natured dedication of his ‘grateful lays’ to an appreciative public, Mason ends with an uncompromising statement of satirical intent: should

They, who honour’d by the People’s choice,
Against that People lift their Rebel voice…
If this they dare; the thunder of his song,
Rolling in deep-ton’d energy along,
Shall strike, with Truth’s dread bolt, each miscreant’s name….
His Muse’s vengeance shall your crimes pursue,
Stretch you on Satire’s rack, and bid you lie
Fit garbage for the hell-hound, Infamy.\(^{32}\)

‘What are Poets now?’ Churchill had asked. In this passage, Mason simultaneously rises to the question’s challenge, and states his adoption of the role Churchill had made for himself, of defender of his country’s freedom. Churchill’s ‘afflicted Country’ becomes Mason’s ‘People’; Churchill’s ‘men/ Of slavish principles’ are Mason’s ‘miscreant[s]’, the ‘hireling Peers’; Churchill’s vow to ‘tear his lab’ring lungs’ to save his nation is the ‘thunder’ of Mason’s ‘song.’ And as we have seen, throughout the 1770s Mason raised his poetic voice, not only in satire, but also in ode and georgic, against perceived political machination. Churchill’s picture of Mason ‘danc[ing]… on the first of May’, was to prove misplaced.

**MASON AND POPE**

Unlike Mason, Churchill confined himself to the medium of satire. Their great forebear Pope, like Mason a writer in several genres, had famously written, in his

\(^{32}\) *AHP*, II.87-96, 5.95-116.
Note to the *Epilogue to the Satires, Dialogue Two* (1738), that ‘This was the last poem of the kind printed by our author, with a resolution to publish no more […] bad men were grown so shameless and so powerful that Ridicule was become as unsafe as it was ineffectual.’ Both Churchill and Mason took up Pope’s baton. Mason’s satiric verse of the 1770s is laced with Popean text, as if he wanted not only to identify with Pope by such means, but also to remind readers of the worth of Pope’s moral stance, articulated through his satires. For Mason, Pope could not be left to ‘triumph in the old world’, but should be a presence in the new. *An Heroic Epistle* carries echoes of the *Epilogue to the Satires*, the *Epistles* to Burlington and Bathurst, and *The Rape of the Lock*, and contains Mason’s admiring acknowledgment of Pope’s satiric powers. Pope’s words and thinking recur in Mason’s poem, as if he is brought in as an assistant of unassailable merit in Mason’s rejection of Chambers and his recommendations from Chinese gardening:

There was a time, in Esher’s peaceful grove,
When Kent and Nature vied for Pelham’s love,
That Pope beheld them with auspicious smile,
And own’d that Beauty blest their mutual toil.
Mistaken Bard! could such a pair design
Scenes fit to live in thy immortal line?
Hads’t thou been born in this enlighten’d day,
Felt, as we feel, Taste’s oriental ray,
Thy satire sure had given them both a stab,
Called Kent a Driveller, and the Nymph a Drab.
For what is Nature? Ring her changes round,
Her three flat notes are water, plants and ground;
Prolong the peal, yet spite of all your clatter,
The tedious chime is still ground, plants and water! 33

The first couplet is a re-working of lines 66 to 67 in *Dialogue Two* of the *Epilogue to the Satires*: ‘Esher’s peaceful grove/ (Where Kent and Nature vye for Pelham’s Love).’ Mason acknowledges Pope’s poetic supremacy ironically: how, he asks, could such a poet make this error concerning ‘Nature’? ‘This enlighten’d day’ would have educated him differently. For Chambers, as he avers in his *Dissertation*, ‘water, plants, and ground’, the elements of ‘Nature’, used creatively by Kent, are insufficient to a garden, where ‘Art’ must ‘supply

33 Davis, p. 423; *AHE*, ll.35-48, p.48.
the scantiness of nature.’ Mason’s chiastic emphasis on ‘water, plants and ground […] ground, plants and water’, is a deliberate echo of lines from the *Epistle to Bathurst*: ‘What Riches give us let us then enquire/ Meat, Fire, and Cloaths. What more? Meat, Cloaths, and Fire.’ In both cases, the requirement for more than a trio of basic needs is superfluous. The outcome of superfluity in Pope’s poem is useless or counter-productive. Are ‘Riches’ empowered to ‘bid pallid Hippia glow’, even in ‘gems’?\(^{34}\) Can ‘Art’, Mason suggests, add anything of worth to Kent’s three essential requirements?

Some lines later, Mason ironically advises a reversal of the gardening style which he had advocated in *The English Garden*, and is articulated in the *Epistle to Burlington*. ‘He gains all points, who pleasingly confounds/ Surprises, varies, and conceals the Bounds’, Pope had written. He complains that at ‘Timon’s Villa’, the visitor was required to ‘thro’ the length of yon hot terrace sweat’ to reach the house. If all is done well, however, the garden may become ‘A work to wonder at, perhaps a Stowe.’ Mason himself, in *The English Garden*, advocates non-linear variety, the surprise of the sudden view, and the imaginative use of ‘Nature.’ His ironic advice in the *Heroic Epistle*, concerning the creation of landscape at Richmond, is to undo the work of the ‘untutor’d’ ‘Capability’ Brown, follower of Kent, and instead

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Bid yon livelong Terras re-ascend}  \\
\text{Replace each vista, straighten every bend;}  \\
\text{Shut out the Thames; shall that ignoble thing}  \\
\text{Approach the presence of great Ocean’s King?}^{35}
\end{align*}
\]

Water here is not only rejected as an essential element for the gardener, but is also viewed as an unworthy one, whose sight is intolerable, even for the king of a water-bound island dependent on the ocean for commerce. If Mason’s ironic instructions are obeyed, he writes, echoing Pope, they may result in ‘a work to wonder at, perhaps a Kew’, where, for Queen Caroline, Chambers erected the

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\(^{35}\) ll.55-6,99,130,70, in Davis, pp. 316-9; Richardson writes that in the first half of the eighteenth century, Stowe was ‘in the vanguard of fashion and […] perceived good taste.’ (p.306); *AHE*, ll.55,63-6.
Chinese Pagoda criticised by Mason in *The English Garden* as a structure of tasteless incongruity, and by Walpole as a useless object that ‘sees neither London nor the Thames, nor has one room in it.’

Chambers, as he demonstrates in his *Dissertation*, is impressed by ‘the splendor and number’ of Chinese ‘garden structures’, among which is the ‘fortified town’, made with ‘public squares, temples […] shops’ and ‘every thing that is at Pekin; only upon a smaller scale.’ This is the pleasure place of ‘the emperors of China, who are too much the slaves of their greatness to appear in public.’ In the section of the *Heroic Epistle* which describes the construction of a ‘mimic London’, in emulation of the artificial ‘Pekin’, Mason makes reference to *The Rape of the Lock*. Conflating this gardening novelty- ‘Urbs in rure, not rus in urbe, is the thing, which an improver of true taste ought to aim at’, was Mason’s ironic comment in his preface to the *Heroic Epistle*- with the notion of inward-looking, autocratic kingship, he predicts that

> Our sons some slave of greatness may behold,  
> Cast in the genuine Asiatic mould;  
> Who of three realms shall condescend to know,  
> No more than he can spy from Windsor’s brow.

Mason had already, in Book One of *The English Garden*, identified the king as one seeking only ‘prospect’, and therefore uncultured, incurious, and by implication, inadequate. ‘Who of three realms’ in these lines is a reminder of the worthier monarch to whom Pope refers in *The Rape of the Lock*: ‘Here Thou, Great Anna! whom three realms obey/ Dost sometimes counsel take, and sometimes Tea.’ A task of the poem’s ‘Sylphs’ and ‘Sylphids’ is to ‘guard with Arms Divine the British Throne.’ The ‘three realms’ here comprise the glorious nation of Pope’s *Windsor-Forest*, in which ‘Old Father Thames’ looks with ‘azure Eyes/ Where Windsor-Domes and pompous Turrets rise.’ In Mason’s poem, Windsor becomes a place of physical, intellectual, and patriotic limitation: the future ‘slave of greatness’, a replica of the present incumbent of the throne,

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36 *AHE*, l.70; see *TEG*, 4.412-428 for descriptions of incongruous constructions; Walpole’s view is ‘record[ed] in the notes of his visit to Kew in 1761’ (ed.’s note, Toynbee, p.59).
37 *Dissertation*, p.24; *AHE*, 1.98, Preface, p.37, ll.101-4, p.51.
38 III.7-8, 73-90, II.73, 90, in Davis, pp. 96, 94, *Windsor-Forest*, ll. 351-2, p. 47.
fails to look outward, as ‘Old Father Thames’ and ‘Great Anna’ once did, for
Britain’s glory, beyond the ocean to the rest of the world. He is confined to
seeing ‘no more than he can spy from Windsor’s brow.’

Lockwood writes that large satiric concerns such as ‘man, or Dulness, or pride’,
as articulated by such poets as Pope and Swift, were replaced in the post-
Augustan world by lesser topics, like, for example, fashions in oriental
gardening. He is mistakenly trivialising the latter. In An Heroic Epistle,
Mason does more than express his admiration for Pope by inter-textualising
Pope’s lines with his own. He is seeking a poetic and cultural fusion with Pope,
placing himself in direct descendancy from him, as he had done in his early
monody. Pope’s Epistle to Burlington, its title partially echoed in Mason’s own,
consists of more than praise or dispraise of a particular house and garden. It is a
metaphorical vision of a cultural and national integrity, mediated through the
idea of property created from the judicious enhancement of nature by art, in
contrast with its tasteless opposite, ‘Timon’s Villa.’ Pope, like Mason, was a
gardener. Both promoted the importance of the garden, the laying out of
grounds, as a manifestation of taste, sense, and respect for nature, undertaken as
seriously as the promotion of virtue through poetic composition inherited from
classical writing. Such a visible and thoughtful enterprise must reflect, for both
poets, the worth and honour of a nation. Indeed, the trees of the grounds and
garden, as Mason indicates in his georgic, and Pope in Windsor-Forest, may be
used in making the ships which are crucial to the nation’s defence, and the
promotion of her trade.

Pope’s direct influence, and his words embedded in the text, can also be found in
Mason’s later satires, though less frequently over time. Popean quotations
appear, as in An Heroic Postscript. ‘If e’er he chance to wake on Newton’s chair/
‘He wonders how the devil he came there’, is an echo from the Epistle to
Arbuthnot: ‘The things, we know, are neither rich nor rare/ But wonder how the
Devil they got there?’ ‘A mighty hunter, but his prey was man’, is a line in
Windsor-Forest that reappears in An Epistle to Dr. Shebbeare, published in 1777.

39 Thomas Lockwood, Post-Augustan Satire: Charles Churchill and Satirical Poetry, 1750-1800
Pope’s intentions and attitudes are echoed lexic ally: Mason states his own intention to ‘cut down Dunces, whereso’er they spring’, and expresses his disdain for ‘Fools’ and ‘Knaves.’ He has a further connection with Pope through the latter’s treatment of his enemy Lord Hervey, who is ‘Lord Fanny’ in *The First Satire of the Second Book of Horace Imitated*, and ‘Fannius’ in the *Fourth Satire of Dr. John Donne, versified*. Hervey’s son, Lord Bristol, named as ‘old young Fannius’ in *An Heroic Postscript*, had, Walpole wrote to Mason, refused to read *An Heroic Epistle*, saying ‘he would as soon read blasphemy.’ Father and son both rejected the work of the satirists. Mason takes up Pope’s depiction of the uncertain sexuality of Hervey, the ‘vile Antithesis’ of the *Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot*, applying it to Lord Bristol. Mason was unsure, he writes in a note to *An Heroic Postscript*, whether his reference to Bristol should read as ‘Fannius or Fannia.’ ‘If I have done wrong’, he adds, ‘I ask pardon […] of […] the Lady.’

**SLAVES AND FREE MEN**

A generation separated Pope and Mason, and literary fashions were changing. Lockwood, as we have seen, mistakes change of subject for a particular kind of change in the poet’s attitude to his subject, a lack of serious engagement. In *An Heroic Postscript*, certainly, Mason would describe himself, ironically, as ‘sport[ing] with Chinese gardens’; Walpole, in his Introduction of 1779 to Mason’s satires, would refer to Chambers as a ‘harmless innovator of Taste’, compared with ‘assassins’ such as Shebbeare and Samuel Johnson who were ‘pensioned to […] recommend the chains and massacres prepared for America.’ During the time of composition and publication of *An Heroic Epistle*, however, both men were convinced of the poem’s importance as political comment. The glory of the Chinese gardens that Chambers so much admired largely depended upon the power and wealth of a despotic emperor and his nobles, a situation that Whigs feared might be repeated in England. As Locke had written, ‘Mankind will be in a far worse condition […] if they shall have armed one or a few men with the joint power of a multitude, to force them to obey at pleasure the

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40 AHP, ll.85-6, p. 78; *Epistle to Arbuthnot*, ll.171-2, in Davis, p. 332, *Windsor-Forest*, 1.62, p.39; Shebbeare, l.155, p.110; *The First Satire*, 1.6, in Davis, p. 341, *The Fourth Satire*, 1.78, p. 405; AHP, 1.62, p.77; Lewis, p. 95 (5 July 1773); Arbuthnot, 1.325, in Davis, p. 337; AHP, n.77.
exorbitant and unlimited decrees of their sudden thought, or unrestrained […] wills without having any measures set down which may guide and justify their actions.'

In his Notes to Mason’s Preface to *An Heroic Epistle*, Walpole refers to *The English Garden* as if to a handbook for Whigs: ‘When [Mr. Mason] gives laws to every man of property for the decoration of his grounds, he insinuates the blessings of laws that ascertain Property.’ Indeed, ‘If our Tory Country Gentlemen, who are so foolish as to expect to be Bashaws under a Sultan and a Grand Vizir, woud recollect that an English Garden cannot be mowed and kept in an arbitrary country, no more than their favourite game-acts retained, they woud be less eager for Despotism’, and the uncertain favour of a tyrant, under whose sway ‘extended possession’ of property would be constantly jeopardised.

Chambers’ later addition to his *Dissertation* would have failed to ease Whig minds. John Harris writes that the *Dissertation* was disliked by the public, and that as a result, Chambers published a further edition in 1773 to which was attached an ‘explanatory discourse.’ Unfortunately, this discourse, which purported to be written by one ‘Tan Chet-qua of Quang-chew-fu’, can hardly have helped to acquire Whiggish support. In the first book of *The English Garden*, Mason had imagined a future Britain, tended by the ‘Youth’ he was instructing, as ‘one ample theatre of sylvan grace’, where ‘Nature’ ruled, assisted by ‘Art’. In his discourse, the putative Chinese author describes a similar vision: his emphasis, however, is upon the prominence of the powerful. ‘This whole kingdom’ of Britain will become ‘one magnificent vast Garden […] with the imperial mansion towering on an eminence in the centre, and the palaces of the nobles scattered like pleasure-pavilions amongst the plantations.’ It was a vision of horticultural absolutism fit to chill a Whig heart.

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41 Toynbee, p.32; Goldie, p.185.  
42 Toynbee, pp. 45,44.  
Walpole clarifies his perspective concerning the political significance of gardening style in his notes to Mason’s preface to *An Heroic Epistle*. Gardening is ‘an Art totally new’, and ‘indisputably English.’ Gardens should be fashioned, in Walpole’s view, according to the dictates of ‘true Taste’, the corruption of which, articulated in Chambers’ *Dissertation*, was the inspiration for Mason’s poem. More than this, the art of gardening is the result ‘of all the happy combinations of an Empire of Freemen, an Empire formed by Trade, not by a military and conquering Spirit.’ Walpole compares the ‘free’ empire of the British before the American war with that of the Romans who, ‘When they became masters of the wealth of the world […] became slaves.’ Having described the lamentable consequences for the art of gardening, and for ‘Property’, under an absolute monarchy, Walpole lifts ‘The English Taste in Gardening’ into an uncompromising political position. It is no less than ‘the growth of the English Constitution, and must perish with it.’ For both Mason and Walpole, to write about gardening was to embrace a political position predicated upon the passion-inspiring concern of the Englishman’s right to liberty, bestowed on him by his forefathers, and articulated in the previous century in the writings of Milton and Locke.

Walpole’s comment on the descent of the Romans into slavery echoes Mason’s lines in *An Heroic Epistle*: ‘Our sons some slave of greatness may behold/ Cast in the genuine Asiatic mould’, whose unwillingness to engage in partnership with his people, to look beyond his palace, may destroy the constitution in spirit and letter. It is an echo of Mason’s animadversions on the king, in the first book of his georgic. George was content to view ‘Nature’ from his lofty ‘turret’: such a preference was a sign of his perceived lack of interest in engaging with his people. Here Mason displays his Whig adherence to the ideas of Locke and Rousseau, both committed to the idea that government gained its legitimacy from the consent of the people. The latter had sought refuge in England in 1766, and was entertained by Mason’s friend Lord Nuneham at his home near Oxford. Rousseau believed that government by hereditary aristocracy should be replaced by government by an elective one. His influence on the young Nuneham was

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44 Toynbee, pp. 42, 44-5.
such that he ‘denounc[ed] hereditary aristocracy and refus[ed] to go to Court or be called ‘My Lord.’ In the flower garden that Mason created for him, Nuneham, to Rousseau’s ‘delight’, erected a statue to ‘The Man of Nature.’

Rousseau had begun the first chapter of what was to become his best-known work, *Du Contrat Social, ou principes du droit politique* (1762), with the now famous statement that ‘L’homme est né libre, et par-tout il est dans les fers.’ ['Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains.']. His following sentence particularises the condition in an unexpected way. ‘Tel se croit le maître des autres, qui ne laisse pas d’être plus esclave qu’eux.’ ['One thinks himself the master of others, and still remains a greater slave than they.']. All men are slaves, though their worldly positions may lead them to believe that they are not.

Pope had expressed such a view of slavery in his *Epilogue to the Satires, Dialogue One*, as he lamented the ascendency of ‘Vice’: ‘In Soldier, Churchman, Patriot, Man in Pow’r/ ‘Tis Avarice all, Ambition is no more/ See, all our Nobles begging to be Slaves!’ No one is exempt from the possibility of descent into moral slavery.

Pope, of course, was writing before Rousseau. In appraising the work of Pope’s successor Churchill, Lockwood refers to Churchill’s portrayal of himself as ‘a creature of the public’, not one of the poetic ‘slaves of private interest, such as patronage.’ He quotes Goldsmith’s comment of 1760, that ‘the […] poets of England no longer depend on the Great for subsistence; they have now no other patrons but the public’, which is on the whole ‘a good and generous master.’ Lockwood points to the lexical change consequent upon the dwindling reliance on patronage during the century, the increasing use of writerly references to the


46 *Du Contrat (sic) Social; ou principes du droit politique* (Amsterdam, 1762), p.2

terms ‘slave’ and ‘free man.’ In 1764, the year of publication of the first translation into English of Du Contrat Social, Churchill wrote his poem Gotham, in which he criticises the enslavement of ‘savage’ lands by Christian Europe, ‘loading [the] necks’ of the inhabitants with the ‘chains’ of enforced temporal and religious systems, making them ‘slaves to men they never knew.’

It is possible that Churchill had read Rousseau’s work, although he had himself made frequent references to slavery in his poetry. Whatever the case, the issue of slavery was becoming a pressing concern, both for reformers, and for the writers now increasingly able to lay down the yoke of private interest, as professional authorship took the place of patronage.

Mason, who was to become an active supporter of the anti-slavery movement, does not declaim against slavery in the way that the bullish Churchill does, but his view on moral slavery is the same. The ‘slave of greatness’ in An Heroic Epistle is ‘one who thinks himself the master of others’, the putative ruler himself. In addition to expressing his views on slavery, actual or moral, in his writings, Mason was also instrumental in helping to create another kind of freedom, for authors no longer needing to be ‘slaves’ to ‘private interest.’ In a letter to Walpole in 1777 he wrote that he had a suit ‘in chancery’ against John Murray, a Scots bookseller who, in 1776, had pirated poems by Gray that had first appeared in Mason’s Memoirs. A final decree in favour of Mason was eventually granted in 1779. Writers, captive in the face of literary pirates such as Murray, were enabled by such action to own their work.

Mason was to meet Rousseau in the mid-1760s. As we have seen, he had become familiar with the ideas of Locke which, as he wrote, ‘burst in blessings on mankind’, as a schoolboy, and as a student at Cambridge, where Locke had himself ‘walk’d musing forth […]/ Majestic Wisdom thron’d upon his brow.’ In his poem Isis: A Monologue (1748), which is described in a note to the 1811 edition of Mason’s works as part satire, ‘mixed […] with true panegyric’, Mason


49 Lewis, p. 310 (26 May 1777), nn.310, 322.
concluded that the chief lesson of the ‘Sage’ was that ‘Nature’s first best gift was Liberty.’

Mason’s Whig adherence to such a view through his life is demonstrated satirically in his publication in 1782 of a response to Soame Jenyns’ disquisition, published earlier that year, *On Government and Civil Liberty*. Jenyns sets out to question the logic of principles concerning government and liberty that are, to him, ‘as false as mischiefous’, including those, at the head of his list, which state that ‘all men are born equal’ and ‘That all men are born free.’ In his *Two Treatises of Government*, Locke had alluded to ‘that equal right that every man hath, to his natural freedom, without being subjected to the will or authority of any other man.’ Such views, according to Jenyns, ‘require nothing more, than to be fairly stated, to be refuted.’ Mason’s answer is in the form of a satire, *The Dean and the Squire*, but it is in his Dedication, addressed to Jenyns, that he directly expresses his anger at a dismissal of tenets he has consistently held dear. He is contemptuous of Jenyns’ intention to challenge what Jenyns sees as ‘so many absurd principles.’ These ‘false principles’, Mason points out, were ‘industriously disseminated at the Revolution by Locke, at the Accession by Hoadly, and a hundred years before either, by Hooker.’ Apart from principles strongly held, Mason’s current involvement in the Yorkshire Association would spur him to a rejection of Jenyns’ views. And to ensure that his reader fully understands what he is responding to, he ‘begs’ him on a separate ‘Card’, printed on the page before the Dedication, to ‘read the first two heads of Mr. Jenyns’ 7th. Disquisition […] that he may perceive the full force of the allusions made here to that wonderful performance.’ Once again, Mason turns to prose in defence of his Whig notion of ‘liberty.’

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50 *Works*, 1, n.179, p.182.
MASON AS INNOVATOR

_The Dean and the Squire_ was written when Mason’s energies had turned to active involvement in the quest for parliamentary reform, and is a response to what he saw as Jenyns’ political heresy. The poem, playful in tone, takes the form of a conversation in which Jenyns, speaking with a fellow anti-Lockean, Dean Tucker, argues against the idea of natural equality:

That men were equal born at first,
I hold of all whig lies the worst.
But yet, if only this they mean,
That you and I, good Mr. Dean,
Were equally produced, ‘tis true,
For I was born as much as you.
But now, comparing size and strength,
Our body’s bulk, our nose’s length,
The periwigs that grace our pate,
My little wit, your learning great,
We find, we are unequal quite.

The pair go on to discuss the progress of a child after birth, and his perceived lack of liberty at the hands of nurse, schoolmaster and nature herself, in a world where some are short and some are tall. In the course of the poem, both men show their lack of understanding of Locke, and by implication, their own stupidity. The _Critical Review_ praised the poem, allowing it ‘much original merit, ease of numbers and poignancy of satire.’ It is in the preface to the poem, however, that Mason’s real strength of political feeling is to be found.52

The humour Mason invested in _The Dean and the Squire_ had accounted in a large part for the success of _An Heroic Epistle_. After the latter’s publication, Hannah More had written to one of her sisters that _An Heroic Epistle_ ‘is, in my opinion, the best satire, both for matter and versification, since the Dunciad.’ In a letter to Mason in March, 1773, Walpole wrote of the poem that ‘there is more remind[ing] his audience that Anne’s title was as dependent on the revolution settlement, as William’s had been.’ The next year he preached that government was ‘ordained for the Good of the Public’ whose ‘Resistance’ would be reasonable should the ruler abuse his power. (Stephen Taylor, _DNB_ (OUP, September 2004; online edn. January 2008) (paras. 7, 28 of 34) <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article> [accessed 6 January 2010].

52 _The Dean and the Squire_, p. 4; _Critical Review_, LIII, pp. 392-3 in Draper, p. 260.
wit, ten times more delicacy of irony, as much poetry and greater facility than [...] in the Dunciad [...] all the world thinks the same.’ As I noted earlier, Anna Seward would write that that though ‘we have a Juvenal and a Horace in Churchill and Johnson [...] a new species of satire, in the heroic epistles of Mason, has perhaps hit the true tone of satire better than any of them.’

It is impossible to know what, for Seward, this ‘true tone of satire’ meant, though her reference to Mason’s ‘heroic epistles’ was likely to be to the satires of the 1770s which included the words in their titles: An Heroic Epistle, An Heroic Postscript, and An Epistle to Dr. Shebbeare, all of which, unlike his other satires, were written in heroic couplets. An Archaeological Epistle of 1782, although used as a vehicle for criticism of the political situation, was ostensibly a satire about literature. The comments of More and Seward were highly complimentary to Mason: the first confirmed a connection between Pope and Mason, one that he had wished to establish; the second acknowledged him as a writer of a new kind of satire, an innovator.

Pope, the inspiration for Mason’s satire, was not even mentioned by Seward. What was it in Mason’s verse that led her to call it ‘a new species of satire’? Part of the answer may lie in Walpole’s note to lines fifty-two to seventy-one of the Epistle to Dr. Shebbeare. John Shebbeare had already been mentioned by Mason in the Heroic Epistle: ‘Witness ye Hills, ye Johnsons, Scotts, Shebbeares/ Hark to my call, for some of you have ears.’ Four years later, Mason made him the addressee of a further Epistle. In his notes to the first poem, Walpole had described Shebbeare as ‘a[n] … infamous libeller, set in the pillory in the last reign for abusing King William and King George […] pension’d in the present reign and employed to abuse King William ten times more grossly.’ Together with Dr. Johnson, he was one of the ‘Assassins [who] ’aspers[ed] the Champions and Martyrs of Freedom.’

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53 Memoirs of the Life and Correspondence of Mrs. Hannah More, ed. by William Roberts, 4 vols (London, 1834),1, p. 87 (Adelphi, 1776); Lewis, p.77 (27 March 1773); for Seward, Johnson and Churchill were distinct enough in their satiric styles for her to compare them to Horace and Juvenal, in spite of Johnson’s imitations of Juvenal, which were far from light in tone.
54 AHE, II.19-20; Toynbee, p.55, 32.
Mason’s trenchant lines on Shebbeare, which I shall explore in detail later in the chapter, elicited Walpole’s particular praise:

Enough of souls, unless we waste a line
Shebbeare! to pay a compliment to thine:
Which forg’d, of old, from strong Hibernian brass,
Shines through the Paris plaister of thy face,
And bronzes it, secure from shame, or sense,
To the flat glare of finish’d impudence…

Old as thou art, methinks, ‘twere sage advice,
That North should call thee off from hunting Price…

What if my muse array’d thee in her spoils,
And took the field for thee, thro’ pure good nature;
Courts praised by thee, are curs’d beyond her satire. 55

An Epistle to Dr. Shebbeare (1776) was written as a riposte to Shebbeare’s An Essay on the Origin, Progress and Establishment of National Society. The Essay was itself a reply to Observations on the Nature of Civil Liberty, written by Richard Price, a non-conformist minister who supported the colonists. As D.O. Thomas writes, Price maintained, in Lockean vein, ‘that a person can be subjected to authority only by his own consent. Freedom consists in being “subject to no other will than one’s own”: additionally, “no man is to be subjected to a government in the operation of which he does not in some way participate.”’ Mason’s poem was a riposte to Shebbeare’s own reply to Price. The Essay’s title page not only announced that it ‘fully refuted’ all the ‘Definitions of physical, moral, civil, and religious Liberty’ contained in Price’s Observations, but also bore a quotation from the first Epistle of Saint Peter, no doubt intended to draw attention to the meaning of Price’s clerical role: ‘Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake, whether it be to the king as supreme, or to governors […] not using your liberty as a cloak of maliciousness, but as the servants of God.’ As Sambrook writes, the idea that the king ruled with consent of the people, rather than by divine right, was constantly attacked by clerics,

High Churchmen in particular.\textsuperscript{56} Mason, as a cleric himself, one sympathetic to the colonists, must have felt a response necessary on behalf both of himself and Price.

Walpole’s reception of the passage was unequivocal: ‘The twenty lines in this page are equal in strength and beauty to the most admired satirical passages in Dryden and Pope.’ His next words indicated a perceived crucial difference between Mason’s purpose in writing, and Pope’s. Mason’s lines ‘have the superior merit of being provoked by the infamy of the Subject, and not by any personal offence.’\textsuperscript{57}

The passage is the centre of Mason’s poem, addressing directly the dedicatee, and enclosed between the poet’s musings on the fate of his verse- ‘no one bard, in these degenerate days/ Can write two works deserving equal praise’- and an ironic comment on Britain’s conduct in the American war, as she ‘Cross[es] the Atlantic vast/ Herself to vanquish in America.’\textsuperscript{58} Pope, of course, had written set pieces about individuals, notably, in the \textit{Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot}, Lord Hervey and Addison, lightly disguised as ‘Sporus’ and ‘Atticus.’

Pope was regularly accused of a malevolence that transferred itself into and inspired his verse. Walpole observed that this is not so with Mason who, unlike the poet of the \textit{Dunciad}, and although he was writing in trenchant terms about his subject, was not reacting to personal attack. Similarly, in his introduction to the satires, Walpole indicated that though ‘Pope revenged his own quarrel on the Dunces’, Mason, ‘uninjured himself’, had ‘exerted the light but sharp weapon of satire’ against ‘the Enemies of his Country.’ Mason’s own reference in \textit{Musaeus}, so many years before, had been to ‘the temp’rate ray’ that ‘gilds the satire, or the

\textsuperscript{56} ‘Richard Price (1723-1791)’, by D.O. Thomas, in DNB (OUP, 2004; online edn., May 2005) \url{http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article} [accessed 2 December 2009] (para. 30 of 38); \textit{Observations on the nature of civil liberty the principles of government and the justice and policy of the war with America} (London, 1776) \url{http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/ECCO} [accessed 12 December 2009]; \textit{An Essay on the origin, progress and establishment of national society, in which the principle of government, the definitions of physical, moral, civil, and religious liberty, contained in Dr. Price’s Observations […] are fully examined and refuted} (1776); \url{http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/ECCO} [accessed 6 January 2010]; Peter, I.2.13-16; Sambrook, p.90.

\textsuperscript{57} Toynbee, p.117.

\textsuperscript{58} Shebbeare, II.44-5, 78-9.
moral lay.’ In fact, in this passage Mason takes the phrase ‘good nature’, Steele’s recommendation for the satirist, and ironically inverts it for the purpose of the satire: his ‘Muse’ will ‘take the field’ for Shebbeare from ‘pure good nature’, and ‘Extol the present, the propitious hour’ when Britain is beginning her colonial war.\(^5^9\) In so doing, Mason demonstrates his awareness of the importance ascribed to satirists of possessing ‘good nature’, even as he employs the idea ironically to criticise the American war. Dryden, who shunned the writing of lampoon as a debasement of satire and satirist, and who decried the readiness of some writers ‘to call rogue and villain’, believed in the moral imperative for the satirist ‘to make examples of vicious men.’ Mason identified with Pope, but he also follows the directive of the earlier poet.

The requirement of ‘good nature’ in the satirist also resonates with Lockwood’s comment that the ‘tone’ of post-Augustan satire became ‘mellower’, invoking ‘a change that blurs the line between satire and humour.’ For Mason, as a letter to Lord Harcourt shows, humour was now an essential ingredient of such verse. On the subject of *An Heroic Epistle*, he wrote, ‘your Lordship says you like it exceedingly; if you do, I suppose it is chiefly because you think such taste, such times, and such politics as ours deserve rather to be laugh’d at than seriously satirized, and in this I agree with you.’ *An Heroic Epistle*, as I shall show, is for Mason such a text. However the tone of his later satires might change, the successful reception of the first one could only have reinforced the view he expressed to Harcourt. And as one of its readers, Anna Seward must have responded with enthusiasm to what she perceived as ‘a new species of satire’, written with a lightness of touch absent in the satiric creations of the bullish Churchill, the solemn verses of Johnson, and the perceived malevolence of the offerings of Pope. Walpole, as I have noted, was of the same opinion: ‘The sportive smiles of Mr. Mason ’, he wrote, ‘will charm when Churchill offends.’\(^6^0\)

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\(^5^9\) Toynbee, p. 32; *Shebbeare*, ll. 69-70.

\(^6^0\) Lockwood, p.174; Harcourt Papers, vii, pp.46-7 (21 March 1773), in Draper, p.252; Toynbee, p.32; Sambrook writes that Churchill’s satire is ‘more often […] straightforward invective with occasional eulogy’, and that he ‘employed irony only to a limited extent’ (para. 19 of 19); Johnson’s ‘London’ and ‘The Vanity of Human Wishes’, written in imitation of Juvenal’s 3rd and 10th satires, delineate the tragic folly of human aspiration, without the invective of Juvenal’s work.
CHAMBERS’ DISSERTATION AND AN HEROIC EPISTLE

So what techniques did Mason employ in An Heroic Epistle to render it the success it was, to make his readers ‘laugh, and revive their spirit by [...] Diversion’, as Walpole put it, in the light of his own indignant response to Chambers’ work? Such a response would have been speedily elicited by the Dissertation’s initial page, which carried a dedication to the king. Referring to his work as ‘the present little Performance’, Chambers praises George the Third as ‘the first Judge’ and ‘most munificent Encourager’ of the ‘Art’ of gardening. It was a view opposed to Mason’s own, as his treatment of the king in Book One of The English Garden had demonstrated. In the subsequent preface Chambers articulates, hardly disguised, his dislike of ‘Capability’ Brown, successor to Kent, with whom Mason was to work on improvements to Lord Nuneham’s estate. Brown, Walpole writes, ‘had been kitchen gardiner to Lord Cobham at Stowe, and became the best Imitator of Kent, and the most fashionable Designer of Grounds and Gardens.’ Chambers disparages the ‘new manner’ of gardening in England, ‘in which no appearance of art is tolerated’, so that ‘our gardens differ very little from common fields.’ What can be expected, he asks, when ‘in this island, [the art of gardening] is abandoned to kitchen gardeners.’ The visitor to an English garden will find only ‘a large green field’ upon which ‘a few straggling trees’ are placed, ‘verged with a confused border of shrubs and flowers.’ In a further prompt for Mason’s ire, Chambers also criticises the introduction into the English garden of ‘little serpentine path[s]’- the ‘fluent curves’ of which were recommended by Mason in Book One of The English Garden- the tediousness of following which will cause the visitor to ‘curse the line of beauty.’ Chambers’ preface is, in fact, a critical review of what he considers to be ‘insipid’ English gardening.61

Even from the title page of An Heroic Epistle, Mason is beginning his ironic comment on the Dissertation. His choice of title itself results from an ironic inversion of Chambers’ claim that ‘The scenery of a garden should differ as much from common nature as an heroic poem doth from a prose relation.’

61Toynbee, p. 32; Dissertation, pp.vi-viii; Toynbee, p. 41; TEG, l.305.
Mason’s ‘heroic poem’ will differ from Chambers’ prose work, but he will champion ‘common nature’ in the face of his opponent’s predilection for the artistic complexities of Chinese gardens. Mason’s addition to his title, that his poem will be ‘Enriched with explanatory Notes, chiefly extracted from that elaborate Performance’, echoes Chambers’ dedication of his ‘little Performance’, which contains descriptions of such elaborate complexities, to the King.\

Mason’s ironic tone continues in his preface, where he claims that his purpose in the following poem, ‘in extolling the taste of the Chinese’, is to ‘condemn that mean and paltry manner which Kent introduced […] which, to our national disgrace, is called the English style of gardening.’ In his poem, he intends to draw for his images on those of Chambers himself, showing how they may be applied in an English setting: ‘Richmond gardens’, for example, which were on the Thames, and diagonally opposite Brentford on its far side, ‘with only the addition of a new bridge from them to Brentford, may be newly modelled, perfectly a la Chinois.’

Hunt and Willis describe aspects of Chinese gardens in Chambers’ account as being ‘like the territory of any contemporary Gothic novel […] a veritable Disneyland of exotic devices.’ The ‘aim’ of many Chinese gardens, Chambers writes, is to ‘excite a great variety of passions in the mind of the spectator’, by creating ‘scenes’ with ‘the appellations of the pleasing, the terrible, and the surprizing.’ The scenes of terror, according to Chambers, ‘are composed of gloomy woods […] vallies inaccessible to the sun […] trees are […] seemingly torn to pieces by the violence of tempests […] buildings are in ruins […] wolves, tigers and jackalls howl in the forests […] gibbets […] and the whole apparatus of torture are seen from the roads […] temples are dedicated to the king of vengeance.’ The ‘surprizing’ scenes ‘abound in the marvellous’, promoting in the traveller ‘quick successions of opposite and violent sensations.’ These may involve visits to ‘subterranean vaults’ where are ‘discover[ed] the pale images of ancient kings and heroes.’ The ‘passenger’ may be ‘surprized with repeated shocks of electrical impulse […] or sudden violent gusts of wind, and

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62 Dissertation, p.16; AHE, Preface, in Toynbee, p. 35.
63 Toynbee, pp. 36-38.
instantaneous explosions of fire.’ He may pass through ‘lofty woods’ inhabited by ‘innumerable monkies, cats and parrots’, or ‘Tartarean damsels, in loose transparent robes […] who invite him to taste the sweets of retirement.’ As his *Dissertation* ends, Chambers compares such ambitious exoticism, designed to stimulate its beholder, with the inferiority of English gardening, ‘Where twining serpentine walks [and] digging holes to raise mole-hills’ - a reference to Brown’s treatment of landscapes- seem all the imagination is able to invent.⁶⁴

As Hunt and Willis suggest, Chambers’ images seem to belong to the realms of fantasy rather than reality, to possess a filmic, dreamlike quality that is anything but quotidian. Their hyperbolic tenor is also unintentionally very funny, and it was that aspect that Mason was able to grasp and play with as he composed his response.

Chambers provides an extravagant account of Chinese bridges, which might be ‘of stone and marble, adorned with colonades [...] towers, loggias, fishing pavilions [...] and porcelain vases. Some [...] are upon a curve, or a serpentine plan [...] with pavilions at their angles [...] adorned with Jets d’eau.’ Mason’s comment on the ease of making a bridge *a la Chinois* from Richmond to Brentford- ‘And o’er the Thames fling one stupendous line/ Of marble arches, in a bridge, that cuts/ From Richmond Ferry slant to Brentford Butts’, as he writes in his poem- is an example of the bathos that provides much of its humour.⁶⁵ His technique is to echo, contract and diminish Chambers’ discursive descriptions, and apply them to the London scene. In such a way he domesticates Chambers’ images, placing them in a familiar, confined city and its environs, and demonstrating the comical inauthenticity of Chambers’ suggestion that the gardening notions of vast, exotic, and distant China, with its imperial system, can

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⁶⁴ Hunt and Willis, p. 318; *Dissertation*, pp. 26-9, 61.
⁶⁵ *Dissertation*, p.49; *AHE*, II.108-110. Brentford Butts still exists: it is described as ‘a street and square of red brick houses, developed from the 1680s.’ Brentford was the county town of Middlesex, ten miles from the City. It was used to public notoriety: in March 1768, Wilkes, having failed to gain the parliamentary seat for the City of London, ‘challeng[ed] the two sitting members for the county of Middlesex’, launching a campaign aided by ‘popular support.’ On 28th March, he won the election. Wilkes and Fox were notoriously dissolve. (Website: ‘Brentford Dock Net’ [accessed 10 January 2010]); Peter D.G. Thomas, ‘John Wilkes (1725-1797)’, *DNB* (OUP, September 2004; online edition May 2008) (para. 10 of 29) <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article > [accessed 18 January 2010].
be successfully transferred, practically or ideologically, to a northern island
inhabited by a race of free men.

The filmic quality of the *Dissertation* finds a down-to-earth echo in sections of
Mason’s poem, as if a cinematic creation of Peter Greenaway were being
answered by a short and cartoon-like knockabout comedy directed by the poet
himself:

Come then, prolific Art, and with thee bring
The charms that rise from thy exhaustless spring;
To Richmond come, for see, untutor’d Brown
Destroys those wonders which were once thy own.
Lo, from his melon-ground the peasant slave
Has rudely rush’d, and levelled Merlin’s Cave;
Knock’d down the waxen Wizzard, seiz’d his wand,
Transform’d to lawn what late was Fairy land;
And marr’d, with impious hand, each sweet design
Of Stephen Duck, and good Queen Caroline.

And later, in reference to the imaginary bridge ‘from Richmond Ferry […] to
Brentford Butts’, Mason writes:

Like distant thunder, now the coach of state
Rolls o’er the bridge, that groans beneath its weight.
The court have crost the stream; the sports begin;
Now N[oe]l preaches of rebellion’s sin:
And as the powers of his strong pathos rise,
Lo, brazen tears fall from Sir F[letche]r’s eyes.
While skulking round the pews, that babe of grace,
Who ne’er before at sermon shew’d his face,
See Jemmy Twitcher shambles; stop! Stop thief!
He’s stolen the E[arl] of D[eb]r[igh]’s handkerchief.
Let B[a]rr[ing]t[o]n arrest him in mock fury,
And M[ansfiel]d hang the knave without a jury.
But hark the voice of battle shouts from far,
The Jews and Macaroni’s are at war:
The Jews prevail, and, thund’ring from the stocks,
They seize, they bind, they circumcise C[harle]s F[ox].
Fair Schw[ellenbergen] smiles the sport to see,
And all the Maids of Honour cry Te!He!

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66 AHE, II.53-62,117-132; Peter Greenaway was born in 1942, trained as a painter and became a
film director. The emphasis in his films is on ‘sexuality, theatricality, artifice, illusion.’ (Alan
Woods, *Being Naked Playing Dead: The Art of Peter Greenaway* (Manchester: Manchester
Both passages are full of comic action, of local human movement, in contrast to Chambers’ wide Chinese landscapes, unpeopled except for an occasional reference to the ‘traveller’ whose role is not to act, but be acted upon, by the elements of ‘pleasure, terror or surprise.’ In Mason’s poem, simple active verbs and participles add to the comic effect: ‘rush’d’, ‘Knock’d down’, ‘seiz’d’, ‘skulking’, ‘shambles’, ‘hangs’, ‘arrests’, ‘shouts’, ‘thund’ring’, ‘seize’ again, ‘bind.’ In the first passage he presents a farcical picture of an uncontrollable ‘untutor’d Brown’, hurrying from the ‘melon-ground’ of the kitchen garden to destroy the artistic creation of royalty at Richmond, ‘Merlin’s Cave.’ Here Mason takes his image directly from Chambers who, finding Chinese gardens superior to those of Italy and France, wrote that ‘in another famous country’—meaning England—‘peasants emerge from the melon-grounds to become professors.’ Alliteration and simple vocabulary emphasise Brown’s supposed position as a ‘peasant slave’, and the ignorant temerity of his action: ‘Destroys’, ‘Lo’, ‘levelled’; ‘waxen’, ‘Wizzard’, ‘wand’; ‘rudely rush’d’, the last two words placed in the first half of the line, where the emphasis falls upon ‘rush’d’, and the first syllable of ‘rudely’, which it echoes; ‘seiz’d’, ‘marr’d.’

Brown has destroyed the ‘Fairy land’ of Queen Caroline, the creation of which, though it had taken place in 1735, must have come near, in Mason’s view, to anticipating Chambers’ ideas in England. The words are oxymoronic: the ‘land’ of Mason’s country, in both a local and a national sense, cannot realistically be associated with what, as promoted by Chambers, is more than ‘Fairy’, is dangerous fantasy. Mason creates a bathetically comic scene in the service of his own deeply held views, delineated in his georgic, about the English garden as representative of the national spirit. In addition, he demonstrates the worth of its putative destroyer, Brown, who has replaced a construction of fantasy with the ‘natural’ greensward of which Mason approves.

67 *Dissertation*, pp. 28, 11; Walpole identifies ‘Merlin’s cave’ and its ‘Wizzard’, a wax statue that was ‘large as life’, as ‘an injudicious and ostentatious Whim of Queen Caroline.’ ‘This unintelligible puppetshow’—other wax images were displayed with Merlin—‘of which Stephen Duck, the Thresher-Poet […] was Librarian, was demolished in the present reign.’ (Toynbee, p. 59).
The activity of the second passage, as we have seen, is a result of Mason’s imagined building of a bridge over the Thames from Richmond, where the court convened, to Brentford, which will become the ‘mock’ London: ‘There at one glance, the eye shall meet/ Each varied beauty of St. James’s Street.’ The court having ‘crost the stream; the sports begin’, and we are treated to an account of crime, arrest, sentence, and ‘battle’, all engaged in by individuals or groups ripe for Mason’s satire.

Mason is in fact applying double satire here, to the inhabitants of his ‘mock’ London, and to the only passage in the Dissertation which describes bustling human activity, though of an artificial kind. As Mason’s notes indicate, the actions from ‘See Jemmy Twitcher shambles’ to the end of the passage are all based upon a particular section of the Dissertation, in which Chambers describes the activity that takes place when the Emperor visits the ‘mock’ Pekin. ‘In this [mock] fortified town’, he writes, ‘the emperors of China […] and their women, who are excluded [from being in public] by custom, are […] diverted with the hurry and bustle of the capital.’ There, ‘every liberty is permitted’, its aim to ‘divert his imperial majesty, and the ladies of his train.’ To this end, ‘eunuchs impersonate merchants […] soldiers, shopkeepers […] and even thieves and pickpockets.’ Mock crimes are sometimes carried out, which result in arrest, and very real punishment. In his notes, Mason links his satiric reference to ‘Jemmy Twitcher’ with Chambers’ comment that ‘Neither are […] pickpockets, and sharpers forgot in these festivals; that noble profession is usually allotted to a good number of the most dexterous eunuchs.’ He links his reference to ‘Barrington’, described by Walpole as ‘Secretary of War […] who was never animated but by servility’, with Chambers’ comment that following a mock theft, ‘The watch seizes on the culprit.’ Mason’s reference to Mansfield, the Lord Chief Justice, is linked in his notes with Chambers’ assertion that the prisoner ‘is conveyed before the Judge, and sometimes severely bastinadoed’, for the amusement of the emperor and his concubines. The last are represented in the

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68 AHE, II.113-4.
satire by ‘Schwellenbergen’, Keeper of the Robes to Queen Charlotte, and her Ladies in Waiting.69

The following four lines provide a comical juxtaposition: ‘The Jews and Macaroni’s are at war.’ Here, and in the subsequent line, ‘They seize, they bind, they circumcise C[harle]s F[ox]’, Mason draws on Chambers’ assertion that in the artificial drama enacted in ‘mock’ Pekin, ‘Quarrels happen- battles ensue’, and ‘Every liberty is permitted, there is no distinction of persons.’ Mason, the director of comedy, assembles two groups, the idea of whose visual disparateness, mingled in combat, is risible. ‘Maccaroni is synonymous to Beau, Fop, Coxcombe’, writes Walpole: such people inhabit a ‘fantastic Dominion.’ The Jews’ black vestments are in complete contrast. The characteristics of the two groups are reflected in their dress. The Macaronis given to ‘excessive gaming’, the Jews their money-lenders, they are opposed in appearance and habit. Charles Fox, who, with his brother, had ‘dissipated three hundred thousand pounds before either was five and twenty’, is a suitable target for the triumphant ‘Jews’, and receives what Mason’s readers would perceive as an appositely undignified, but harmless, satirical punishment for his excessive lifestyle.70

This section of the passage is brought to a structural climax on the stressed beats of ‘Charles Fox.’ Anaphora, in ‘they’, repeated three times- at which the reader is led to wonder what further violence is about to occur- provides a pathway to it. Two single-syllable, strong verbs between the repeated ‘they’s- ‘seize’ and

69 Dissertation, pp. 24-4; An Heroic Epistle to Sir William Chambers, Knight, Comptroller of His Majesty’s Works, and Author of a Late Dissertation on Oriental Gardening. nn. 16-7. <http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/ECCO> [accessed 5 January 2010] : Mason’s extensive notes to this edition are not reprinted in Toynbee; Walpole, in Toynbee, comments on ‘Noel’ in the fourth line: ‘Dr.Noel […] had been censured in the House of Commons for a Sermon that breathed the rankest Sentiments of Despotism’ (p. 67)- so an appropriate inclusion here; the corrupt lawyer Sir Fletcher Norton, subject of the sixth line, was satirised by Churchill, and would be again by Mason (see p.13 above.) About Mansfield, the DNB notes that ‘Much of [his] judicial energy […] was devoted to the conduct of jury trials. Given the choice, he might have dispensed with juries.’ A controversial issue was that of seditious libel. Mansfield followed the doctrine that juries could not decide whether or not the contents of a publication were seditious: that decision must belong to the judge alone. (James Oldham, ‘Murray, William, first earl of Mansfield (1705-1793)’DNB (OUP, September 2004; online edn. May 2008) (paras. 24, 39 of 41) <http://oxforddnb.com/view/article> [accessed 18 January 2010); ‘Schwellenbergen’ is ‘Mrs. Schwellenberg’ (ed’s note, Toynbee, p. 71).

70 Toynbee, pp. 69-71.
‘bind’- lead to a bathetic three-syllable verb, ‘circumcise.’ No fearsome ‘bastinado’ here, then, but a long, anti-climactic verb before the introduction of the section’s culmination, the emphasised naming of a notorious politician and playboy.

Mason has fun with his bustling visual comedy, contracting Chambers’ images into comment on the familiar crimes and shortcomings of distinct London figures, and turning his solemn prose into poetic humour. He is, of course, by such means also satirising Chambers’ imperial court, where play-acting can lead to real corporal punishment merely for the entertainment of the emperor and his women. Chambers makes clear that imperial wealth and the preferences of despotism are bound up with gardening exoticism: the ‘Rooms’ of garden buildings may be ‘finished with incrustations of marble, inlaid precious woods, ivory, silver, gold, and mother of pearl.’ To rooms like these, ‘halls of the moon’, the Chinese princes ‘retire, with their favourite women […] and here they […] give a loose to every sort of voluptuous pleasure.’ Women may ‘divert the patron with music, singing, lascivious posture-dancing, and acting plays and pantomimes.’ Chambers is impressed by the shows of wealth. ‘Nothing’, he writes, ‘is too great for Eastern magnificence to attempt […] where treasures are inexhaustible […] power is unlimited, and where munificence has no bounds.’

In his dedication, Chambers had addressed the King as the ‘munificent Encourager’ of gardening activity. The words must have suggested an alarming connection with the imperial system.

No doubt Charles Fox would have gladly entered ‘the halls of the moon.’ For Mason, however, Chambers’ enraptured descriptions, his reference to ‘power […] unlimited’, suggest all the perils of despotic rule, where the Emperor’s subjects are dependent on his whim, and no man, or woman, can be free. The women of Chambers’ account are indistinguishable. In his poem, Mason makes reference to two women of London who have made, in very different ways, independent lives. Echoing Chambers’ ‘Tartarean damsels’, Mason refers to ‘our Tartar maids.’ ‘Or, wanting these’, he continues, ‘from Charlotte Hayes we

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71 *Dissertation*, pp. 22, 24, 63.
bring/ Damsels alike adroit to sport and sting.’ Walpole provides a note on this lady: she was ‘a well-known woman of pleasure, who, advancing in years, took her Doctor’s degrees and became Instructress of Damsels in her profession.’ In his furnishing of ‘Brentford’ with ‘London’s charms’, Mason writes that ‘Patriot Betty’ shall ‘fix her fruit-shop there.’ The line is a reference to Chambers’ comment on his ‘mock city’: ‘fruits and all sorts of refreshments are cried about the streets.’ Walpole notes that ‘Elizabeth Munro was a celebrated fruit-woman in St. James’s Street [whose] Shop was […] much frequented by the Opposition.’ The two women represent the respectable and its opposite in London society. Mason makes use of them, as he does of his other *dramatis personae*, to satirise Chambers’ exotic extravagances. He foregrounds Hayes and Munro, however, as women of spirit and individuality, far removed in kind from the acquiescent playthings of Chinese autocracy. The madam and the fruit-woman are openly identified in Mason’s poem. The female slaves of despotism, of Chambers’ account, are nameless, identified only by their function.

The Chinese scenes of ‘terror’, with their sightings of ‘crosses’ and ‘gibbets’, are matched by Mason, with a reference to Bagshot Heath, in a declaration that ‘Thy gibbets, Bagshot! shall our wants supply.’ Chambers’ temple dedicated to the ‘King of Vengeance’ becomes an analogous ‘fane’ in which ‘Tremendous Wilkes shall rattle his gold chain.’ The line is accompanied by a dryly humorous note: ‘This was written while Mr. Wilkes was Sheriff of London, and when it was to be feared he would rattle his chain a year longer as Lord Mayor.’ ‘Terror’ collapses in the face of ironic comment on domestic politics and opinion.

Mason’s notes are largely reminders of the details of Chambers’ text, although, as the one quoted above indicates, he occasionally allows himself into their composition. Having concluded the direction of his knockabout comedy, he at last permits himself, in the poet’s *persona*, to enter the verse. Addressing ‘Sir William’, and referring to himself as ‘thy Bard’, he claims his ‘Knight’s

72 AHE, ll.78-80; Toynbee, p. 60；*HE*, l.116, n.13; Toynbee, pp. 66-7. At her death, the Gentleman’s *Magazine* (30 August 1797, part ii, p.89) recorded that ‘Betty […] might justly be called the Queen of Applewomen.’ (ed’s note, Toynbee, p. 67).

73 AHE, ll.84-8, n.15; Bagshot Heath was a site of public executions.
protection’, and asks to ‘share, like faithful Sancho, Quixote’s fame.’ The lines disparage, in their reference to another deluded knight, the worth both of Chambers’ title and of his gardening ideas, the fantastic unreality of which can make no impression in, or on, a land governed by a constitutional monarch dependent on the people’s consent.

The response of *The London Magazine* to the poem is representative of the favourable comments it received: ‘This epistle is a very ingenious riposte upon Sir. W. Chambers’ late Dissertation on Oriental Gardening. The chief interest of it is to expose the monstrous taste of the Chinese, which the Knight […] has recommended. The parody upon various passages in the Dissertation is supported by wit, humour, and good poetry.’ Mason’s literary contemporaries were impressed. Goldsmith read the satire ‘with a running accompaniment of laughter.’ Even the Tory Samuel Johnson ‘did not refuse his praise to its execution.’

Mason published *An Heroic Epistle* and *An Heroic Postscript* anonymously. Walpole’s enthusiasm for his friend’s satire was keen: ‘Your country wants an avenger’, he wrote to Mason on receiving from him a pre-publication copy of *An Heroic Postscript*. ‘You can do what a whole dirty nation will not do.’ The involvement of Walpole, Mason’s informer concerning events at court, with any aspect of the satire, however, made anonymity desirable. Walpole’s niece had married the Duke of Gloucester, a prince of the blood, and Walpole agonised about the effect upon her if it was discovered that he had connections with the anti-court sentiments of Mason’s poems. On the publication of *An Heroic Epistle*, however, Mason’s name, among those of other literary luminaries such as William Cowper, Christopher Anstey and William Hayley, was immediately put forward as its author. Thomas Warton was certain that Mason had written it. As time went on, Mason’s authorship became, as Toynbee writes, ‘an open secret.’ Writing to Lady Ossory in 1783, Walpole mentioned a visit from Mason,
‘supposed author’ of *An Heroic Epistle.* Though Mason did not ‘tell [his] name at first’ in writing satire, as Gray had advised him, anonymity was not long preserved.

**AN HEROIC POSTSCRIPT**

*An Heroic Postscript to the Public* was published in 1774. It was described in *The Gentlemen’s Magazine* as the creation of one who had ‘the powers of poetry in a very eminent degree.’ *An Heroic Epistle* had run to eleven editions in its first year. Its satiric successor ran to eight, a lesser number, but still an indicator of how widely it was read. ‘My pompous Postscript found itself disdain’d’, Mason wrote later in *An Epistle to Dr. Shebbeare,* with considerable exaggeration. As I have noted, the satire is partly a personal response to *An Heroic Epistle*’s success, and partly the result of the poet’s promise to wield the satirist’s pen in defence of his country. It is a mixture of light satirical touch and defiant declaration, which culminates with the latter in the writer’s vow to ‘Stretch on satire’s rack’ those who ‘against […] the People lift their rebel voice.’ Early in 1774, Mason wrote to Walpole that he felt his satire had ‘a proper mixture of the comic and serious. I do not expect it will please so much as the former, but I believe it will frighten some folks much more.’

*An Heroic Postscript* lacks the particular coherence of *An Heroic Epistle,* with its continuing analogies with Chambers’ prose. It has, however, a looser thematic coherence of its own. It is the poet’s statement about the power of satire, and his own loyalty both to the genre and to his country. Within its 120 lines, the poet thanks his public, acknowledges the power of satire, hopes that ‘the flow of these spontaneous rhymes/ May truly touch the temper of the times’, and vows to punish ‘hireling Peers’ who oppose his country’s interests. The particular object of the satire is the King. One of its most successful passages is a reprise of the

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76 Lewis, p. 128 (14 January 1774): ‘Acquit me of […] Court-serving’, Walpole wrote, ‘[but] nor would I have my niece, who is ignorant and innocent, suffer for the participation of her uncle’; Toynbee, p. 9; Richard Mant, *Memoir of Thomas Warton* (1802), in Toynbee, p.10; Lewis, XXXIII, pp. 406-7 (15 July 1783).
77 *Gentlemen’s Magazine,* XLIV, p. 84 in Draper, p. 256; *Shebbeare,* 1.36; Lewis, p. 125 (4 January 1774).
anti-despotic theme of the earlier poem, in which Mason again directs the action, creating a scene to carry his satire. Addressing his ‘Muse’, he writes

Did China’s monarch here in Britain doze,  
And was, like western Kings, a King of Prose,  
Thy song could cure his Asiatic spleen,  
And make him wish to see and to be seen;  
That solemn vein of irony so fine,  
Which, e’en Reviewers own, adorns thy line,  
Would make him soon against his greatness sin,  
Desert his sofa, mount his palanquin,  
And post where’er the Goddess led the way;  
Perchance to proud Spithead’s imperial bay;  
There should he see, as other folks have seen,  
That ships have anchors, and that seas are green,  
Should own the tackling trim, the streamers fine,  
With Sandwich prattle, and with Bradshaw dine,  
And then sail back, amid the cannons’ roar,  
As safe, as sage, as when he left the shore.78

In *An Heroic Epistle*, ‘China’s monarch’ and the employments of his leisure had been echoed in Mason’s portrayal of the activities in the ‘mimic London’, the ‘pastimes that attend/ Great Brunswick’s leisure.’ 79 In *An Heroic Postscript*, the emperor is imaginatively brought to Britain, where he is briefly conflated with ‘Great Brunswick’, George the Third himself. Both monarchs, in Mason’s view, suffer from the ‘Asiatic spleen’ which prevents them appearing before their people. In the case of ‘Great Brunswick’ it is an alarming sign of disregard for that people, and of autocratic ambition.

According to Mason’s note, ‘Kien-Long, the present Emperor of China is a poet.’ If he were a ‘King of Prose’, like the uncultured George the Third, the power of Mason’s ‘song’ could alter the behaviour he adopts as the ‘slave of […] greatness’, and cause him to show himself in public. In *An Heroic Epistle*, Mason had referred to George’s own unwillingness to look beyond his palace grounds. In this passage he invents a composite figure of George and ‘China’s monarch’, who will ‘post where’er the Goddess led the way’, such is the power of the ‘Muse’, ‘Perchance to proud Spithead’s imperial bay’- an epithetical

78 *AHP*, ll. 53-4, 33-48.  
79 *AHE*, ll. 98, 135-6.
reference to George’s perceived desire to become, like the Emperor, an absolute monarch. The scene at Spithead, Mason notes, refers to ‘A certain naval event [which] happened […] about two calendar months after the publication of the Heroic Epistle.’ According to Walpole, this was ‘The naval review at Portsmouth made by Lord Sandwich to pay his Court to the King, and which delayed the fleet to the great detriment of the Service in America.’

What the ‘monarch’ will see at Spithead, however, is unremarkable, simply ‘That ships have anchors, and that seas are green.’ When he returns home, he will have learned nothing, ‘As safe, as sage, as when he left the shore.’ And, Mason implies, the fleet will have been confined for no good reason, simply for Sandwich to curry favour with the King. Mason has the ‘monarch’ mounting his exotic ‘palanquin’, but that is the last exoticism he, or we, are treated to. Ordinary, even homely, language, describes the consequence of his journey, just as Mason is here emphasising an ordinary point, that it does not need the visit of a king to ascertain visual facts about ships and seas, tackle or streamers. Far better had the fleet sailed at the proper time, and the King, instead of seeing only what was before his eyes, as ordinary ‘folk’ would do, been wise enough to ensure such an outcome.

The next line continues the theme of delay. The ‘monarch’ will ‘With Sandwich prattle, and with Bradshaw dine’, as if no urgency is required. As if to emphasise the mindless prevarication of the king and his advisers, the verbs are foregrounded by the stress that falls upon them at the end of each half of the line. ‘Prattle’, with its phonic similarity to ‘brittle’, suggests a lack of anything other than superficial converse, the absence of military or royal wisdom; ‘With Bradshaw dine’ implies a further lengthy misuse of time spent with a man who Walpole describes as the ‘Son of a Smugler […] a personal favourite of the King.’

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80 An heroic postscript to the public, occasioned by their favourable reception of a late heroic epistle (London, 1774), n.8 <http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/ECCO> [accessed 12 January 2010]: the note on Kien-Long is not in Toynbee; Toynbee, p. 80.
81 Toynbee, p. 64.
Lines 43 to 48 describe the outing to and departure from Spithead. Each line is centrally divided, with two or three beats on either side of a caesura. The repetition of this arrangement over six lines creates the impression of a list of unremarkable points, none of them worth contributing to the retention of a fleet, and symbolising the dull royal incomprehension of naval priorities. The repetition on either side of the caesura of ‘That ships’, ‘That seas’, followed by a similar repetition in the next line of noun, then epithet, the noun two-syllabled, the epithet one- ‘The tackling trim, the streamers fine’, and in the next of a verb at the end of each half-line- ‘prattle’, ‘dine’- all contribute to a sense of unimaginative dullness. The rhythm of the final line changes, with the new emphasis on the ‘monarch’ himself. Stress falls on the single-syllabled, alliterated epithets of the first half of the line that describe his condition, ‘safe’ and ‘sage.’ George, Mason implies, is no wiser now than before, certainly no Chinese ‘sage’, having seen nothing new, and having conversed with fools. Even though satire has galvanised the king/emperor figure into leaving his palace, it has been to no avail. What it has done, in the context of the poem, is reveal the pusillanimity of a monarch rendered ineffectual by his detachment from external realities. The king had recognised himself in *An Heroic Epistle*, and thrown the book on the floor. Mason must have hoped for a similar response to his new satire. Given the great popularity with readers of his first, he must have wished for a general recognition among them, as they read his new poem, of how inadequately they were led.

**AN ODE TO MR.PINCHBECK AND AN EPISTLE TO DR. SHEBBEARE**

In 1776, Mason produced a further satire, an *Ode to Mr. Pinchbeck, upon his Newly Invented Patent Candle-Snuffers*. Pinchbeck, Walpole wrote, was ‘a celebrated Toyman, Son of the Inventor of the mixed metal called by his name.’ He was also a great favourite of the King, who ‘delight[ed] in new fashioned watches and dials.’

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82 Toynbee, p. 96.
The poem targets those responsible for the American war. Lord Bute, Sandwich, Mansfield, Lord North, and of course the King, are all mentioned in it. Having published his first two satires anonymously, Mason now, in an Advertisement to the poem, declared himself to be ‘Malcolm Macgreggor […] Author of the Heroic Epistle […] and the Heroic Postscript.’ The name itself is a satirical reference to the perceived proliferation of Scotsmen favoured by the monarchy. Walpole notes that the clan MacGregor had twice been deprived of its name during the seventeenth century, as a punishment for ‘infamous barbarities.’ It was reinstated in 1776 by George the Third, who according to Walpole, ‘was fond of subverting the Acts of King William, and of copying those of the Stuarts.’ So the putative name of the satirical author himself becomes a comment on the untrustworthiness of the reigning monarch.

In spite of this interesting addition to its publication, the satire failed to find the enthusiastic reception of Mason’s earlier satires. The Gentleman’s Magazine ‘praised [the ode’s] whimsical allegory.’ Hannah More, however, though finding ‘something of wit in it’, felt it ‘by no means worthy of the author of the Heroic Epistle.’ It is in sixteen six-lined stanzas, each half stanza containing two lines of four beats each, and one of three:

Illustrious Pinchbeck! Condescend
Thou well-belov’d, and best King’s-Friend,
These Lyric Lines to view;
O! may they prompt thee, e’er too late,
To snuff the Candle of the State,
That burns a little blue.

It once had got a stately Wick,
When in its Patent Candlestick
The Revolution put it;
As white as Wax we saw it shine
Through two whole lengths of Brunswick’s Line
Till B[ute] first dar’d to smut it.  

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83 Toynbee, pp.86, 94.
84 Gentleman’s Magazine, XLVI, p. 371 in Draper, p.257; Roberts, 1, p.87; Ode to Mr. Pinchbeck, ll. 1-12.
Mason was writing an ode addressed to a man Walpole described as ‘the most harmless’ of the King’s friends, a ‘fertile Inventor of baubles’, and of the candle snuffers that inspired the poem. The poet imagines the making of an enormous candle snuffer, which will weigh ‘some thousand stone’, that could be dropped on the American Congress, putting an end to Washington and his supporters. A comical idea, articulated in a poem addressed to a ‘Toyman’, is matched by the poem’s structure, with the playfulness of its short lines, and the feminine endings recurring throughout the ode. More’s comment, however, seems likely to have been prompted by a perceived mismatch within the poem of its playful structure, and the enormity of its true subject, the perfidy of British statesmen and their master, the King. The weak feminine endings and brief lines can be seen as more appropriate for a children’s rhyme than satirical comment on a controversial war. Nor does the poem seem a worthy successor to An Heroic Postscript, in which the poet declared his sincere belief in satire’s power.

With An Epistle to Dr. Shebbeare, published in 1777, Mason returned to the use of heroic couplets. As a result, he produced a much stronger, more impressive poem. It is when Mason adopts Pope’s powerful weapon, the heroic couplet, that his own satire gains in strength and focus. Lines in the satire about the Ode to Mr. Pinchbeck reveal the reason for the author’s reluctance to return to its format, and an understanding of the inadequacy of its rhythmic structure:

> And when I dar’d the Patent Snuffers handle,  
> To trim with Pinchy’s aid, Old England’s candle,  
> The lyric muse, so lame was her condition,  
> Could hardly hop beyond a fifth edition.

‘Hop’, with its intimation of children’s games, is an apposite verb to apply to Pinchbeck’s nursery-rhyme style.

In the Advertisement to An Epistle to Dr. Shebbeare- again attributed to ‘Malcolm Macgreggor’- Mason explains why the epithet ‘heroic’ is missing from the title, though the poem itself, he writes with ironic self-aggrandizement, ‘in

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85 Toynbee, p. 97; Pinchbeck, l.78.  
86 Shebbeare, ll. 38-41.
point of elevation of diction and sublimity of sentiment [is] as highly heroical as my Epistle to Sir William Chambers.’ The answer is in the status of the addressees: ‘it would be unpardonable of me’, Mason writes, ‘not to discriminate between a Comptroller of His Majesty’s Works, and the Hackney Scribbler of a Newspaper.’ The reference to his previous poem suggests that in the poet’s mind his three ‘heroic’ poems form a connected trio. All are written in heroic couplets; all make reference to Chambers, butt of the initial satire. ‘I that of late, Sir William’s Bard and Squire/ March’d with his helm and buckler on my lyre’, are the first lines of An Heroic Postscript. ‘Proudly I prick’d along, Sir William’s Squire/ Bade kings recite my strains, and queens admire’, Mason writes in Shebbeare.87

The Monthly Review was to describe Shebbeare, on its publication, as ‘a keen, acute, spirited satire on court connections.’ In a letter to Walpole, Mason himself described his poem as ‘a happy mix of the careless and the serious, the burlesque and the heroic.’ Certainly Shebbeare is varied and discursive in content, with references to Anstey and his New Bath Guide, to ‘phlogiston’ and ‘Dr. Priestley’, to the lack of success of Mason’s Postscript and his satire on ‘Patent Snuffers.’ There is a tension, however, between lines which recall Mason’s intention to make his readers laugh, as the only way to gain their attention- ‘No, let my numbers flutter light in air/ As careless as the silken gossamer’- and the unconcealed anger, raised by the onset of colonial war, that is present from the satire’s beginning:

O for a thousand tongues! And every tongue
Like Johnson’s, arm’d with words of six feet long…
To panegyrise this glorious nation,
Whose liberty results from her taxation.
O, for that passive, pensionary spirit,
That by its prostitution proves its merit!
That rests on Right Divine, all regal claims,
And gives to George, whate’er it gave to James. 88

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87 Toynbee, p. 102; AHP, ii.1-2; Shebbeare, ll.30-1.
88 Monthly Review, LVII, p. 488, in Draper, p. 259; Lewis, p. 321 (27 July 1777); Shebbeare, ll. 20, 48-9, 34-41, 94-5, 1-9; in 1775 Johnson published ‘Taxation no Tyranny’, in which he rebuffed the American colonists’ complaint about British taxes.
Mason’s lines on ‘the flimsy times’, however, follow a section of the poem in which trenchant criticism of Shebbeare leads to the poet’s ironic claim for the power of his ‘muse’’s versatility, and thence to a satirical vision of a peace agreed with ‘Congress.’ In its course, Mason moves from unrestrained contempt for his poem’s dedicatee to comment, in one succinct line, on the perfidy of his nation:

Enough of souls, unless we waste a line,  
Shebbeare, to pay a compliment to thine:  
Which forg’d, of old, of strong Hibernian brass,  
Shines through the Paris plaister of thy face,  
And bronzes it, secure from shame, or sense,  
To the flat glare of finish’d impudence.  
Wretch that from Slander’s filth art ever gleaning,  
Spite without spirit, malice without meaning:  
The same abusive, base, abandon’d thing,  
When pilloried, or pension’d, by a King.  
Old as thou art, methinks, ‘twere sage advice,  
That N[or]th should call thee off from hunting Price.  
Some younger blood-hound of his bawling pack  
Might sorer gall his presbyterian back.  
Thy toothless jaws should free thee from the fight;  
Thou canst but mumble, when thou mean st to bite.  
Say, then, to give a requiem to thy toils,  
What if my muse array’d thee in her spoils,  
And took the field for thee, thro’ pure good nature;  
Courts prais’d by thee, are curs’d beyond her satire.  
Yet, when she pleases, she can deal in praise:  
Exempli gratia, hear her fluent lays  
Extol the present, the propitious hour,  
When Europe, trembling at Britannia’s power,  
Bids all her princes, with pacific care,  
Keep neutral distance, while the wings of war  
Cross the Atlantic vast; in dread array,  
Herself to vanquish in America.  
Where soon, we trust, the brother chiefs shall see  
The Congress pledge them in a cup of tea,  
Toast peace and plenty to their mother nation,  
Give three huzzas to George and to taxation…  
In Fancy’s eye I ken them from afar  
Circled with feather wreaths, unstain’d by tar:  
In place of laurels, these shall bind their brow,  
Fame, honour, virtue, all are feathers now.89

89 Shebbeare, II.52-89.
The heroic couplet appears a far more robust vehicle for Mason’s attack on the American war than do the tripping stanzas of *Pinchbeck*. In this passage he moves, in his arraignment of ‘vicious men’, from a single human subject to a collective political one, those shamed, in the poet’s eyes, by their involvement with hostilities against the colonies. The transition is neatly made by reference, in half a dozen connecting lines, to the ‘muse’ who inspires the poet in his offensive against both.

When writing in heroic couplets, Pope’s method was to complete a thought within either the first or second lines of the pair. Mason also does this, as lines such as ‘Spite without spirit, malice without meaning’, where the antithetical balance is accompanied by alliterative stress on the abstract nouns, demonstrate. In ‘Courts prais’d by thee, are curs’d beyond her satire’, he again uses the alliteration of a hard ‘c’ sound at the beginning of each half of the line, to stress the malign influence of Shebbeare on those he fawns upon; the stressed ‘prais’d’ in the first half of the line is set against a similarly stressed dark opposite, ‘curs’d’, in the second. The antithetical line defines Shebbeare as soiling all he touches. The result is a succinct paradox: what is praised, deserving or not, will itself be cursed by the source of the praise. Even satire is powerless here.

As we have seen, it was Mason’s habit to take old and tried forms and adapt them to his purposes, making them his own. In addition to the Popean usage referred to above, he employs the expansive length of the iambic line to build up a picture of subject or situation. His promise in *An Heroic Postscript*, to ‘thunder’ against ‘vicious men’, his country’s enemies, bears fruit in his description of Shebbeare. From the image of Shebbeare’s ‘soul’ worn as a shameless bronze mask, he moves to four lines of direct attack. The feminine endings of lines 58 and 59, rather than weakening the passage, provide a metrical contrast with, and preparation for, the following couplet, the masculine endings of which gain emphasis as a result. Anger at Shebbeare is represented in this couplet by a list of pejorative epithets and verbs, all of which contain stressed

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90 Draper, p. 247: a typical example from Pope is ‘The Lines are weak, another’s pleas’d to say/Lord Fanny spins a thousand such a Day.’ (*The First Satire of the Second Book of Horace Imitated* (1733), II. 5-6).
syllables with an initial plosive. The short breaks between ‘abusive, base, abandon’d’ contribute to the sense of a building up of contempt which will culminate in ‘King.’ The final word indicates the nature of Shebbeare’s crime, his amoral willingness to write at the whim of monarchy.

Lines 73 to 79 form another example of descriptive accretion which terminates in a similar way. The lines from ‘Exempli gratia’ to ‘America’, if we ignore the previous line with its colon, comprise an entire sentence, in which the poet adds ironically to a picture of Britain’s military and political power, apparently as ‘vast’ to supporters of the war as the ‘Atlantic’ itself. The vision of a powerful force, ‘in dread array’, crossing a mighty ocean, is speedily deflated in a single line, ‘Herself to vanquish in America.’ It is a name which, like that of the ‘King’, has become a potent symbol for the warring factions of British politics.

Mason’s next lines begin with a change in tone, though they are just as ironic in their homely vision as the earlier lines are in regard to Britain’s unchallengeable naval power. The ‘brother chiefs’ referred to are Richard and William Howe, respectively ‘Commanding Admiral and General in America […] appointed Commissioners […] for treating for Peace with the Congress.’ Their mission was to end in failure, but from line 81 to 84, the ironic comfort of the scene emphasised by the feminine endings of the second couplet, Mason has them consorting with ‘Congress’, as the latter capitulates to their demands, ‘pledg[ing] them’, ironically, with the substance that came to symbolise the hostility between the ‘mother nation’ and her colonies.

For his following, devastating image, Mason conflates two contemporary phenomena, the ‘tarring and feathering of their Adversaries’ by the Americans, and the new fashion of English women of wearing ‘plumes of feathers.’ Employing this image, he contracts into one line the abstracts by which good men are known, and weighs them against the lightest of objects: ‘Fame, honour, virtue, all are feathers now.’ The impact of the line’s meaning is increased by the weighting with stress of ‘Fame’, and the first syllables of ‘honour’ and

91 Walpole, in Toynbee, p. 118.
92 Toynbee, p.118
‘virtue’, so that the first half of the line seems crowded with abstracts far outweighing the airy contents of the second half. The scenes Mason creates in the passage, the crossing of the Atlantic and the meeting with Congress, are each delineated in several lines. Their ironic purposes and outcomes are overshadowed, however, by the poet’s own political truth, expressed in this single line. None of the satirical contractions of An Heroic Epistle can begin to match its seriousness: lines of ‘silken gossamer’ are redundant here, as is the sense of fun he brought to his riposte to Chambers’ dissertation.

Later in the poem, Mason demonstrates his ability to use the couplet to create a successful extended metaphor. James Cox was a ‘Goldsmith and Entrepreneur’, a maker of lavish mechanisms in precious metals. In 1772 he had opened a museum in Spring Gardens in London. Taking as his example what Walpole describes as a ‘splendid Mechanism of Cox’s Museum […] designed for the East Indies’, Mason creates a parallel between the action of Cox’s machine and the tax and bribe pattern that he believed had developed at Court and in parliament, to the detriment of a nation heavily taxed as a consequence of war. Sambrook writes that during the century ‘it was believed by many that the moneyed interest, working insidiously behind government, had devised a mysterious machine for enriching itself and impoverishing the rest of the nation.’ The central image of the following passage exemplifies such a concept. Addressing ‘greedy ministers’, Mason writes:

Ye know, whate’er is from the public prest,
Will sevenfold sink into your private chest.
For he, the nursing father, that receives,
Full freely tho’ he takes, as freely gives.
So when great Cox, at his mechanic call,
Bids orient pearls from golden dragons fall,
Each little dragonet, with brazen grin,
Gapes for the precious prize, and gulps it in.
Yet when we peep behind the magic scene,
One master-wheel directs the whole machine:
The self-same pearls, in nice gradation, all
Around one common centre rise and fall:
Thus may our state-museum long surprise;
And what is sunk by votes in bribes arise.\(^93\)

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\(^93\)Toynbee, p. 122; Sambrook, p. 98; Shebbeare, ll.200-13; information on Cox is taken also from the ‘Heilbrunn Timeline of Ancient History (Metropolitan Museum of Art)’ <http://www.metmuseum.org> [accessed 20 January 2010].
In an inventory of the Cox museum’s collection, published in 1774, Cox’s ‘Chronoscope’ was described with the feature Mason draws upon in the passage: ‘a flying dragon […] dropping pearls in constant succession from its mouth.’ Such a dragon becomes in the satire ‘the nursing father’, the king, regarded as the nurturer not of his people, but of officials by bribery. To this picture, Mason adds the ‘greedy ministers’, the ‘little dragonet[s]’, eagerly awaiting nourishment. In 1769, according to Cox’s inventory, a similar ‘Chronoscope’ had been sent ‘on board the Triton Indiaman to Canton, and now adorns the palace of the Emperor of China.’ It was one of several gifts sent to ‘Kien-Long’, the poetry-writing Emperor who appears in An Heroic Postscript. In his extended metaphor, Mason returns to the theme of perfidious exoticism. Cox’s machine is a fitting gift for a despot; the king’s behaviour, represented in Mason’s satiric machine, displays it in action.

Walpole’s response to Shebbeare was unequivocal: ‘[It] will survive when all our trash is forgotten’, he wrote, and referred to ‘the immortal lines on Cox’s Museum.’

AN ODE TO SIR FLETCHER NORTON AND KING STEPHEN’S WATCH

The issue of tax reappears briefly in the satire published together with Shebbeare, the Ode to Sir Fletcher Norton, in Imitation of Horace. ‘Enough for me in these hard times/ When ev’rything is tax’d but rhymes/ To tag a few of these together’, Mason writes. The Ode, an imitation of Horace’s eighth ode, Book Four, is written in thirty-four rhyming couplets, broken only once by four lines written in abab form. An abab structure is also employed for the four final lines. Each line of the poem, as was the custom in many English translations of

94 A descriptive inventory of the several exquisite and magnificent pieces of mechanism and jewellery […] for enabling Mr. James Cox, of the City of London, Jeweller, to dispose of his Museum by way of Lottery < http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/ECCO> [accessed 20 January 2010]; a note on the Heilbrunn website informs us that some of the ‘gifts’ sent to ‘the Chinese Emperor, Qianlong’, are still in a collection in the Forbidden City.
95 Toynbee, p. 29.
Horace, carries four beats. The trenchancy of Shebbeare is replaced by a lighter tone appropriate for Horatian imitation.

The subject which prompted the poem was surprising. Fletcher Norton, Walpole wrote, was ‘a Lawyer of great eminence but […] very bad character’, who, to general amazement, had ‘made a bold Remonstrance […] to the King on the throne in the House of Lords at the close of one session.’ As a result, Mason found himself in the unusual position of praising the action of a man he despised, ‘Who lately, to the world’s surprize/ Advis’d his Sovereign to be wise.’

In a letter to Walpole of July, 1777, in which he mentioned Shebbeare as if it was another’s work, Mason also commented on the Ode that it ‘has its merit, but […] all the lines [of Horace] are not alluded to, as nomen tulit ab Africa, and Carthaginis flammae impiae, etc., which in these kind of imitations ought always to be observed.

Mason does more in his poem, however, than ignored details of the original ode. Horace’s ode is addressed to his ‘Friend’, Martius Censorinus. In it, he regrets his inability as a poor man to present his worthy addressee with precious gifts. However, ‘You delight/ In noble Verse, and I can write/ In these I’m rich, can please a Friend.’ Indeed, it is because of writers, he continues, that ‘Heroes live.’ ‘If Books were dumb, what small Regard/ Would Virtue meet, what mean Reward?’ Having begun with a compliment to his friend, Horace’s poem becomes an acknowledgement of the power of the pen, so much greater than that of ‘Stately Pillars rais’d in Brass’ or ‘Stones inscribed with publick Praise.’ Writing is superior to any costly gift: it can bestow immortality.

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96 An Ode to Sir Fletcher Norton, ll.17-19; typical eighteenth-century translations of Horace were, for example, The Odes, satyrs and epistles of Horace. Done into English by Mr. Creech (1730), T. Hare’s A translation of the odes and epodes of Horace into English verse (1737), and Philip Francis’ A Poetical Translation of Horace, 4 vols (1742-6); see also chapter 1, n.24, for Smart’s translation.
97 Toynbee, p. 127; Norton, ll. 3-4; Toynbee notes Walpole’s Memoirs of George III (ed. 1894), 1, p. 189: ‘It was known’, Walpole wrote of Norton, ‘that in private causes he took money from both parties.’ (p. 128).
98 Lewis, p. 321 (27 July 1777); n. 321: ‘Nor the burning of wicked Carthage, disclose more gloriously the fame of him who came back home, having won his name from Africa’s subjection.’ (ll.17-20).
In his own *Ode*, Mason takes Horace’s theme and gives it an ironic twist. His initial reference, rather than to a friend, is to a man who has acted honourably against all expectation. Not ‘rich enough’ to present Norton with ‘a gold box’, the poet will write, as Horace did. In this case it is questionable as to whether ‘My verse will much rejoice the Knight.’ Verse can, indeed, ‘give that permanence of fame/ Which heroes from their country claim.’ It can also, however, accomplish more, of a doubtful nature. Citing ‘Fingal’ and ‘Macpherson’, and so reminding the reader of the dubious provenance of *Ossian*, Mason wonders that

A common poet can revive  
The man who once has been alive:  
But Mac revives, by magic power,  
The man who never lived before.\(^\text{100}\)

Mason’s ‘muse would think her power enough’, he claims, to render living men ‘immortal.’ So, he adds with heavy irony, ‘Sandwich for aye, should shine the star/ Propitious to our naval war’- another reference to Sandwich’s inefficiency and political predilection. In bestowing unmerited ‘immortality’, ‘verse’, far from fulfilling an honest function of praise, becomes as untrustworthy as the individuals referred to in the poem. Its protean nature corresponds with that of the *Ode*’s addressee, whose ‘Remonstrance […] to the King’ cannot be relied upon to indicate any kind of permanently beneficial change. We are reminded of Steele’s concern that men of ‘Wit’ may write in such a way that ‘truth becomes discolour’d to us.’\(^\text{101}\)

The lines on Sandwich are followed by the *abab* structure of the final four. The expansion from couplets into this structure, and the consequent separation of the feminine endings of ‘riot’ and ‘quiet’, provide a larger space in which Mason can develop his final image. Set against the ironic picture of Sandwich is the bloody reality:

\(^{100}\) *Norton*, ll.51-4.  
\(^{101}\) *Norton*, ll.57-9, 65-5; Steele: see p. 6, above.
While Stormont, grac’d with ribband green,
Keeps France from mixing in the riot,
Till Britain’s lion vents his spleen,
And tears his rebel whelps in quiet.\textsuperscript{102}

Gentle Horatian imitation ends here, with a change in poetic structure analogous to the change in tone. The last lines, as does the final line of the passage from\textit{Shebbeare}, abandon all poetic diversion to tell the poet’s ‘truth’, which no ironic comment or flight of imagination can negate: that his country is embroiled in a war not only unjustified, but also against nature.

In writing in imitation of Horace, Mason again adapts an ancient form for his own purposes. As I have noted, \textit{Shebbeare} and the \textit{Ode} were published together. It was an appropriately differentiated pairing, heroic couplets set against lighter, octosyllabic couplets; trenchant criticism against paradoxical praise of an amoral lawyer, and ironic musings on the power of art to transform and misrepresent. Though the second poem can be seen as a kind of dessert to the main course of \textit{Shebbeare}, its final lines return the reader to the horrors of the war, which for Mason are always the locus of reality.

In February 1780, Mason’s \textit{King Stephen and his Courtier} was published anonymously in \textit{The Yorkshire Freeholder}. Mason called it ‘a tale founded on fact.’ At this time he was deeply involved in the activities of the Yorkshire Association: the satire itself arises from the time of its inception. It is directed at Leonard Smelt, an engineer who had been deputy-governor to the Prince of Wales and Prince Frederick, and was on intimate terms with the king. At the meeting of the electors of York in December 1779, from which the formation of the Association sprang, Smelt gave a speech in which he defended the king and government ‘most inadequately.’ Mason wrote to Walpole that Smelt had declared ‘that instead of decreasing the power of the Crown we ought to give it a great deal more.’\textsuperscript{103}

\textsuperscript{102} Norton, ll.69-72. ‘Stormont’ is ‘David Murray, Viscount Stormont, nephew of the Earl of Mansfield, and Ambassador to Paris.’ (Toynbee, p. 131).
\textsuperscript{103} Barr and Ingamells, p. 75; Lewis, p. 491 (31 December 1779).
The satire was published again in 1782, without Mason’s permission, as *King Stephen’s Watch*, and attributed to ‘the Author of the Heroic Epistle.’ It is written in eighty-nine unbroken octosyllabic lines, all in couplets apart from one trio of rhyming lines. In it, Smelt becomes the representative of all who believe in the ‘infallible’ nature of royalty. Based, as Mason asserts, on an actual incident, it tells the story of the King’s gift to Smelt of a watch. When it was found that the King had himself set it wrongly by an hour and a half, Smelt ‘insisted’ that it ‘must be right, being set by […] [royalty.’ Mason, who was present at the York meeting, and who had ridiculed Smelt’s speech, has fun with this story:

‘Sir courtier! Of our courtly train,  
We hold thee, the most gallant swain,  
Nor is there any squire we know,  
Who speaks so smooth, and bows so low…  
Here, take this watch, we’ve set it so,  
To tell thee when to come and go,  
To fetch and carry as we please.’  
He bow’d, then took it on his knees.

Being asked later by the King, ‘Courtier, what’s o’clock?’, and the King having expressed surprise at the answer, ‘Smelt’ replies that

‘I rest upon my regulator…  
The sun may err- It must be true.  
O ne’er shall my disloyal eyes  
Trust yon vague time-piece of the skies…  
No, gracious Sire, both eve and prime  
Your gift shall regulate my motions,  
My meals, secretions and devotions.’

104 Barr and Ingamells, p.76; *King Stephen’s Watch. A Tale, Founded on Fact. By the author of the Heroic Epistle to Sir William Chambers, Knit* (London, 1782)  
George is to control his most intimate, corporeal and spiritual, life. ‘King Stephen’, against the evidence of his eyes, declares that he will trust the sun no longer: ‘Troth, thou hast taken the right side’, he assures his ‘squire.’ ‘The sun’s a whig, as I’m a sinner/ ‘Tis time to dress and go to dinner.’

The satire appears as light-hearted fun, intended simply to amuse by demonstrating how foolish behaviour can become as a consequence of slavish adherence to monarchy. It is also, however, a serious comment on an absolutism that infantilises the subjects who encourage it, and destroys the natural order, setting itself up in its place. References to the ‘sun’ are also reminders of the notorious absolutism, noted well in England, of France’s own ‘Sun King’, Louis XIV. Behind the naively comical conclusions of the ‘Courtier’ and ‘King Stephen’ lies a thematic reiteration of the final lines of the Ode to Sir Fletcher Norton, with their allusion to the unnatural condition of the American war. It is also a reminder of the angry opening of Shebbeare, with its contemptuous comment on ‘that passive, pensionary spirit/[…]/ That rests on Right Divine, all regal claims/ And gives to George, whate’er it gave to James.’

**AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EPISTLE**

An Archaeological Epistle was also published in 1782. It was written as a riposte, as Mason’s title page announced, to ‘A Superb Edition of the Poems of Thomas Rowley, Priest’, which had been published by Jeremiah Milles, Dean of Exeter, President of the Society of Antiquaries. Gray, Walpole and Mason were among those who doubted the provenance given to the poems by the young Thomas Chatterton, who claimed to have found them in an ancient chest in a Bristol church. They, among many others, believed Chatterton himself to be their author.

Mason’s poem was a parody of the ‘antique’ poems’ style. ‘I only say of myself’, he writes in his Preface, ‘simply and modestly, that I write Archaeologically.’ In his edition, Milles had provided a glossary of antique

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105 King Stephen’s Watch, p.13.
words for the benefit of his readers. Mason too provides a glossary for the enlightenment of readers unfamiliar with his own ‘antique’ words. Some examples of these indicate the appeal the project had to his sense of humour, and the fun he must have had with this particular composition, a reprise of the pastiche of Musaeus, written so many years before. The difference, however, is between a youthful poem that celebrated the language of Mason’s poetic ancestors, and one in which, a lifetime later, he criticises through parody what he sees as a lazy writer’s dishonest use of an ‘antique’ style intended to mislead the reader. He points to the mixing, in the ‘Rowley’ poems, of ancient and modern versions of the same word- quoting ‘mees’ and ‘mead’ as an example- which enable the writer to rhyme his verse with little effort, as he can choose his version at will. He points to the usefulness of ‘the Anglo-Saxon prefix ‘y’, which can be inserted wherever there is a space to fill. ‘This dear little y’, he writes, ‘comes and goes just as one pleases.’ In addition, in writing such verse, ‘the poet will be almost entirely emancipated from the shackles of grammar.’ If, however, he can put ‘as many letters as [he] can […] crowd into a word […] that word will look truly Archaeological.’

‘Glomb’ in the Epistle, as Mason’s notes indicate, means ‘frown’; ‘houton sprytes’ are ‘haughty souls’; a ‘mollock hepe’ is ‘a wet heap, or load; ‘thie chyrckeynge dynne’ is a ‘disagreeable noise.’ Gray, Walpole- or ‘Warpool’, as his name is written here- and Mason all feature in the verse:

‘Spryte of mie Graie’, the mistrelle Maisonne cries,
‘Some cherisaunie tys to mie sadde harte
That thou, whose setive poesie I pryze,
Wythe Pyndarre kyngne of mynstrells lethlen arte.
Else now thie wytte to dernie roin han come,
For havynge protoslene grete Rowley’s hie renome.'

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106 AAE, p. 4.
107 Ibid, pp. 7-8, stanza 9, p. 14. Mason, tongue firmly in cheek, translates the stanza in a note: ‘Soul of my Gray’, the poet Mason cries, ‘Some comfort it is to my sad heart that thou, whose elegant poetry I prize, with Pindar, king of poets, art dead. Else now thy wit to sad ruin had come, for having been the first to kill (or destroy) the high fame of Rowley.’ (p. 14).
Johnson’s *Lives of the Poets*, in which he is less than kind to the poetry of Gray, had been published the previous year: Mason uses both his poem and its Preface to retaliate on behalf of his dead friend. He continues to address Gray in verse:

‘Yetté, giff thou sojourned in this earthly vale,  
Johnson atte thee had broched no neder stynge;  
    Hee, cravent, the ystorven dothe affayle,  
Bute atte the quyck ne dares hys venome flynge.  
Quyck or ystorven, giff I kenne aryght,  
Ne Johnson, ne Deane Mylle, scalle e’er agrose thie spryte.'

The satire consists of twenty-one stanzas. His critical comments on Johnson notwithstanding, Mason has great fun with his ‘antique’ verse. In the fifteenth stanza, however, both style and mood change, as if, having played with his poem for a while, Mason has arrived at its serious heart. Britain’s fate, once more, becomes his subject, as he reverts to contemporary language. The ‘murky antiquarian cloud’ that surrounds Milles and his fellows, and that ‘blots out truth, eclipses evidence’, seems suitable for a greater and sadder purpose:

Expand that cloud still broader, wond’rous Dean!  
    In pity to thy poor Britannia’s fate;  
Spread it her past and present state between,  
    Hide from her memory that she e’er was great,  
That e’er her trident aw’d the subject sea,  
Or e’er bid Gallia bow the proud reluctant knee.

If the truth about literary provenance can be so easily silenced, and readers hoodwinked, such a method can be employed to deceive a people and her governors into believing ‘That still the free American will yield’, and that ‘loans on loans and loans [Britannia’s] empty purse will bear.’ The dishonesty and folly of powerful parliamentarians echo those of the writer, and editor, of the ‘Rowley’ poems.

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108 Stanza 10, p. 14, ‘translates’ as ‘Yet, if thou sojourned in this earthly vale, Johnson at thee had pointed no adder sting; he, a coward, assails the dead, but dare not fling his venom at the living. Alive or dead, if I understand rightly, neither Johnson nor Dean Milles shall ever trouble thy soul.’

Draper notes the favourable reception given to *An Archaeological Epistle* by reviewers. The *Monthly Review* ‘ridiculed Dean Milles, and gave a long review of the satire with much quotation.’ In the *New Annual*, the author was described as ‘one of our ablest men in respect of genius and wit.’\(^{110}\) Though Mason’s poem was a clever debunking of Chatterton’s ‘antique’ style, and an opportunity to criticise Johnson, a political message lay at its heart. As Mason’s satiric career was drawing to a close, he was still receiving accolades for poetical expositions that were vehicles for the expression of political passion.

**THE END OF MASON’S SATIRE**

*The Archaeological Epistle, The Dean and the Squire,* and *King Stephen’s Watch,* were all written in the early 1780s. These poems mark the end of Mason’s satiric career. The opportunity for political activism offered by the formation of the Yorkshire Association, and the political rift with Walpole, which began at the end of the 1770s and arose from Mason’s involvement with the Association, cut him off from a useful source of political information and personal encouragement.\(^{111}\)

Mason had not ceased to fulminate against the American war, however, as *An Archaeological Epistle* and the final book of *The English Garden* show. As the war ended, and hope for political improvement grew, his need to write satire diminished. The satires he produced during the 1770s provide a further example of his capacity for taking the genres of antiquity, and using them in the service of contemporary concerns. For Mason, of course, the most pressing of these were the threat of absolutism in an age in which issues of freedom and slavery were constantly debated, and the moral bankruptcy demonstrated in Britain’s hostilities against her colonies.

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\(^{111}\) Lewis, p. xxviii: ‘The chief cause of [Mason’s and Walpole’s] ultimate split [was] the York Association […] Walpole [was] violently opposed to the Association’s demand for annual Parliaments and a reformed mode of representation.’ Walpole alluded to ‘A Mutiny at York of independent gentlemen (chiefly stirred up by Mr. Mason) to give no more taxes till reductions of […] sinecure places, etc., which give too much influence to the Crown.’ (‘Loose Papers’ (30 December 1779) in Doran,1, p. 357).
The increasingly worrying preliminaries of war and its subsequent onset directly affected the nature of Mason’s satire. Early in the century the Spectator had supported the efficacy of the ‘Comick Satirist’, who should possess a knowledge of ‘the Humours of the Age.’ In An Heroic Epistle, Mason had written from a conviction that, in the present age, only by making readers laugh could his poem take effect. An Heroic Postscript, in which the poet makes a forceful declaration of the satirist’s duty to his country, takes on a far more Churchillian tone. The failure of Pinchbeck, largely because of too light-hearted a poetic approach to the beginning hostilities, was redeemed by the strength of Shebbeare, in which Mason, in particular passages, revealed himself as possessing a Swiftian saeva indignatio.

This was also a quality of Pope’s verse, found, for example, in the poem that he declared ‘the last poem of the kind printed by our author’, Dialogue Two of the Epilogue to the Satires. ‘Yes, the last pen for Freedom let me draw/ When Truth stands trembling on the edge of Law’, Pope had written, as he promoted the power of satire to defend such a ‘Truth’: ‘Truth guards the Poet, sanctifies the line/ And makes Immortal, Verse as mean as mine.’ In the first Dialogue, in the voice of a ‘Friend’, Pope had alluded to a view of himself held by the world: ‘Tories call’d him Whig, and Whigs a Tory.’ Though Pope’s and Mason’s political sympathies diverged, both sought a moral ‘Truth’ in the face of political corruption, whether embodied by Robert Walpole and George the Second, or Bute, North and George the Third. It was Pope’s articulation of a poet’s truth that Mason admired and sought to emulate.

The tonal modulation of Shebbeare echoes that of Pope’s Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot, in which the poet’s mood changes from one of ironic lament at the fate of a successful author pursued by would-be writers, to the scathingly alliterative contempt of ‘Sporus’, ‘This painted Child of Dirt that stinks and stings.’ Shebbeare echoes Arbuthnot in both its varying modulation and its strength of feeling. Mason claimed for his poem a mixture of the ‘burlesque’ and the ‘heroic’, suggesting that the ‘humour’ that seemed necessary to entice readers

112 Davis, p. 423; Dialogue II, ll. 246-9; Dialogue I, l. 8.
was still at the forefront of the poet’s mind. It is the ‘heroic’, however, that springs from visceral feeling, that impresses. As the war in America became bloodier, and the attitudes to it of the king and his friends seemed more reprehensible, Mason’s sense of anger and despair, following its own trajectory, increasingly manifested itself on the page.

In both the preface to, and the text of, The English Garden, Mason articulated his debt to Milton. Mason’s debts to Pope and Gray, who themselves wrote satire and drew on classical example, as he did, are paid in different ways. Pope had been consigned to the second class of poets by Warton, and criticised for his perceived malignancy and his attachment to imitation of the ancients. Mason, however, not only recognises Pope’s immense talent and desire for moral truth, but also, as we have seen, wishes to claim inheritance from him. He calls Pope on to the stage of his own satire, as if for a late eighteenth-century performance that will support Mason’s own. The political viewpoint of Gray, whose own satire Mason suppressed, is represented, empathically, through Whiggish verse his friend would have approved. In such a way, Mason involves not only antiquity, but also eighteenth-century poets whose work benefited from its literary inheritance, in expressing his concerns about the modern world.

Mason’s satire was widely read and appreciated in his own time, as the responses of reviewers and literary contemporaries show. In later accounts of the century’s satire, however, his importance to the genre is consistently overlooked. He was, of course, writing satire, post-Churchill, at a time seen by many later critics as one in which the old order was making way for the new in the form of Romanticism. Such an over-arching view will inevitably result in the neglect of aspects of literature that do not immediately fulfil its criteria. Mason’s contribution to late eighteenth-century satire has been ignored for the sake of a broadbrush approach to literary history, whereby the particularities of literary creation are sacrificed to the needs of a theoretical viewpoint. Mason’s contribution to satire during the 1770s should be acknowledged for what it is, the

113 Mason to Walpole, in Lewis, p 321 (27 July 1777).
robust, poetically valuable, and deeply-felt expression of a politically engaged writer intent on revealing, and opposing, the evils of his time.
CONCLUSION

Mason’s poetic life ended quietly, with the Pindaric ode which he sent to Hurd only weeks before his own death in April, 1797. In the last years of his life, from 1795 to 1797, on his birthday, February 23rd, he had written an ‘Anniversary’ sonnet. The first was written on his seventieth birthday. Each sonnet is a meditation upon age. In each, the poet comments on the passing of time and the inevitable waning of his powers. In spite of this, however, all three poems celebrate his still lively appreciation of nature, his garden, and his Christian faith. ‘Still round my shelter’d lawn I pleas’d can stray’, he writes in the sonnet of 1795; ‘As my winter, like the year’s, is mild/ [I] give praise to him, from whom all mercies flow’, are the final lines of the following year’s sonnet. The last, written in 1797, celebrates Mason’s continuing love of nature, and the health that enables him still to enjoy it:

Yet still my eyes can seize the distant blue
Of yon wild Peak, and still my footsteps bold,
Unprop’d by staff, support me to behold
How Nature, to her Maker’s mandate true,
Calls Spring’s impartial heralds to the view,
The snow-drop pale, the crocus spik’d with gold.

To the appreciation of ‘Nature’ and his ability to remain as yet ‘Unprop’d by staff’, Mason adds thanks to his ‘Maker’ for the retention of the ‘Poet’s feeling’ which had inspired his verse:

And still (thank Heav’n) if I not falsely deem
My Lyre, yet vocal, freely can afford
Strains not discordant to each moral theme
Fair Truth inspires, and aid me to record,
(Best of poetic palms!) my Faith supreme
In thee, my God, my Saviour, and my Lord. ¹

Mason’s ‘Faith supreme’ would be, indirectly, the burden of his final Pindaric ode, with its central recognition of the unmatchable mystery of divine power. His dedication as a poet to ‘each moral theme’ had been made early in his career,

with the composition of *Musaeus*. His faithfulness to such a dedication is made clear in this, the last of his birthday sonnets.

Mason was, above all, a poet of the moral life, a quality made manifest in each of the genres I have explored in this thesis. As we have seen, his treatment of the ‘moral theme[s]’ that exercised him was mediated through the Whig ideology with which he had become familiar in youth. At its heart were Lockean tenets: of the equality of all men at birth; of the constitutional contract between monarch and people, whose right it was to replace a government that exceeded its powers; of religious toleration; of a quest for a way of living that was dependent upon the subjugation of selfish appetite. For Mason, the application of such an ideology to national life was an essential undertaking if his country was to survive and flourish.

In the service of this ideology, Mason demonstrated a considerable poetic versatility. The manipulation of the distinct voices of Pope, Chaucer, Spenser and Milton, in his early monody, indicates an aptitude for adaptation which is continued in his successful use of different genres to convey moral messages to his readers. In the course of this generic dissemination, equating the importance of the poet’s role with the importance of his message, he adopts the title of ‘British Bard’, speaking with the historical authority of the poet as *vates*. In John Dennis’ view, poets had forfeited such an august position in their service to the amoral and profane. In his Pindaric ode, *On the Fate of Tyranny*, Mason overtly foregrounded ‘the Wrath and Vengeance of an angry God’, the vehicle which, for Dennis, was guaranteed to create awe and terror in the reader. In each of the poems I have explored in this thesis, however, whether monody, ode, georgic or satire, Mason invariably claims a place, as Pindar himself had done, as moral commentator.

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2 As J. R. Milton indicates, Locke expressed these views in works such as *Epistola de Tolerantia* (1689), *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693), and the *Two Treatises of Government*. (‘Locke, John (1632-1704)’, *DNB* (Oxford University Press, September 2004; online edition, May 2008) (paras. 48, 55, 70 of 94) <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article> [accessed 16 May 2010]).
From the composition of his early poetry onward, Mason shows not only a flair for adapting ancient genres to contemporary use, but also a desire to involve the literary masters of the more recent past to validate his own claim to be a moraliser of song. His first Pindaric ode, *On Expecting to Return to Cambridge*, expresses a personal longing for re-entry into an environment in which a morality predicated upon the exercise of the intellect, in company with ‘compeers’ who are seekers after ‘Truth’, is able to flourish. In Cambridge, Locke had ‘walk’d musing forth […]/ Majestic Wisdom thron’d upon his brow.’ Though Locke is not mentioned by name in the ode, his influence on Mason was such that his connection with Cambridge must have been inseparable from the place in the poet’s memory: the ode itself encapsulates the Lockean notion of the ideas of the mind as products of the actions of sensory stimulation and internal reflection. In *Musaeus*, the young Mason demonstrates his wish to involve in his verse his poetic predecessors Milton and Pope, themselves moralisers of song, in order to affirm his position as such a poet. As his monody concludes, he prays that it will be a worthy offering for the ‘sacred Bard’ who is the subject of the lament.

The continued presence of Pope and Milton as beacons of morality in Mason’s mind is made manifest in his use of Miltonic and Popean intertextuality in his own poetry. The presence of such intertextual echoes, and their frequency in the verse, reinforce Mason’s own sense of himself as a guiding voice to the well-lived life, a poet following in the footsteps of his great predecessors.

The seriousness Mason shows in the involvement in his poetry of the thought of, and literary allusions to, such writers, shows itself also in his employment of classical genres in the service of contemporary concerns. Such genres were rendered noble by longevity, and their association with classical literature and philosophy. They were also, to the eighteenth-century poet, not only a link to the gifted writers and thinkers of the classical past, but also central to their own literary productions, providing frameworks in which their own verse could be set. As I have shown, Mason makes deliberate use of a variety of genres. Within the scarcely-used form of the monody, he elucidates his perception of himself as the inheritor of a poetic line stretching from Chaucer to Pope, and indirectly, through the imagined speech of Pope, states his intention of becoming a poet.
dedicated to the ‘moral lay.’ Writing about his georgic, he explains his reasons for choosing to follow Virgil and Milton, both commentators on the political scene, in style and structure. That he exercises care in choosing Pindar as a model is demonstrated in his close and novel attention to the structure of the true Pindaric, and his adoption of Pindar’s role as an arbiter of social behaviour. The work of the Roman satirists, as Pope and Johnson had shown in their imitations, and poets such as Smart and Creech in their translations, was a respected source of moral instruction.

Mason took each of these genres, employing them to comment upon the times, and to provide his own instruction and guidance for contemporaries. The 1770s, which saw a deterioration in Britain’s political situation as the result of a conflict viewed by many as fratricide, was Mason’s busiest period as a poet. He put georgic, satire and ode to use in his determination to expose what was, for him, an evil perpetrated by unprincipled politicians.

Many writers had produced generic imitations and translations. Some, such as Pope’s imitations of Horace and translation of the Iliad, and Johnson’s imitations of Juvenal, in London and The Vanity of Human Wishes, were masterly. Mason, however, was a purposeful innovator, employing a variety of genres in new ways. In classical times, monody was an artefact inspired by grief. In Mason’s hands it becomes a vehicle for pastiche. In it, however, he foregrounds, within a theatrical framework, his own abilities and seriousness as a poet. His Pindaric odes, rather than becoming the costumes in which to address a monarch, as Robinson suggested was the fate of most Pindaric odes after Cowley, are concerned with contemporary issues. The organised structure of Mason’s Pindarics is as true to the original as he can make it, as is his approach to the content. Besides commenting on current events, however, he acknowledges the contemporary trend towards the expression of individual experience and feeling—whose provenance is the ideas of Locke on individual response to sensual stimuli—and the growing vogue of ‘sensibility.’ Palinodia takes as its subject the enormous event of the French Revolution. The name of the poem, however, indicates that comment upon the situation in France will be mediated through the
poet’s personal consideration of his former desire to see the French people rise against a repressive monarchy, and the reality of the Revolution’s outcome.

In *The English Garden*, too, Mason involves himself and his own feeling in the text, as mourner for wife and friend and as his nation’s poet. He even, in the concluding narrative of Book Three, becomes a character, the sympathetic poet to whom ‘Lineia’ complains about the misuse of water, an example of the mistreatment of ‘Nature’ which stands as a metaphor for the derelictions of contemporary government. By courtesy of her imagined presence, the poet becomes the ‘British Bard’ to whom ‘Nature’ itself, in the guise of ‘Lineia’, entrusts a message for Britain’s people. The eighteenth-century georgic was often a vehicle for praise of ‘Britannia’, and all that was seen to make her militarily and commercially great. In Mason’s hands, however, the garden which is his poem’s subject becomes itself an embodiment of his vulnerable country: loved, a source of pride and generation, but in constant danger from those undeveloped beings, still clinging to past custom, who would ruin the constitution as thoughtlessly as they would disfigure natural growth.

In his role as dramatist, Mason chose, for one of his tragedies, the story of the British hero Caractacus. It was the act of a writer who wished to emphasise the traditional idea of ‘Albion’s’ ancient nobility, and the fight for freedom under invading peoples. In adopting, in his georgic, the title ‘Albion’s Poet’, he advertised himself as one who, whether he praised or blamed, was devoted to his nation’s welfare. More than this, as his country’s poet, he took upon himself the role of guide to its wellbeing.

Though Mason was at times self-referential in his work, in the act of writing, his habit was social. When he was an undergraduate, Richard Hurd became his mentor; at the end of his life, Mason was still sending Hurd his verse to read. His friendship with Thomas Gray involved regular perusal of each other’s writing, as their correspondence shows. Their two names were often bracketed together, as in the Colman and Lloyd parodies of 1760, or the complimentary
comments of Vicesimus Knox on their poetry. As I have suggested, Mason not only influenced his friend’s poetry, but also continued a form of collaboration with Gray even after the latter’s death, in the satire which he wrote through the 1770s.

The early years of that decade found Walpole collaborating with Mason, as the former furnished material for Mason’s satire. In the early 1780s, William Burgh supplied the prose Commentary to The English Garden. Politics was not all, however: Burgh’s comment on his honour at having his name attached to that of Mason, in the 1783 edition of the georgic, is an indicator of the respect and feelings of friendship Mason elicited from his contemporaries. The sympathy of long and valued friendship, as well as of shared political views, was a force behind Mason’s posthumous collaboration with Gray.

Over the passage of time, Mason’s poetic reputation suffered a severe decline. His verse was censured by a nineteenth-century criticism biased towards the ‘Romantic’ poets, and dependent upon the unfocused analysis of ‘gentlemen’ critics such as Leslie Stephen. For Arnold, the eighteenth century had been a period of uninspired stability, before the arrival of Wordsworth on the poetic scene. Twentieth-century criticism rejected the eighteenth century’s classical inheritance, and its embrace of ‘sensibility’, both considered as outmoded and irrelevant to contemporary letters. The rise of a literary form seen as more accessible than poetry to the general reader, the novel, contributed to attitudinal change. John Draper’s critical biography of Mason, though exhaustive in its scholarship, reflects the general opinion of eighteenth-century poetry still prevalent in the early twentieth century. For Draper, Mason is worthy of scrutiny only as a typical product of his day, enfeebled as a poet by an outmoded clinging to a dying neo-classicism which would be swept away by the energetic advance of ‘Romanticism.’

Only in the last half-century has this view of eighteenth-century verse, perpetuated by scholars too ready to accept inherited opinion, begun to change again. The new attitude has allowed unknown and forgotten poets to be discovered and re-discovered, a process which has added richness to the literary heritage. Part of that richness devolves from the centrality to eighteenth-century poets of the classical genres, with their wealth of poetic and philosophical expression, that these poets still chose to frame their own verse; part devolves from the position of such poets as integral to the social and cultural fabric of their world, and the normality of their involvement with, and desire- often passionate- to comment on the pressing issues of the day, and to turn such involvement and passion into poetry.

Mason was a salient example of a poet of this kind, driven by his own political certainties to criticise, ridicule, celebrate or praise. He was, however, more than this, and much more than his critics have allowed him to be. The poem that brought him to the world’s attention, his monody, displayed a masterly control of earlier poetic voices; many years later, in An Archaeological Epistle, he showed the same ability, in his imitation of the ‘Rowley’ poems, to capture, imaginatively, an obscolescent diction and style.

In writing his odes, Mason showed himself capable of making an old, respected verse form new for his time. In doing so, he involves a variety of literary and philosophical preoccupations of the mid-eighteenth-century: the privileging of the ancient sublime in Hebrew writing; the striking use of personification and, new to the true Pindaric form, the growing reference to individual experience. Restoring the Pindaric ode to its original organised structure, he uses interesting metrical schemes to support the elevated language of the sublime, as in the description of the passage of ‘Death’ in the terse lines of the ‘Caractacus’ ode, the iambic pentameters and expanding alexandrine within which the majestic ‘Spirit of the Deep’ appears from ‘the mighty bosom of the main’ to persuade ‘Britannia’ to a more honourable course of action, or the dramatic distillation of ‘Famine pursued, and frown’d’ and ‘Stood stern Captivity’ of On The Fate of Tyranny.
In *The English Garden*, responding to the fluid nature of the Miltonic blank verse in which he has deliberately chosen to write, Mason demonstrates a flexible capacity to suit lexis, diction and image to the changing moods and themes of a text that developed over more than a decade. The opulent description of the plants in the garden of Abdalonymus at the end of the second book, for example, with its nine-line long sentence, is in direct contrast to the list, articulated in compressed half-lines, of the nature-denying treatments forced by insensitive gardeners upon the ‘cold, unconscious element’ of water in the third.

In his satires Mason is revealed, in his desire to lay bare the follies and iniquities of William Chambers, George III, and the supporters of the Colonial war, as an accomplished director of satiric comedy, for whom humour is the key to the reader’s attraction to the verse. In his slighter satires, such as *King Stephen’s Watch* and *The Dean and the Squire*, the stage is not so deliberately set, nor so rich in characters. There is, however, a real sense of fun in the tension depicted between a perceived un-Whiggish servility and ignorance on the one hand, and the elevated social positions of the butts of the satire on the other.

Mason’s most effective satires, *An Heroic Epistle to Sir William Chambers*, *An Heroic Postscript*, and *An Epistle to Dr. Shebbeare*, are written in the heroic couplets inherited from Pope and Churchill, which Mason adapted to his own use, and within which, in *An Epistle to Dr. Shebbeare*, he expresses a Swiftian anger at the perpetrators of the American war and those paid and pensioned, as he believed Johnson and Shebbeare had been, to uphold the conflict through their writing. His anger is turned on the page into memorable images and metaphor, such as the analogy of Cox’s masterpiece of machinery with the concealed machinations of the King.

The deeply-felt anger that Mason expressed publicly through poetry was to demand a further outlet. For a poet who lived and breathed political passion, writing could not be enough. Though the satire he wrote in the 1780s continued to denounce the American war, *The Ode to the Naval Officers of Great Britain* and the final book of *The English Garden* were the last literary productions in which he publicly attempted to promote a change of view. In the first, he
exhorted ‘Britannia’, in the name of ‘Freedom’, to take arms against the old enemy France, rather than the colonies; in the second, in an attempt to demonstrate to the reader the realities of the conflict and the shame of the nation, he encapsulated a true story of British atrocity in America within imagined narrative.

Mason joined the Yorkshire Association at the end of the 1770s, becoming one of its major representatives. For him, action against parliamentary corruption began to replace writing about it. The friendship with Walpole that had provided material for Mason’s satires was in any case breaking down, only to be fully renewed in the last years of the two men’s lives. The vehicle with which Mason now sought reform was prose rather than poetry. He wrote many sermons in his life as a priest: it is unlikely that any of them would outdo the force of the anti-slavery sermon he preached in York Minster early in 1788. The publication of *Animadversions on the Present State of the York Lunatic Asylum* indicates a man deeply concerned with issues of local as well as national interest.

The enthusiastic energy with which Mason adopted such causes points to the sincerity of the emotions and beliefs driving his verse. He had, in writing *Musaeus* at the beginning of his poetic career, displayed a talented aptitude for adaptation, a good ear, and an intention to take upon himself the mantle of his great predecessors. Throughout his poetic life he would continue on this path, yoking together ancient and respected genres with contemporary events and issues, bringing the best of the past to the service of the present, and writing poetry, directed to his country’s good, which was appreciated and admired in his own time.

Mason was a poet, a dramatist, and a writer of sermons; he was also a gardener, a painter, and a musician. The breadth of his interests, the admiration shown for him as a man creative in several areas, brought him into contact with noted cultural figures such as Gray, Walpole, Reynolds and Hurd. His reforming activities, of which his poetry was an artistic representation, brought him the friendship of men such as Wilberforce and Wyvill. In this lifelong process, Mason himself became a central cultural figure, at the heart of a wide-ranging
nexus of personalities whose beliefs and attitudes influenced and altered the mood and tenor of Britain’s cultural and social life.

The blinkered view of later critics of eighteenth-century poetry is steadily clearing. In the light of such change, it is time that Mason’s name was added to the list of eighteenth-century poets worthy of attention in the twenty-first.
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