COX, Mary Elizabeth. REALISM AND CONVENTION: A STUDY OF THE POETRY OF PRIOR, SWIFT, AND GAY.

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Readers of this study who are already familiar with the work of Prior, Swift, and Gay will want to keep in mind the chronological limitation. In this study of the relation between realism and "neoclassical" convention, illustrations drawn from poems written before 1700 and after 1725 have been kept to a minimum. The poetry of Swift's later years is not cited, though occasional reference has been made to the early odes. The Beggar's Opera and the Fables, the basis for much of Gay's popularity and posthumous fame, are mentioned only briefly. More than sixty poems of Prior written before 1700 are excluded; these are not important for my purposes, since his later work provides adequate examples of the techniques used earlier, but the reader may miss references to several good anthology pieces.


I am happy to express my thanks to Professor Robert C. Elliott, whose advice and criticism have been of great value. I thank also Professors William Charvat, Edwin Robbins, and Roy Harvey Pearce, who made excellent suggestions, and Dr. Robert M. Estrich, Chairman of the English Department, who helped by commenting on my prospectus.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

"Neoclassicism"—whether it be regarded as an attitude toward life, a body of critical theory, a formal principle of poetry, or a stylistic syndrome—is supposed to have enjoyed its English heyday between 1700 and 1725 and to have entered shortly thereafter a period of decline lasting for several decades.¹ The story of the rise of neoclassicism and the story of its condemnation have often been told. Its contradictions have been analyzed, its extremes have been justified or deprecated, and its relations to religion, science, the ancients, and the arts have been explored.

A lack of agreement about the meaning of neoclassicism has always been evident, as well as a certain care to use quotation marks or the prefix pseudo-, and to point out that neo- means more than simply "new" when the literary phenomenon of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is being compared with ancient classicism. Because its "period of culmination" was the Augustan Age, explanations of neoclassicism have naturally been woven with discussions of Reason, the Rules, Nature, and common sense; with those of Deism, Enlightenment, and cosmic optimism.

On the other hand, recognition of neoclassicism has led to investigation of forces running counter to it, so that we find it treated in studies of primitivism and progress, sentiment, taste, and the sublime. But seldom has it shared the spotlight with "realism," which is more often discussed in connection with the novel than with poetry.

The authors of several widely different kinds of studies have expressed opinions about the realism of poets in the neoclassic age, and some of them have found the age itself realistic. One of the most interesting appraisals presents Augustan realism, live and healthy in the early eighteenth century, threatened by an "anti-realistic, anti-rational" movement which deified the non-human part of the universe and rejected civilized life. Doughty attributes the dearth of lyrics in the neoclassic period to the "great impulse towards realism"—manifested, he says, in the adoption of a vigorous popular idiom in poetry. MacLean credits the objective quality of eighteenth-century literature to the influence of Locke; writers were induced by Locke's demonstration, says MacLean, "to give almost undue

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2 V. de Sola Pinto, "Realism in English Poetry," Essays and Studies, XXV (1939), 81-100.

attention to the external world." Ian Jack connects with the New Science "the realistic bent of literature" throughout the period; Bond refers to the "realistic, sometimes cynical attitude that was common to the age." According to Hunt, "both neo-classic critical theory and poetic practice, from the prefaces to Gondibert on throughout the Age of Pope, reflect to a large extent the belief that the proper study of the poet is men and the manners of men as seen through his own eyes, and that, for the most part, poetic conventions should be measured against realistic standards before they can be acceptable." Gallaway speaks of the "realistic emphasis of the age of classicism" and praises the writers of the time for maintaining "contact with reality."

But these statements are offset by several critical comments that give the opposite impression, making the neoclassic age seem most unrealistic, even antagonistic to realism. Watt remarks that the unadorned realistic description implied by the purely referential

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use of language was tabooed by the classicists. Sutherland says that eighteenth-century poetry characteristically lacks "the sense of immediate, direct contact with experience." Although cosmic reality was of great interest to the Augustans, says Wimsatt, the "opposite sort of reality--commonplace and fragmentary--the unexplained, supposed real of literal everyday life, was something that Augustan poets did not much try to handle." Bush mentions as one cause of the development of "poetic diction" the effort "to avoid the 'lowness' of concrete realism." According to Havens, eighteenth-century poetry does not represent eighteenth-century life and thought; of one poem he remarks that it "departs from classicism . . . by being realistic." Another hint of incompatibility is found in Sherburn's suggestion that mid-century authors turned to realism to escape from classical material.

Besides disagreement about the realism of the neoclassicists, two things are obvious: first, the word realism does not have the same meaning for all the critics; second, realism (or any expression which seems to be replacing or amplifying that word) implies on the part of the user a favorable attitude toward the literary complex it refers to. Realism—whatever it may be—is apparently desirable. Therefore, our estimate of the neoclassic age is seriously affected by our understanding of its realism or lack of it.

Two problems must be of special interest to anyone attacking the investigation of realism in neoclassic poetry. A beginning can hardly be made without noting that the eighteenth century had a dual attitude toward poetic diction. The idea of a special diction for poetry is an ancient and honored one—a classic one. Even Wordsworth, according to Gilbert Murray, recognized in the midst of his attack on neoclassical diction that the tradition of poetry was against him. Murray defends "the Aristotelian or classical view that there is such a thing as 'poetic diction,' and that the language of poetry is essentially somewhat different from that of prose."¹⁵ Poetic diction is "to a very slight extent a matter of euphony; much more it is a matter of appeal to the senses and the imagination rather than to intellect and

calculation; most of it is a matter of association, and therefore of tradition."16

It is not surprising to find the Augustan Age believing in "a treasury of select words, phrases, and other 'ornaments.'"17 But it is important to note that the neoclassic belief in a special poetic diction was only half the story. Opposing poetic-diction theories in the eighteenth century was the idea that "the language of poetry should in general conform to that of cultivated conversation and prose."18 This idea may have owed something to science, the influence of which was in the opposite direction from ornamental language, though proponents of the simpler diction did not usually deny imagination a place in poetry.19 Whereas the classical doctrine was emphasized and demonstrated in Pope's translation of Homer, the opposing one was supported in his Essay on Criticism.20

Aside from the obvious connection between the words of a poem and its very existence, recognizing conflicting aims is important to an investigation of realism because an especially selected diction seems likely to be less realistic than one which leaves the poet free

16 Ibid., p. 138.
18 Idem.
19 See Donald F. Bond, "'Distrust' of Imagination in English Neo-Classicism," PQ, XIV (1935), 54-69.
to use any word that comes to mind; special diction arose partly to avoid the common and the vulgar. The problem is important, moreover, because the dual attitude might seem to make any further probing unnecessary; for, if there were two attitudes toward the language of poetry, each poet of our period might easily have had two styles—one realistic, the other more "poetic" (if the two adjectives can be opposed). Poets, it seems, did consciously try to have more than one style. The simple solution is lent support, too, by Auerbach's explanation of the division of styles in classical times. If Auerbach is right, we can expect to find realism in satirical, humorous, or light verse only. But I do not think recognition of the duality closes the matter. For one thing, more than two styles can be distinguished in the work of all the poets under discussion. Moreover, elements of realism occur in the serious poetry.

The second problem that must be faced—and in a sense this one too involves diction—has to do with the inclusiveness of the term neoclassical. In 192 Thomas Quayle set forth the distinguishing features of eighteenth-century "poetic diction" and left the impression that they were elements of neoclassicism. Since this author

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23Erich Auerbach, Mimesis, tr. W. R. Trask (Princeton, 1953), passim.

24See note 17, above.
sometimes uses quotation marks for the key words, apparently he is not satisfied with the popular interpretation which blames neoclassicism for the extremes he so clearly analyzes. I think, however, that in the following facts there is an adequate justification for the popular interpretation: (1) a separate diction for poetry is a classic ideal; (2) "Latinisms" were one of the features of the English poetic diction; (3) the poetic diction of the neoclassicists developed in an age which is quite reasonably called Augustan, and most of the terms are to be found in the classic Roman poetry; 25 (4) the fashion received a great impetus from Milton, whose affinity with the great classic writers of the past no one questions, and from Pope's Homer, which remains the standard example—honored and maligned—of "neoclassical" language. Moreover, if we include the confusion about "imitation" and the widespread belief in a parallelism between poetry and painting, the traditional picture of neoclassicism as condemned by the romanticists is complete. The present study will make use of this very broad traditional meaning of "neoclassicism."

Nevertheless, in 1957 Josephine Miles listed ten important recent studies which "have made us increasingly aware of the brief tenure of neoclassicism in the eighteenth century, and the looming power of a cosmic art beyond the classic." 26 A sharp restriction of the meaning of neoclassicism is implied. Professor Miles sees three trends working


26 Josephine Miles, Eras and Modes in English Poetry (Los Angeles, 1957), p. 64.
themselves out with a certain rhythm in English literary history. One of the "modes" is either "metaphysical" or "romantic"; a second is "the sublime"—the "cosmic art" of which obscured neoclassicism; the third—poised, detached, impersonal—"is sometimes called classical."27

Removing the eighteenth-century "sublime" poem from the category of neoclassical works makes neoclassicism seem less important than it once did. For here, in "the prevailing eighteenth-century poem," much of the "poetic diction" described by Quayle is found. We may still believe, however, that the sublime poem was produced under the impulse of neoclassicism and that much of what has been said about decadence in the latter part of the century, though it be now applied to a certain type of poem, is still descriptive of neoclassicism. It was in the effort to pull away from the "metaphysical fictive extreme," according to Professor Miles' explanation, that the century "moved to another, natural, extreme, that of the sublime."28 The sublime is the end product, then, of a classical reaction. There seems no sufficient reason, therefore, for abandoning the traditional meaning of "neoclassicism."

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I have chosen for my study of realism in neoclassic poetry the work of three poets of the second rank—Prior, Swift, and Gay. Pope,


28 Eras and Modes in English Poetry, pp. 65, 56.
of course, is unanimously regarded as the central figure of neo-classicism, propounding its theory, bringing its rhythmical instrument to perfection, and providing in his translations a treasure-trove of "diction" for imitative writers following him. But Pope has surely had already a good part of the attention to which his superiority over his contemporaries entitles him. If neoclassicism means anything at all, it must show up, surely, in poets of lesser rank who are good enough to be worthy of study. The three poets I have chosen, who wrote or published much of their work in the first quarter of the century, and who are surpassed by no early-eighteenth-century poet except Pope, were certainly subjected to the influences of neoclassicism. I shall try to show what elements of realism can be isolated and described, what ingredients of the poetry can be called realistic, and what techniques the poets used in their effort to secure a realistic effect or to avoid it.

Since problems of definition are so difficult, it is worthwhile to notice that all three of these men have been regarded as neoclassical by reputable critics. Sherburn (p. 909) calls Prior "perhaps the ideal neo-classicist." Armens, though not hesitating to call attention to "preromantic" elements, takes Gay's neoclassicism for granted, so does Havens, according to whom periphrases reached their height in

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rimed verse in Rural Sports (1713). Swift is more difficult to assess; he early turned against the fashionable pindarics, and, as his editor suggests, may have allowed the pendulum to swing too far. But Sherburn (p. 857) allows that Swift was an "independent neoclassicist." Kulischeck credits Swift with shaping the octosyllabic couplet so that it again became "a graceful and entirely appropriate medium for the expression of personal emotion, within formal restraints, that is authentically classical." Another critic calls Swift's a "natural classicism" which, unlike the traditional classicism of Dryden, depends on "elucidation" of a form inherent in the substance; judgment, in this critic's opinion, it would seem, combined with "the purpose of fitting form to substance," determines "the classical quality of the poet's work."

But if these men are worthy of being called "neoclassical" in a complimentary sense, it is no less true that unattractive features of neoclassicism are found in their work. At first sight this poetry seems far removed from everyday life. An inexperienced reader, who would perhaps call it "unrealistic" or "artificial," might decide that


those critics are right who find realism a countercurrent to neoclassicism. As Bateson says, the verse is "swaddled" in the "wet blanket" of so-called poetic diction. It supplies plentiful examples of the stock diction analyzed by Quayle: apostrophe, personification, periphrasis, excessive Latinism, hackneyed and irrelevant words, adjectives inserted apparently for the sake of the rhythm. In it are also blurred epithets, tiresome mythological machinery, dreaminess of tone, and dullness. A first impression of these minor Augustan poets may confirm a prejudice; since their work foreshadows the decadent neoclassicism so much noticed later in the century, it may seem to justify the strictures of Wordsworth and later romanticists.

Two considerations, however, may prevent hasty judgment. First, there was a time when "verdant mead," "shady grove," and "wand'ring stream" did not have a soporific effect; whether neoclassical conventions were necessarily antagonistic to realism will be discussed in Chapter IV. Secondly, even in barely skimming these poets' work one may be struck by references to persons, objects, situations, or experiences that seem a part of everyday life. It need not be surprising, then, that the verse of Prior, Swift, and Gay, as well as that of less prominent contemporaries, has sometimes been called "realistic." Here, of course, as in the general remarks quoted near

the beginning of this chapter, it is obvious that various elements of realism are involved.

Several critics have used the words realism and realistic in referring to the work of individual minor Augustans. Doughty (p. 54) writes positively of Prior's intense realism; Groom remarks his seriousness; Lawry credits him with general, usually moral, representation of the human situation. Attention has been called to Swift's prosaic, realistic content; his incompleteness as a poet has been charged to his being penned up in reality. Doughty (p. 67) says Swift excels in realistic verse as well as prose, and Davis praises his particularity and individuality. Watt mentions Swift's work as an illustration of "moral realism," a quality Quintana says accounts for the "anti-myths" in it.

Gay elicits less unanimous verdicts. Brown credits him with realistic descriptions. Fairchild speaks of his "keen-eyed realism."  


40 Wallace Cable Brown, The Triumph of Form (Chapel Hill, 1948), p. 4.  

Armens (p. 9 et passim) praises him not only for the native English realism in the pastorals but for the moral realism which gives his work importance as social satire. On the other hand, Schelling calls one of Gay’s most famous lyrics "preposterous and untrue to nature," regarding it as flawed by "perverted realism." Sutherland emphasizes Gay’s "natural artificiality" and his "softening of the actual."

Though the verse of lesser writers than the three second-rank poets selected has not been examined carefully for the present study, it may be well to include at this point a few miscellaneous judgments which indicate that their realism has been noticed.

John Hughes, the "Renaissance Man" of the Augustan Age—poet, musician, librettist, historian, translator—has a poem called "The Hue and Cry" which gives details about a character that make her seem distinctly individual. Wasserman credits Ambrose Philips with achieving "some slight sense of realism," because the rustic style in which he wrote did not force him to use the clichés attendant on the "polished" style of his fellow pastoralists. According to the same critic, the pastorals of Abel Evans, a friend of Pope, "contain occasional touches of honest realism."


Goldsmith's judgment on Parnell—"He has considered the language of poetry as the language of life"—is quoted by Deane, who adds that Parnell's best work shows a knowledge of when to use and when not to use ornamental set phrases. Sherburn (p. 919) says Thomas Purney in 1716 "struck out new lines in rural poetry" through "particularity in rural details." Another critic remarks that the characters in Purney's pastorals are based on his experience.

Oswald Doughty analyzes the work of the least important lyricists of the century, about thirty of whom belong to the 1700-1725 period. Most of them, according to Doughty, are "common-sense" poets, restrained, pleasant, reliable, solid, singing of the practical and the commonplace. In the work of John Philips, in my own opinion, the homely details are not swallowed up or made less real by being mixed with Miltonic diction. An example of another kind of realism is found among the burlesques which form the subject matter of R. P. Bond's study. Bond (p. 227) calls attention to the historical interest of a Hudibrastic called "British Wonders" (Edward Ward, 1717), which reflects actual events.


48 In Bond's Register, incidentally, there are about twenty-five Hudibrastics which indicate a fashion for referring to current affairs that makes Swift's two dozen pages of verse about the Wood halfpenny seem less nearly unique.
One important group of poems, the topographical, deserves notice both because they are "rooted in the classics" and because many of them are based on particular detail. Aubin finds more than a hundred of them composed between 1695 and 1730, and the number increased rapidly as the century advanced.\footnote{Robert A. Aubin, \textit{Topographical Poetry in XVIII-Century England} (New York, 1936), p. 3 and bibliographies.} Poems by Wright, Rutter, Brereton, Arbuckle, and Garbot are praised for what seem to be realistic elements beyond simple enumerative accumulation of details, and one anonymous poem of 1705, "an early bit of propaganda against imprisonment for debt," is described as "startlingly realistic."\footnote{Tbid., p. 158.} Relative lack of concrete description in some of the didactic poems is a sign of the influence of Pope's \textit{Windsor Forest}, according to Aubin, but occasionally these poems manage to distinguish themselves by other traits that might be called realistic. In the Aubin study, "strong sense of actuality," "unsophisticated definiteness," "immediacy," "amazingly vivid," take their place beside "realism" and "realistic" as complimentary terms for those poems which escape from the conventional.

The primary interest of the present study is to establish the relationship of neoclassicism to what I shall tentatively call "concrete realism." Recognizing that realism means more than this narrow term would indicate, and that other studies with higher goals would...
be at least as valuable as this, I am arbitrarily imposing a limitation. Though other kinds and elements of realism to which attention is attracted will not be ignored herein, the study will focus on the extent and nature of concrete realism in the poetry of the quarter century in which neoclassicism supposedly culminated. I will classify instances of the use of particular details in different types of poems, examine techniques that contribute to "realistic" effects, and attempt to show how neoclassical conventions affected realism. A final chapter, taking into consideration both theory and practice, will clarify, I hope, the place of the concrete detail in the neoclassic pattern.

I have two reasons for using the word concrete rather than particular. Though the two are sometimes used interchangeably, the latter word is opposed to general, and is so understood in most discussions of neoclassicism I have seen. Concrete, on the other hand, is opposed to abstract. Most of the discussions will be based on references to the external, physical world, but occasionally in this study it may be necessary to remember that such references can be either particular or general, and that general terms can in certain contexts have a realistic effect.

A more important reason for the choice of words, however, is to avoid being classed with two groups of critics who may be said to denigrate the neoclassic period by too great fondness for the

51 Watt's qualified term "realistic particularity" (The Rise of the Novel) seems especially suitable to describe the work of a novelist, who has more time than the poet to be as particular as he wishes. If particularity sometimes fails to be realistic (as is implied by Watt's modifier), it is no less true that some sort of realism can be achieved without it.
particular detail. Josephine Miles complains of those who set up eighteenth-century poetry as "general," and poetry in essence as "particular," thereby removing the one from the realm of the other."\(^{52}\) Regarding the "general" as incompatible with poetry affiliates these more recent writers with Quayle, according to whom the "deliberate avoidance of accidental and superficial 'particularities'" reflected neoclassical "inability to achieve that intensity of imaginative conception which is the supreme need of all art" (p. 13).

A second group of critics regard as "preromantic" anything in eighteenth-century poetry that makes use of detailed, accurate, or everyday language. Some of these occasionally write as if they thought that particular details crept (one of them uses the word) into English poetry in spite of Dr. Johnson; Oswald Doughty will serve as an example:

Johnson said it was not the province of the poet to "number the streaks of the tulip, or describe the different shades of the verdure of the forest"; nevertheless poetry was, very rightly, gradually approaching such forbidden exercises, as artists came to realise that even if generalised truth were the aim of poetry it must nevertheless be presented in the concrete if poetry were to retain its life and power. Cowper was the most important of the early leaders in this tendency towards close observation and realistic detail in descriptions of nature ... \(^{53}\)


\(^{53}\) Forgotten Lyrics of the Eighteenth Century, p. 124.
Admirers of neoclassicism, on the other hand, have long been guided by a broader definition of realism. They have, of course, taken note of the neoclassicists' respect for general terms, together with the Augustan conviction that the real and the true involve conformity to universal human experience. These admirers sometimes speak of "classical realism," "moral realism," or "social realism." They explain that neoclassic critics and poets identified truth to Nature with normal probability, the usual, the general. The art which the neoclassic age founded "on the identification of truth with normal probability" is for these sympathetic appraisers a "realistic art."

But admirers of neoclassicism who favor a definition of realism that insists on the particular as the chief or only ingredient no longer need to apologize for neoclassicism's theoretical disapproval of details; for a recent study has explained a bifurcation of neoclassic ideals concerning truth or reality. Ian Watt, noting that Shaftesbury in 1709 attacked particularity, says that "a contrary aesthetic tendency in favor of particularity soon began to assert itself, largely as a result of the application to literary problems of the psychological approach of Hobbes and Locke." If this contrary tendency asserted itself soon enough, it would go far toward

54 As do Gallaway, Armens, and Watt, for example.
55 Gallaway, p. 53.
56 The Rise of the Novel, p. 16.
explaining particular realism in the period of this investigation; but in spite of the word "soon," Watt offers no evidence earlier than his quotation from Lord Kames, "perhaps the most forthright early spokesman of this tendency," whose championship of particularity dates from 1762, half a century away from Shaftesbury's attack. Moreover, according to Miles, an interest in "implicative particularity" defines the "new Poetry" of the mid-century. If some who enjoy both eighteenth-century poetry and the modern realistic novel are happy to become acquainted with the Watt and Miles observations, they should note that neither explanation accounts for any prominence of particularity in the first quarter of the century.

This, then, is a study of the realism in about five hundred English poems composed while neoclassicism was at its height. Because of the varied and even conflicting ideas about realism that show up in scholarly writing, I can hardly hope to avoid some confusion and may overlook much of importance. To keep the issue as clear as possible, I have placed the emphasis on the concrete and the particular, without any implication that other kinds of realism would be unworthy of investigation. Because so much account has already been taken of the

neoclassic tendency to exalt generality over particularity, this study will concentrate on estimating what part the concrete played in neoclassic poetry in the early eighteenth century, perhaps thereby throwing some light on the relation of realism to neoclassicism and bringing the age closer to our own.
CHAPTER II
REALISTIC ELEMENTS IN PRIOR, SWIFT, AND GAY

The conventions of the neoclassic period, like those of other bygone eras, often draw a curtain between the poet and the reader and result in an impression of vagueness, generality, or unreality. A study of neoclassic criticism may not dispel the impression. But even if conventions at first seem to predominate, a step in the direction of appreciation can be taken by noticing what elements of realism are present, and by withholding judgment about their relation to convention.

The purpose of this chapter is not to insist that the poems from which the examples are taken must be called "realistic." It is rather to examine separately certain ingredients found in varying proportions in poetry of the first quarter of the eighteenth century. The examination will be the basis of later discussion of ways in which Prior, Swift, and Gay blended these ingredients with non-realistic elements and thereby produced the balance that characterizes the best neoclassic poetry. If a given poem is far from the best, or is not neoclassic in any sense except the historical, later discussion may be based on the way in which the poet either has failed to achieve his aim or has allowed realistic ingredients to become the determining formal element in his work.

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Some charges of vagueness, generality, and unreality brought against neoclassic poetry result from a lack of attention to the poet's effort to orient the reader in time and space. The techniques --usually simple ones--by which this orientation is accomplished may be called techniques of particularization: the use of proper names, direct address, time references, incidental background, and identifying details. Particularization as a means of orientation is the most easily distinguishable of the realistic elements in neoclassic poetry.

That the use of proper names in verse was a matter of considerable importance to eighteenth-century writers has not escaped notice. Sometimes names occur in the title; much of neoclassic poetry is "occasional," and particularized titles arouse expectations of a poetry close to life. Prior writes To Mr. Harley, Wounded by Guiscard and To a Poet of Quality Praising the Lady Hinchinbrook. He is the author of Verses Spoke to the Lady Henrietta-Cavendish Holles Harley, in the Library of St. John's College, Cambridge, November the 9th, An. 1719. Swift has verses On the Little House by the Church Yard of Castleknock; an elegy On the much lamented Death of Mr. Demar, the Famous Rich Man, who died the 6th of this Inst. July, 1720; and a dialogue Upon the horrid Plot discovered by Harlequin the Bishop of Rochester's French Dog. Gay's Mr. Pope's Welcome from Greece is subtitled "A Copy of Verses by Mr. Gay, upon Mr. Pope's having finished

1Groom, The Diction of Poetry, p. 125.
his Translation of Homer's Iliad." On other occasions Gay writes
To the Right Honourable Paul Methuen Esq and To Her Grace, Henrietta,
Duchess of Marlborough.

Not always, of course, does the proper name in the title, or
the clear indication of the author's stimulus to write, carry over
to the poem itself. If the "occasion" were not named, some of the
writing could hardly be distinguished from the most unrealistic
pieces. The pre-1700 poems of Prior offer several examples, like To
the Countess of Exeter, Playing on a Lute and To the Countess of
D[urse]t walking in a Garden. But most of the poems are particular­
ized in some way other than by the title. Indeed, the pages of Prior,
Swift, and Gay are sprinkled with proper names.

Panegyrics, as well as other serious poems, are likely to refer
to actual persons besides the one being honored. A single example is
Prior's An Ode, written in 1703 in memory of Colonel George Villiers
and addressed to him in the first line. This meditation on death and
fate names famous ones ancient and modern, living and dead: reigning
Queen Anne, and William and Mary; Churchill, Bradford, Sackville, and
Hyde; Maecenas and Socrates. Mention of immortality brings in not only
Pythagoras, but John Asgill, contemporary lawyer and writer of a
treatise on translation to eternity without death (218).

2 The Literary Works of Matthew Prior, ed. H. Bunker Wright and
Monroe K. Spears (Oxford, 1959), I, 81, 7. Future references to
Prior's poems (in Volume I of this two-volume edition unless other­
wise noted) will be made by page numbers in parentheses.
Though particularization by proper names is a realistic element, the use of proper names in panegyric writing, it must be admitted, does not get us far on the road to realism. The high and mighty ones celebrated in the odes are made to seem even farther removed from ordinary mortals by having their deeds and their virtues set forth in exalted cadences. But the named persons did live, they lived at a certain time, and they probably did the things they are said to have done. Whether they had the virtues attributed to them may be a moot point, but anyhow such virtues are proper to persons in their station. Decorum is not anti-realistic.

Panegyric poetry is not alone in being particularized by proper names. In a single poem in a lower key, Swift uses the names of Harley, Bolingbroke, Gay, Parnell, and Pope, as well as the place names Windsor and Charing-Cross. In A Ballad on the Game of Traffick, he introduces the members of Lord Berkeley's household as they play cards. Wine, a dull early poem of Gay, names Godolphin, Sunderland, Halifax, Devonshire, and Marlborough; place names too are conspicuous. Prior makes fun of the prominent physician Dr. Radcliffe (410), and again he imagines Dr. Willis and Dr. Bentley, two low-church Whig ministers, discussing a sermon of the Tory Bishop of Rochester (403). In his Paulo Purganti are references to Knags and Burgess, contemporary

\[3\] The Poems of Jonathan Swift, ed. Harold Williams, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1958), I, 198. Further references will be made by volume and page numbers in parentheses.

clergymen, and to Wycherley and Congreve (260, lines 28 and 30). In a satiric ballad he names King William's favorites, Sunderland, Albemarle, Miremont, Cutts, and others (192).

Some of the persons named are close to the poet's own life: Prior's "Fair Miss Mary" (To a Child of Quality), the "noble, lovely, little Peggy" (A Letter to the Honorable Lady Mrs. Margaret Candish Harley), Jonathan and Richard of Alma, and "Jinny the Just" (300); Swift's "Dear Harley" (I, 176 and elsewhere); George, Nim, and Dan, and Lady Betty (I, 278); Pope and Arbuthnot; Stella and Vanessa.

Fictitious names do not preclude realistic particularization. Swift's Corinna and Ardelia (I, 148, 119) are barely less recognizable than Stella and Vanessa. Prior's "Erle Robert" and "Boling, whilome John the Saint" (400) are slight disguises for Harley and Bolingbroke, and Philo, the enemy (397), has been identified as Defoe. Even when fictitious names apply to types rather than individuals, particularization is possible. In a long "neoclassical" description of the torments of happy love, Prior's Celia expresses the fear that glory, or honor, or a new sweetheart will take Damon away; just as the reader is lulled by the conventionality, Celia asks whether Damon will be faithful

When my own Face deters Me from my Glass;  
And KNELLER only shows, what CELIA was? (211, lines 55-56)

Here one proper name, that of the famous painter of portraits, fixes the story in time and place, and reminds us of the Augustans hidden under the pastoral guise.
A second important means of particularization, direct address, may be found, like third-person references, in different kinds of neoclassic poetry. It is proper to except invocation and apostrophe from a consideration of the second person as an element of realism. When Gay writes "Thou, Trivia, Goddess, aid my song" (59), or when Prior interrupts his account of a drowning to say "Oh! destin'd Head; and oh! severe Decree; / Nor native Country Thou, nor Friend shalt see" (219), conventions stronger than the realism of direct address are pulling in the opposite direction. Such usage is frequent; even King Solomon is heard calling on "my Pensive Muse"—an anachronism more off key than the description of Britain that marks his vision of the future (371, lines 355; 323, lines 431-452). In the prize specimen of panegyric (Carmen Seculare, of which Dr. Johnson asked, in his Life of Prior, "Who can be supposed to have laboured through it?") the most important addressee is Janus, with side glances at "Thou, Imperial Windsor," and "Thou, the fair Heav'n, that dost the Stars inclose" (175, lines 380, 382). When the panegyric celebrates its hero in the third person, only occasionally addressing him directly as "thou" or "you," and when the poet seems unable to make up his mind whom he is addressing, often there is evidence of a consciousness of the reader as audience. A sudden shift to the second person near the end of one ode finds Prior addressing the reader as "Whoe'er Thou art" and giving instructions what to do if he should find the drowned man's body (219). But examples of the second-person approach that are more compatible with realism, indeed auxiliary to it, can easily be located.
If the subject matter of the poem is close to everyday life, the poet's addressing the reader or otherwise including him by the casual use of the second person can be effectively realistic. In *A Description of a City Shower*, Swift uses "you" near the beginning to draw the reader into his London scene. *Trivia*, one of the best of Gay's poems, gives the reader advice on walking the streets of London, with some interruptions when the poet invokes his Muse.

Verse epistles, in which the addressee is usually named at least once, are written throughout in the second person. The line of thought is consistently worked out to harmonize with the direct address—that is, everything in the poem is part of a message to the addressee. In satirical epistles, like Gay's to Mr. Snow, consistently direct writing is not incompatible with the public quality associated with satire. In other words, consciousness of the audience is not abandoned. But the audience is not addressed; "thou" or "you" is reserved for the receiver of the letter. Even in less formal poems (like Swift's paraphrase of Horace [I,179] in which the direct address to "Dick" merges at the end with the first person in "Let us both in time grow wise"), mention of public affairs serves notice that an audience other than Richard Steele may be in the poet's mind. In other direct-address poems a more intimate listener-in than the great wide world is assumed. For example, the audience other than the addressee of Prior's *To Mr. Howard: An Ode* (275) is no doubt Cloe, who has sat for the Irish painter, and who is mentioned in the third person. Sometimes a letter in verse is a way to get a personal message
across to the public; Prior's quatrains to Curll (517), if he had published them, would have resolved a doubt about the authorship of some delightful stanzas (787) that has continued to this day.

The most realistic uses of direct address occur in poems to friends on subjects of private concern. Among the best known are Swift's to Stella (II, 721 ff.); other examples from Swift are the verses to Harley (I, 176), Ford (I, 311), and Delany (I, 215). Sometimes such private poems reveal incidentally the poet's attitude toward matters of broader interest, as To Mr. Delany reveals Swift's attitudes toward "Humor, Rafflery and Witt."

Address other than by proper name is frequent. The addressee may be the "Sir" of Prior's imitation of Horace (395), "my Lord" of Gay's Epistle to the Earl of Burlington (152), or "my friend" in his Mr. Pope's Welcome from Greece (164); the "Madam" of Prior's verses about going to a fortune-teller (214), or of Gay's Epistle to a Lady (147). Swift has "dearest Dismal" (I, 162) and "Right Trusty" (I, 263), although he is more likely to use "you" with no identification but the title of the poem. He also adopts the second person (to a greater extent than either Prior or Gay) when he seems to be talking only to his readers in informal fashion. He can make even apostrophe sound direct. After an opening section that contains such conversational lines as

His Grace! impossible! what dead!
Of old age too, and in his bed!

... Well, since he's gone, no matter how,
The last loud trump must wake him now:
And, trust me, as the noise grows stronger,
He'd wish to sleep a little longer.
And could he be indeed so old
As by the news-papers we're told?
Threescore, I think, is pretty high . . . (I, 296)

the sudden "Come hither, all ye empty things" is more than the conven­tional apostrophe that brings to a close a serious elegy. Those "empty things" are in the audience; they are

Ye bubbles rais'd by breath of Kings;
Who float upon the tide of state,

and Swift means them to be the object of a serious lesson.

Especially in lyrics, the addressee is sometimes called by a fictitious name. Those songs of Prior which link him to the Restora­tion are sung for Phillis, Amynta, Corinna, Dorinda, or Morella. His better-known lyrics, in the familiar style that he made his own, are for Cloe, Nancy, or Lisetta, who have been identified.  

Perhaps fictitious names reminiscent of the pastoral tradition seem anti­realistic. However, what is lost in one way is made up in another, for a song gains in immediacy if even a pseudo-particularity is imparted to it by the directness of the person-to-person approach.

Time references, a third means of orientation, are less common than names of persons and places, perhaps because they are really less important. Verb forms take care of the most significant time relationships. Modifiers, however, are used occasionally to advantage:

Prior's Merry Andrew appears at "last Southwark Fair" (452); his Cupid comes knocking "at dead of Night" (213). His Cloe, Prior writes, came into the room "t'other Day" (441); it was "In Heav'n one Holy-day" that Cupid "Lost ev'ry earthly thing He betted" (273). Swift can begin with "Now," as in A Description of the Morning, or with "In antient Times," as in Baucis and Philemon. Sometimes he uses a "when" clause (I, 118) or "This Day" (I, 149), or "one day" (I, 170). Gay makes much use of the present tense, with a here-and-now effect unobtainable any other way.

Identifying details and incidental background information are two more aids to orientation. Though Philo is obviously not a real name, the man "who wrote ill, and spake worse" against Prior seems to be Defoe,

```plaintext
. . . a Linguist, a Poet, a Critic, a Wag;
To the solid Delight of thy Well-judging Club
To the Damage alone of thy Bookseller BRAG (I, 397;
II, 924)
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Swift's Fable of Midas, with its allusions to a leader with a passion for money and to the falling away of pensions, perquisites, and bribes, clearly refers to the Duke of Marlborough (I, 156). In Merry Andrew Prior says his clown appears at "the last Southwark Fair" rather than at Bartholomew Fair, "so peevish was the Edict" which had banned plays and other performances. The particularization, rarely, however, depends on background information alone. Some of Swift's poems, for example, have many bits of information which still probably needed the title to explain them even for contemporary
readers. Now notes too are necessary, as they are for the identification of actual persons for which brief descriptions without a name sufficed when the poems were first published. We would never guess who was "t'other puppy that was drown'd" (I, 299), though the previous line introduces us to Curr Plunkett and Whelp Skean.

When the writer, by even one of these techniques, gives the reader the impression that he is talking about a particular person or persons at a particular time and place, he has given his poem one element of realism. If he has only hinted that Cloe smiled at him over her cup of tea, the process of particularization has been at work. He is not talking about girls or mistresses or Cloes, or about smiles or teacups in general, or about whether Cloe should or should not have smiled. Though the aura of authenticity may be only slight, it will arise from simple orientating particulars, alone or in combination. A more powerful aura, to be sure, can emanate from the accumulation of details which go beyond mere orientation; and, as Chapter III will show, the neoclassic poets were not strangers to other ways of using details.

The second element of realism that can be isolated in neoclassic poetry is the prosaic element--the matter-of-fact, the ordinary, the everyday--in style and in subject matter.

Matter-of-factness in style takes the form of direct statement and absence of metaphor. To say that the verse of the Augustans is a
poetry of statement seems at first rather complimentary, indicating comparative freedom from the bombast that threatens the unsuccessful "sublime." But unfortunately the direct statement is as great a threat to the sublime as bombast; the "resemblance to fine prose," as Saintsbury says of the Pindaric, "is apt to appear in a damaging fashion." Swift's **Ode to the Athenian Society** provides an example of the too-flat tone in poetry aiming high:

```
This hopeful Sect . . .
Will quickly take another course
And by their never-failing ways
Of Solving all Appearances they please,
We soon shall see them to their ancient Methods fall,
And straight deny you to be Men, or any thing at all;
I laugh at the grave Answer they will make,
Which they have always ready, general and Cheap . . .
(I, 19)
```

This kind of prosiness is not necessarily implied when the word **prosaic** is chosen to describe an element of realism. Much of the prosaic element in Augustan verse is not incompatible with successful poetry—simply because much of the verse does not aim at the sublime.

References to a poetry of statement need not be derogatory. They may suggest that "poetry of statement" is associated with the "correct" selection and arrangement of words, so that the thought is expressed clearly without displacement of syllables and usually without inversions uncommon in speech. The phrase may, that is, refer to the comparatively prosaic "familiar style"—the style of assurance,

urbanity, confident communication. 7 Unsuccessful rime or rhythm, to be sure, may sometimes reduce the familiar style to mere prosiness, as an unfortunate choice of words can reduce the "sublime." Instances of both kinds of failure may be found in Swift's verse, though it is unjust, I think, to describe his poetry as "merely witty prose put into fluent verse, with clever rimes."8 The preponderance of direct statement over figurative language is a prosaic element because direct statement does not heighten language the way other poetic styles do.

Though Quayle (see p. 6 above) points out the two ideals of poetic diction current in the eighteenth century, it is noteworthy that the tendency toward plain everyday language—clear, logical, denotative—is not the tendency he labels "neoclassical." Nevertheless, the first quarter of the century approaches this ideal of plainness more closely than later decades. Metaphors are indeed scarce, and similes hardly less so. Even personification—that much-deplored though skillfully defended mark of later eighteenth-century poetry—is unobtrusive in the work of Prior, Swift, and Gay. In the Augustan tradition, one critic has pointed out, the poet inhabits "the world of common sense waking consciousness," and his style is likely to be in tune with his subject. "The proper form for the matter of poets


8 Cambridge History of English Literature, IX, 124.
in the Augustan tradition," this same critic says, "may fairly be said to have the virtues of good prose."^9

The use of colloquial language and conversational speech rhythms is a marked characteristic of neoclassic verse. Examples are plentiful. From Prior, at random come "Dear Thomas, didst Thou never pop / Thy Head into a Tin-man's Shop?" (244); "Dear Cloe, how blubber'd is that pretty Face? / Thy Cheek all on Fire, and Thy Hair all uncurl'd" (450); "We sure in vain the Cards condemn: / Our selves both cut and shuffl'd them" (491). From Swift we have

Dear Sid, then why wer't thou so mad
To break thy Rod like naughty Lad? (I, 135)

Why, Stella, should you knit your Brow,
If I compare you to the Cow? (II, 759)

Furnish'd with Paper, Pens, and Ink,
I greatly sat me down to think:
I bit my Nails, and scratch'd my Head,
But found my Wit and Fancy fled. (II, 740)

The following, like the third example from Prior, above, have only slight inversions of natural order:

To Shops in Crouds the dagged Females fly,
Pretend to cheapen Goods, but nothing buy. (I, 138)

I Often wish'd, that I had clear
For Life, six hundred Pounds a Year . . . (I, 198)

With that he draws two Handfulls out,
The one was Oats, the other Hay,
Putts This to's Excellency's Snout,
And begs, He would the other weigh. (I, 63)

From Gay, in whose pre-1725 work at least conversational rhythms are rarer, come the following:

I know your maiden Aunt will scold,
And think my present somewhat bold. (175-176)

What a Pother has here been with Wood and his Brass,
Who would modestly make a few Half-pennies pass! (188)

If I would not give up the three Graces
I wish I were hang'd like a Dog . . . (191)

The last two quotations are from ballads. The conversation of Gay's characters from rural life does not yield many examples. Their most prosaic topics are dressed in pentameter couplets, which, regardless of the choice of language, give an air of artificiality that Gay certainly intended. Single lines that seem natural can easily be found ("Will she thy linnen wash or hosen darn"--37, l. 33; or "I slic'd the luncheon from the barly loaf"--37, l. 70). But the riming line nearly always changes the effect. Even in single lines the naturalness is upset by inversion:

With crumbled bread I thicken'd well thy mess.
(37, l. 71)

Now mine I quickly doff of inkle blue . . . (45, l. 112)

I broke my yarn surpriz'd the sight to see . . .
(45, l. 76)

This kind of distortion is ubiquitous in the Shepherd's Week. Gay's nearest approach to the "correct" familiar style is in To a Lady on Her Passion for Old China, which seems to owe something to the influence of Prior.
Conversation is an incidental element in much neoclassic verse. One of Swift's imitations of Horace, for example, contains direct quotations from those who speak to him when he is dragged to Court "for the Service of the Crown," as well as Harley's chit-chat as they ride in his coach (I, 198). Conversation occasionally interrupts the monologue of Prior's Solomon (e.g., 344, lines 386 ff.), the narrative of Down-Hall, the pseudo-Spenserian description of Colin's Mistakes.

But conversation can be an integral part of a poem. It may be quick, as in Prior's An English Padlock, or lopsided, as in Alma. It may neatly mingle question and answer with narrative, as in Prior's Her Right Name. One speaker may interrupt another, as in The Conversation, where a type character talks about Prior to the poet himself incognito. The French poet Boileau is represented as breaking into the poem on the Blenheim victory,

But is it thus You English Bards compose?
With Runick Lays thus tag insipid Prose?

(222, lines 63-64)

and his question is part of Prior's discussion of the problems of writing.

Some poems are set up as dialogues, with speakers indicated as in a play. The Turtle and the Sparrow, one of Prior's witty tales, has as characters two birds as human as Chaucer's. The famous love duet Henry and Emma is an adaptation of the medieval Nut-Brown Maid, with the give-and-take plan retained. Swift's Upon the Horrid Plot...
is a dialogue between a Whig and a Tory. Gay's "Squabble" (in The Shepherd's Week) is a duel in song between Cuddy and Colin Clout.

Some dialogues, of course, have almost no element of the commonplace, but rather make an attempt at a serious style. An early poem of Prior, To the Earl of Dorset upon His Marriage, is one example. Prior's Celia to Damon—with its pentameter couplets, "Fire Eternal," "fantastic Fame," "cold Indifference," "Cytherea's Shrine," and "swelling Seas of Rapture"—fits the traditional neoclassical pattern as well as any poem can. The burlesque of the "poetic" in Gay's "Squabble" takes its realistic effects not from the style (with its pentameter couplets, inversions, and plentiful trochaic adjectives), but from the single words the bumpkins use: "oatmeal," "haycock," "towel," "corns," "tobacco-pouch."

Burlesque is frequent enough to be considered a characteristic of neoclassic style. The Shepherd's Week, with its low-life actors and earthy doings, is a burlesque of the pastorals of Philips, though in our day it reads more like a burlesque of the pastoral tradition. Swift's Apollo's Edict quotes the god's rules forbidding similes about the rising and setting sun, Aurora, the Milky-way, and the bird of Jove, as well as other clichés. Elsewhere Swift names unpleasant places in which fair Chloe, charming Silvia, and bright Phillis are likely to be found, instead of in the Dresden China niches the poets usually assign to them (II, 727). His City Shower closes with a travesty of Dryden's style; the same critic who calls these lines "a
savage parody" regards the poem itself as almost contemptuous of "the whole show." 10 Echoes of traditional phrases are heard throughout and the wit depends on distortion. 11 In one of the prose Dialogues of the Dead, Prior gives St. Thomas More six conventional couplets ("Conscience, Thou Solemn Bond of mutual Trust") which the Vicar of Bray allows are "pritty enough but a little hobbling in the Number." Then follows the Vicar's humorous interpretation of Conscience ("Your Conscience like a Firy Horse"), originally written for Alma; it is effectively inserted here, because the character contrast between the dialogists is underlined by the contrast in the two poetic styles (652-653). To take two more examples from Prior, the second answer to Chloe (450) seems to burlesque the style of the first; moreover, parts of Alma read almost like a burlesque of Solomon.

As mentioned at the beginning of this section, the prosaic element in neoclassic poetry is a feature not only of style, but of subject matter. Even a cursory glance through their pages shows Prior, Swift, and Gay trying to turn actual life into poetry. Gay seems to have had a gift for adjusting the most ordinary subjects to neoclassical diction and heroic couplets. Swift's predilection for the repulsive, however it may be understood or defended, is evidence of


his willingness to regard even the worst of the actual as material for his verse. Prior humorously acknowledges the recalcitrance of prosaic material in his play-rime for Boileau:

... how hard it is for Me
To make my Matter and my Verse agree?
In one great Day on Hochstet's fatal Plain
French and Bavarians twenty thousand slain;
Push'd thro' the Danube to the Shoars of Styx
Squadrons eighteen, Battalions twenty six:
Officers Captive made and private Men,
Of these twelve hundred, of those thousands ten.
Tents, Ammunition, Colours, Carriages,
Cannons, and Kettle-Drums—sweet Numbers these.

(222, lines 53 ff.)

As Prior tells the French poet,

... we Poetic Folks, who must restrain
Our measur'd Sayings in an equal Chain,
Have Troubles utterly unknown to Those,
Who let their Fancy loose in rambling Prose.

(222, lines 48-52)

Apparently the effort to measure their sayings was worth making.

Many passages in the pseudo-philosophical Alma testify to Prior's own success. In one section, for instance, he is telling how poets write—how, "in the Structure of their Feasts, / They seek to feed, and please their Guests":

Thus, if You Dine with my Lord May'r,
Roast-Beef, and Ven'son is your Fare;
Thence You proceed to Swan, and Bustard,
And persevere in Tart, and Custard:
But Tulip-leaves, and Limon-peel
Help only to adorn the Meal;
And painted Flags, superb and neat,
Proclaim You welcome to the Treat.
The Man of Sense his Meat devours;
But only smells the Peel, and Flow'rs:
And He must be an idle Dreamer,
Who leaves the Pie, and gnaws the Streamer.

(481, lines 377-388)
Another delightful example is from Swift. Even the poet cannot ignore the practical necessities, Swift tells Stella:

A Poet, starving in a Garret,
Conning old Topicks like a Parrot,
Invokes his Mistress and his Muse,
And stays at home for want of Shoes:
Should but his Muse descending drop
A Slice of Bread, and Mutton-Chop,
Or kindly when his Credit's out,
Surprise him with a Pint of Stout,
Or patch his broken Stocking Soals,
Or send him in a Peck of Coals;
Exalted in his mighty Mind
He flies, and leaves the Stars behind,
Counts all his Labours amply paid,
Adores her for the Timely Aid. (II, 727, lines 25-38)

Everyday activities are the subject of Prior's epigram about the lady who divides her time between God and Astorath (542), and of his epitaph on "Saunt'ring Jack and Idle Joan" (461). Swift writes charmingly about happy domestic life (I, 321-322). In Wine Gay describes a drinking scene "with skill and gusto." At the beginning of Araminta he presents a bride dressing on her wedding morn (200). Even when the poet is aiming at the high style, real activities may be mentioned. Queen Anne, according to Prior, has given "sacred Morals to a vicious Age, / To Temples Zeal, and Manners to the Stage" (216, lines 30-31). The references are to Queen Anne's Bounty, which benefited the clergy, and to a royal proclamation against indecent performances, the wearing of vizard masks, and other "abuses of the stage" (II, 892).

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Sometimes customs of the day are mentioned incidentally. In The Chameleon Prior presents a brief contrast between two types of London clubs and refers to the custom of writing toasts on glasses (269-270). Swift several times mentions the third night's profits allowed to a playwright (e.g., I, 230). Augustan tastes and attitudes are often noticeable. Prior voices the ideal of retirement among friends and books in the country, an ideal that inspired other early eighteenth-century poets (139). Of a picture, he writes:

... if the Colouring be not there ...  
It would not gain on Jersey's Eye:  
Bradford would frown and set it by ...  
(260, lines 16-18)

Gay, in The Fan (12, line 120), refers to the "modish Spleen."

Contemporary public affairs are briefly referred to in many poems and are the theme of others. Examples of the latter are Swift's on the Wood halfpence (I, 331 ff.), on the South Sea Bubble (I, 248), on forced retirement of Godolphin (I, 131); Prior's on political factions (411, 181), on the "Orange" (70), and on the battle of Blenheim (220). Social evils are the basis of Gay's town eclogues and of his epistles on patronage and taste (161), on the land tax bill (174), and on profiteering (177).

An especially interesting way of introducing the everyday world into poetry is to attribute prosaic actions to mythological characters. Mercury produces his "warrant" when he goes to confiscate Cupid's arrows (Prior, 442); Proserpine stands on the bank of the river Piave to serve a death warrant just before Villiers' drowning (219); Cupid
appears at Cloe's house armed with a search warrant to look for his mother's dove (435), and his subalterns "rap the Door, / Like Footmen on a Visiting-Day." In one of Gay's poems, Cupid says he'll be waiting at either of two coffee-houses (184). Gay's unsavory goddess Cloacina sets up her son in business in London (68). Swift introduces Apollo as if the god were an eighteenth-century gentleman; Apollo alights from "his Glitt'ring Coach," puts a wreath of bays on his head to shield him from the flashes of the lady's eyes, and confesses "his Flame" in "the old Celestial Cant" (I, 119-121).

Unexpected actions particularize more earthy "type" characters, too. For example, Prior makes Paulo Purganti and his wife more than mere pegs whereon to hang a story. The wife keeps her husband from drinking too much wine, but stuffs him with oysters, eggs, and vermicelli; she forbids him coffee and tobacco, and plies him with chocolate and claret (261, lines 63 ff.).

For the most part the everyday world reflected in the poetry is that of polite society, not the world of the very poor. A good example is the realistic description of the wife's daily activities in Prior's Hans Carvel (184, lines 21-42). But Gay in his burlesques reveals a sincere interest in country amusements and country tasks, as well as in the country folks' beliefs and attitudes.13 Prior more

13Armens regards the town-country contrast as basic to Gay's serious thinking. See John Gay, Social Critic, pp. 9, 226.
rarely acknowledges the existence of the poor; even when he describes a farm, it is a prosperous one

Where all was snug, and clean, and warm;  
For Woods before, and Hills behind  
Secured it both from Rain and Wind;  
Large Oxen in the Fields were lowing:  
Good Grain was sow'd; good Fruit was growing:  
Of last Year's Corn in Barns great Store  
Fat Turkeys gobbling at the Door . . . .

(204, 11. 67-74)

Since Prior is here (in The Ladle) writing his unique version of the Baucis and Philemon story, it is interesting to note that Swift's hospitable old couple live in a poor hut in a village (I, 111). Swift has an eye for the lower levels of London life, as shown by the vignettes in the London Shower and A Description of the Morning. When Swift writes of fashionable lords or ladies, his pictures are often unattractive.

iii

We now come to a third realistic element in neoclassic poetry, the personal element. Sometimes the poet uses his own identity or his own experience as material for his poetry.

Prior writes to one real friend in behalf of another, speaking to Harley of "Dear Dick" and calling himself Mat (394); he earns his dinner listening to someone else's verses (462). He refers to those who have snubbed him because of his low birth (195); he hints at disappointment because his very great diplomatic service has not been rewarded (408, 935); he writes his own portrait in an epitaph (409). Swift teases his friends; bewails his loneliness and his discomfiture
at being banished to Dublin (I, 203); exposes the love of Stella and Vanessa for himself, his own hatred and contempt for the follies of his fellowmen, his anger at economic injustice. Reference to his private affairs is unusual with Gay (Armens, p. 25), but his personality is inescapable; in Trivia, for example, the streets of London are seen through his eyes, interpreted by his experiences.

The first person turns up constantly in the writing of the neoclassic poets; so numerous are the examples, both singular and plural, that quotations would be superfluous. Odes and the lightest of love poems, tales and pastorals, epistles and epigrams, panegyric and satire—no kind is entirely exempt from the most personal element of all. Perhaps the Augustan poet is not always letting the reader glimpse his whole mind, perhaps the Age required that a certain amount of artificiality should stand between the poet's inmost thoughts and his urbane readers, but at least he is not afraid to stand behind his words.

The first person is a realistic element not only because it particularizes, but because it gives an effect of immediacy. Even in formal poems, when the poet is under an obligation to present himself as rejoicing on a great occasion or overcome with admiration for a great personage, the first person pulls in the direction of the real. When the poet speaks in his own person (as Swift to Stella or Prior to Harley) on an occasion when panegyric is not called for, truth to the poet's own thought is presumed. Less realistic, of course, is the assigning of the "I" to a person other than the poet, like Prior's
King Solomon; when that happens, monologue has a chance to be realistic if the central personality stays "in character" and if other recognizable realistic elements occur; for example, even King Solomon becomes a mouthpiece for Prior's patriotism, skepticism, and disillusionment.

The neoclassic poet can intrude into his own poetry in several ways. He can let his attitudes toward events and problems show through his language—by direct comment, perhaps, as when Prior explains The Turtle and the Sparrow to little Margaret Harley, or by the choice of epithets like Swift's "bubbled Fools" (I, 27) or Gay's "generous Burlington" (166). He can judge actual individuals. Like Prior, he can speak of ungodly Wh[iston], "stuttering Durfey," "frantic Lee," or "grave Mahon"; like Gay, he can write of "Vulture H[opkins]" (178), or "decent Scudamore" (166); like Swift, he can compose a quibbling elegy on the wooden Judge Boate (I, 284), whose name and activities make possible pun after pun. He can judge a way of life, as Prior does when he describes the "kind of as-it-were" led by Jack and Joan (462), or when he voices his appreciation of Britton, the small-coal man who has become famous in the history of music (412). He can, like Swift, show enough sympathy for an ordinary person's problem to write about the loss of a servant woman's purse (I, 68).

The neoclassic poet can, of course, and does, moralize and generalize. In such instances, however, he is likely to be brief, and by staying close to his own experience he usually succeeds in
avoiding the trite. So it is when Prior preaches a little sermon at the end of *True Statesmen*:

To church and Queen and Laws be hearty
But hate a Trick and scorn a Party
... Vote Right tho' certain to be blam'd
And rather Starve than be ashamed.

(412, lines 31-32; 36-37)

At the end of *Vanbrugh's House Built from the Ruins of Whitehall*, Swift gives us an idea of his attitude toward modern poetry:

So Modern Rimmers wisely Blast
The Poetry of Ages past,
Which after they have overthrown,
They from its Ruins build their own. (I, 110)

He shows deep concern in a little poem which tells the story of Atlas and Hercules, applying it to the top Tory ministers when Harley and St. John disagree about policy:

Suppose then Atlas ne'er so wise,
Yet when the Weight of Kingdoms lyes
Too long upon his single Shoulders
He must sink down, or find Up-holders. (I, 160)

Occasionally a hint of the poet's attitudes at odds with his habitual expression breaks through. Though Prior is the poet of urban society, for instance, the language in which the turtledove sends the Sparrow out of the sacred grove is uncomplimentary to city life:

Begon, with flagging Wings sit down
On some Old Pent-house near the Town;
In Brewers-Stables Peck thy grain,
Then wash it down with Pudl'd rain:
And hear thy dirty Offspring Squawle,
From Bottles, on a Suburb Wall. (541, lines 424-429)

And the Turtle gives her reason, with Gulliverian contempt:

Vile Bird, thou hast Converst with Men;
Notions like these from Men were giv'n
Those vilest Creatures under Heav'n:
To Cities and to Courts repair,
Flatt'ry and Falshood flourish there:
There all thy wretched Arts employ,
Where Riches triumph over Joy.
Where Passion does with Int'rest Barter;
And Hymen holds by Mammon's Charter;
Where Truth by point of Law is Parry'd;
And Knaves and Prudes are Six times Marry'd.

(lines 431-441)

If Prior can sound unlike himself, so can Swift. Feared and hated by the great, he can reveal himself as quite ordinary:

His Beaver brush'd, his Shoes, and Gown,
Away he trudges into Town;

... He trembles at the Thoughts of State;
For conscious of his Sheepish Gait,
His Spirits of a Sudden fail'd him,
He stop'd, and cou'd not tell what ail'd him. (II, 376)

He is ashamed to wear glasses (II, 758); he is willing to share Stella's suffering and give her what is left of his life (II, 766).

The neoclassic poet can use real life as inspiration for blazing satire against society, against government, against economic oppression; he can also use his personal life as a basis for narrative and description marked by psychological accuracy, like Prior's picture of the morning after "the late Revel, and protracted Feast" (336, lines 111-121). The neoclassic poet can also let us share his honest puzzlement about eternal problems, as Prior does (gravely in Solomon and the Predestination brouillon, and lightly in Alma); or he can meditate on his faith, as Gay does in A Thought on Eternity and in A Contemplation on Night.

Augustan poetry—supposedly restrained and formal, social rather than personal—was designed, someone has written, to be read in the
coffee house. In poems about politics, love, and fashionable foibles, conventions sometimes—certainly not always—submerge the real. Since modern realists highly prize objectivity, it is interesting to note that objectivity is a mark of neoclassic poetry; but it is important to note also that the subjective element is likewise an element of realism.
CHAPTER III
TREATMENT OF DETAILS BY PRIOR, SWIFT, AND GAY

Considering the disagreements among critics mentioned in Chapter I, it is tempting to suppose that some judgments about realism in the neoclassic period have been based on the examination of extreme specimens. One way to attack the problem is to look at the poems in groups; moreover, since details play so prominent a part in producing realistic effects, it seems wise to check these groups for different ways of handling details.

The discussion in the present chapter takes account of three groups of poems. In the first are many that have a conventional approach, or handle traditional subjects, or use diction noticeably or predominantly removed from everyday language; whenever realism can be detected in these poems, it seems incidental. In the second group are poems with an obviously realistic impetus, or with prosaic subject matter, and poems permeated with everyday words that show no intention on the part of the poet to keep in step with traditions. The third, perhaps most important, group includes poems with conventional and realistic elements neatly and skillfully mixed.

Though convention must not be regarded as precluding realism, there is no doubt that certain conventions make the obtaining of a
realistic effect more difficult for the poet. Prior, Swift, and Gay all wrote poems which can be classed as basically conventional in style or subject matter, or both. In some of these poems, even the particular details seem to be conventional, giving the impression that realism must have been far from the writer's intent. Such a one is To Cloe Weeping (Prior, 270), in which the birds, clouds, brooks, nymphs, and swains that support the phrase "world in sympathy" are specific in relation to the phrase they are particularizing, but general enough to merge in tone with "woe," "murmurs," "sighs," and "dear breast."

Or concrete details may be expressed in such terms, or in such a context, that the impression of conventionality overshadows them. A fair example is Prior's Seeing the Duke of Ormond's Picture, at Sir Godfrey Kneller's (257). In spite of the specific occasion, the pictorial details, and the direct address throughout, this poem proclaims its conventionality by its couplets, personified abstractions ("Stern Vengeance" and "Hostile Terror"), circumlocution of a kind that seems pointless except as it serves the rhythm, and general terms like "heap" for the dead enemies over whom Ormond's horse ("steed") stumbles; moreover, there is the traditional reference to the artist's ability to perpetuate persons, events, or his own fame.

That a poem can remain conventional in spite of the deliberate addition of particular details is nowhere better shown than in Henry

Prior's once popular poem is the very epitome of "neoclassical" conventionality. Yet a comparison of his version with the original ballad shows that he added details about the heroine's parentage, her childhood, and her grown-up experiences before her dialogue with Henry. Both the principals are nameless in the ballad, but Prior introduces Emma's father and tells how he named her for her mother but "call'd her oft, in Sport, His Nut-brown Maid," as she played round his knees. Details of Henry's disguises are also given, and a little later the stage is set for the fateful interview:

Now Night advanc'd. The House in Sleep were laid,
The Nurse experienc'd, and the prying Maid;
And last That Sprite, which does incessant haunt
The Lover's Steps, the ancient Maiden Aunt.
(lines 226-229)

These and other details, however, can not alleviate the effect of the heavy conversation, the moralizing indulged in by the characters as well as the poet, the almost endless procession of lines filled with the fashionable diction of the time. When the long dialogue begins, the main outline of the argument follows The Nut-Brown Maid, making more noticeable the decorated and stilted language into which the simplicity of the old ballad is translated.

Prior wrote many other poems containing almost nothing that invites the appellation "realistic." Charity (207) has only a reference to the telescope, and even that is periphrasis, "the Artist's Intervening Glass" (line 37). His Prologue for Queen Anne's birthday
in 1704 (215) is a conventional panegyric, though "the young Austrian" named is Prince Eugen of Savoy, and though Anne's favors to the church and to the theater are mentioned cryptically (lines 30-31). Another ode to the Queen, in the modified Spenserian stanza, sets forth particular events of the battle of Ramillies, but in a fantastically tiresome way (230). The poet passes by one good chance to be particular: as Marlborough, thrown from a horse, was mounting a second, a man holding it was killed. But Prior writes:

The Ev'ning Star so falls into the Main,
To rise at Morn more prevalently bright.
He rises safe: but near, too near his Side,
A good Man's grievous Loss, a faithful Servant dy'd.

(lines 157-160)

How a poet could bypass opportunities to be realistic is illustrated also by Swift's congratulatory epistle to Lord Harley on his marriage. To Stella, Swift wrote (ed. note, I, 176) that the bride was reputed handsome, with good sense, but red hair. The poem, after expressing surprise that Lord Harley, so gifted, should also be successful in love, takes the view that the lady made the choice, as Aurora and Diana did. An ordinary nymph would have fled like Daphne; so excellent a pursuer would have had no chance:

For such is all the sex's flight
They fly from learning, wit, and light:
They fly, and none can overtake
But some gay coxcomb, or a rake.

(lines 19-22)

Here a generalization based on observation is made to reconcile the poet's feigned surprise with a complimentary attitude toward both bride and groom. But little realism can be claimed.
In most writing of all literary periods, according to one critic, "the place of the realistic detail has been comparable to that of the gargoyle on a cathedral, of little consequence to the over-all effect of the structure. . . . The goal is not over-all truthfulness, but occasional delight."² A homely line can at least flavor a serious poem—a line like "A Fly, a Grape-stone, or a Hair can kill," in An Ode in memory of Colonel Villiers (Prior, 217). The same effect comes occasionally even in the long philosophical poem Solomon (311), though unexpected familiarity of expression is not enough to break the prevailing solemnity. At the beginning of the Third Book, to point out only a single example, the great king apostrophizes his soul, "Come on, Thou little Inmate of this Breast" (362, line 39). Though Solomon is too long for adequate sampling, it contains a number of brief passages in which Prior's characteristic familiar style temporarily breaks through the conventionality.

The pastoral convention is especially likely to overshadow details. But even in a poem as steeped in pastoralism as "Colin's Mistakes" (Prior, 545), a line like "Harley the Honor of the Day supports" (line 19), supplying as it does only the name of a real person, strikes a realistic note.³ Here it prepares for the ending, which is enough of a surprise to attract attention in spite of the rather smothering tone of the context: all the lovely ladies, taken


³Cf. page 25, above.
by Colin to be those described by Spenser, turn out to be Harley's wife, "in various Habit drest." Occasional relief from the conventional is provided by statements that are true psychologically, but differ from most generalizations because they are not in the third person or because they are associated with proper names.

Gay's *Daphnis and Chloe* has

Last night with Delia's dog he played;  
Love by such trifles first comes on.  
(St. VII)

In the same poem another detail shows Gay's understanding of women:

Sudden I put on looks displeas'd,  
And hasty from his hold withdrew.  
'Twas fear alone, thou simple swain.  
Then hadst thou prest my hand again,  
My heart had yielded too!  
(St. V)

In spite of its restraint, Prior's *Epistle, Desiring the Queen's Picture* (408) hints his disappointment at not receiving a reward for his services in arranging the peace of Utrecht.\(^4\) Let other ministers have the great rewards, the poet says, "the shining Side-board, and the burnish'd Plate"; all he wants is Anne's portrait:

If all the Pains that for Thy BRITAIN's Sake  
My past has took, or future Life may take,  
Be grateful to my QUEEN; permit my Pray'r,  
And with This Gift reward my total Care.  
(lines 9-12)

Sometimes an occasional periphrastic expression will stand out more clearly than those surrounding it, providing a slight touch of realism

\(^4\)Cf. page 44, above.
in spite of convention. For example, in spite of periphrasis, a fair visual image emerges in

E'er on thy Chin the springing Beard began
To spread a doubtful Down . . . (217, lines 5-6)

and causes "the springing Beard" to be a little removed from "universal tyrant," "trembling Age," "spacious Land," "liquid Main," "fleeting Breath," and a dozen other such combinations in the same Prior poem.

Most important of those poems which achieve a certain amount of realism in spite of the rhythm and diction are Gay's Trivia and Rural Sports. Though both these well-known works are written in pentameter couplets and filled with "poetic diction," they are remarkable for the number of details of everyday life which emerge from the lulling rhythm and the sentences so often inverted that inversion seems the norm.

According to Irving, Gay mentions or describes in Trivia at least sixty ways of earning a living, and more than thirty-five separate localities. Gay also describes the activities of all kinds of people to be seen in the streets, tells the prospective walker-about-town what kind of clothes to wear, what hazards to avoid, and how to tell the weather; gives him hints on street-walking manners and advice about being charitable; entertains him with digressions on superstition, Christmas, and the dangers of

foot-ball, and with myth-garnished tales. There is no attempt to
gloss over the unpleasant features of urban life. As Armens says,
"Gay was absorbed by certain aspects of urban life. . . . [which]
are usually presented directly with no idealization."^6

*Rural Sports* (107) has an even greater air of conventionality.
Specific details occur in such verse as the following (from a
description of the hunt):

The distant mountains echo from afar,
And hanging woods resound the flying war:
The tuneful noise the sprightly courser hears,
Paws the green turf, and pricks his trembling ears;
The slacken'd rein now gives him all his speed,
Back flies the rapid ground beneath the steed;
Hills, dales and forests far behind remain,
While the warm scent draws on the deep-mouth'd train
Where shall the trembling hare a shelter find?
Hark! death advances in each gust of wind! (lines 374-383)

The Muse is not only called on for aid; she is made the addressee of
the entire poem. There is something to be said for *Rural Sports*,
aside from the fact that "poetic diction" reaches its height there-
in: according to Myra Reynolds, it contains some real nature study.^7

Concrete details are sometimes used to develop general state-
ments. In Gay's *Wine*, for example, where most of the details are
expressed in high-sounding language, mimicking Milton, occurs this
general expression of nocturnal silence:

> till Humid Night
> Has half her Race perform'd, now all Abroad
> Is hush'd and silent . . .
> (lines 263-265)


^7*The Treatment of Nature in English Poetry*, p. 64; see also p. 11,
above.
The kind of developing details which follows--

... nor the Rumbling noise
Of Coach or Cart, or smoaky Link-Boys call
Is heard ... 

—is far from unique in the conventional verse of the period.

Some details illustrate a theme or a principle. The vagaries of churchmen are shown by the reporting of a specific case in Fragment (Prior, 413). The theme of the same poet's True Statesmen (411) is that factions are bad, and Prior takes the opportunity to advise his Tory friends, Harley and St. John, though he leaves blanks for their names. The poem refers also to Davenant, a Tory pamphleteer and political economist, as well as to "T.D."—one of Davenant's pamphlet characters. The details are interesting:

And if the Doctor Uninvited
Afraid to fancy he was Slighted
Comes in, his Labours he may Spy
Fixt to the Bottom of a Pye
Or find how those reward his trouble
That light their Pipes with Dear T[om] D[ouble].
(lines 21-26)

Several realistic hints of character or personality enliven the twenty-one stanzas of Mr. Pope's Welcome from Greece (164), in which Gay ("in the manner of the beginning of the last Canto of Ariosto," he says) salutes Pope on his completion of the Iliad. Pretending that Pope is returning from a journey, Gay pictures the English landmarks he must be passing, and enumerates the friends that gather to greet
him. Most of the lines have an artificial air, but some of the characters stand out:

Ned Blount advances next, with busy pace,
    In haste, but sauntring, hearty in his ways.
   (lines 117-118)

See Digby faints at Southern talking loud.
   (line 149)

Also in the welcoming crowd are

Gay fat, Maine fatter, Cheney huge of size
   (line 134)

and "honest, hatless Cromwell, with red breeches" (line 136). The reference to Tickell's translation of Homer is interesting; Tickell is in the throng too:

   Tickell whose skiff (in partnership they say)
   Set forth for Greece, but foundered in the way.
   (lines 151-152)

One important way in which poems can exhibit realism incidentally is by the use of homely examples or comparisons from everyday life as instruments of satire on something else. In the Epilogue to Phaedra, for instance, Prior seems to satirize luxury:

   But, as it is, Six flouncing FLANDERS Mares
   Are e'en as good, as any Two of Theirs;
   And if Hippolytus can but contrive
   To buy the gilded Chariot; John can drive.
   (245, lines 15-18)

In the same poem, he also hints at the attitude of his age toward marital fidelity: Phaedra's husband should have let her know when he was coming home. As he says,

   Then He had turn'd all Tragedy to Jest;
   Found ev'ry Thing contribute to his Rest;
   The Picquet-Friend dismiss'd, the Coast all clear.
   (lines 37-39)
In the following example from Swift, the lowly comparison does not satirize the housewife, but the faded woman whose efforts to reconstruct her youthful appearance make *The Progress of Beauty* (I, 229) sickening in spite of the skill with which the poem is constructed:

A Skillful Housewife thus her Thumb  
With Spittle while she spins, anoints,  
And thus the brown Meanders come  
In trickling Streams betwixt her Joynts. (lines 41-44)

In the previous examples the use of such details for satiric purposes seems casual. But sometimes it is not. The best example is Gay's *The Shepherd's Week*, a satire on literary pastorals, which is necessarily permeated with details.

When a particular detail of the non-conventional kind appears in a basically conventional poem, the realistic effect is not always satisfying. In serious poetry, the everyday detail may impinge too sharply on the reader who is following description or narration geared to the abstract, the general, or the mythological. The unassimilated realistic particulars probably had as much to do with the failure of Swift's early poems as his inability to keep the conventional part of his poems from sounding bombastic. Examples of such particulars can be found in the *Ode to Sir William Temple* (I, 27; see stanzas VII, XI, and XII). The pre-1700 verses of Swift, moreover, are not free from the kind of offensiveness found in many of Swift's later poems. To take one early example, the last stanza of the Pindaric *Ode to the King* (I, 4) insults Louis XIV, "that tennis-ball of fate," in a fashion as inelegant as can be imagined. Though such passages
are disconcerting, the jarring realistic detail has a place in humorous or satiric verse. When the poet is counting on surprise or contrast, the intrusion of details into conventional material is an important weapon.

To all the poems so far discussed in this chapter, details seem to give only an incidental realism; all three poets have furnished examples of the use of particulars in works no one would want to call realistic. A consideration of the total poetic production of the three writers, however, reveals a number of poems in which realism seems pervasive. Each of these poems, I think, fulfills at least two of Watt's specifications for "formal realism": (1) particularization of time, place, and person; (2) natural and lifelike sequence of action; (3) literary style which gives the most exact verbal and rhythmical equivalent possible of the object described. The extent to which individual poems deviate from one or another of these specifications will become evident, though I shall try to keep the emphasis on the handling of details within several subgroups of this predominantly realistic verse.

In some of these poems, including much of Gay's work, convention blurs the realism. The Epistles, for instance, were all written to particular persons; they contain many references to eighteenth-century life; they reflect Gay's opinions on questions of his time. But the

8The Rise of the Novel, p. 291.
poet's fondness for invoking the Muses, his exclamatory sentences, rhetorical questions, and inversions, besides a plethora of adjective-noun combinations with the special neoclassical cliché quality, affect adversely the reader's appreciation of the interspersed life-like vignettes. To show Gay's skill in handling concrete details, two examples of the sharper passages are given:

I'd rather ballads write, and Grubstreet lays, Than pillage Caesar for my patron's praise: One common fate all imitators share, To save mince-pies, and cap the grocer's ware. Vex'd at the charge, I to the flames commit Rhymes, similies, Lords names, and ends of wit; In blotted stanzas scraps of Odes expire, And fustian mounts in Pyramids of fire.  
(Epistle to a Lady, 148, lines 35-43)

The maid, subdued by fees, her trunk unlocks, And gives the cleanly aid of dowlas smocks. Mean time our shirts her busy fingers rub, While the soap lathers o'er the foaming tub. If women's geer such pleasing dreams incite, Lend us your smocks, ye damsels, ev'ry night! We rise; our beards demand the barber's art; A female enters, and performs the part. The weighty golden chain adorns her neck, And three gold rings her skilful hand bedeck: Smooth o'er our chin her easy fingers move, Soft as when Venus stroak'd the beard of Jove.  
(Epistle to Burlington, 154, lines 103-114)

Even a little touch of the conventional in poems otherwise realistic has a dulling effect. Gay is not alone. The word "nymph," used twice at the beginning of Prior's The Question, to Lisetta (445), inoculates the reader against suspecting the real situation in the background of the poem; four abstract nouns in the fifth line of a six-line poem To My Lord (439) wipe away the effect of the opening, "Pen, Ink and Wax and paper send / To the kind Wife, the lovely
Friend." In some contexts, convention jars. For example, in one of Prior's songs (715), the phrase "as all good Christians shou'd" is followed almost immediately by "Jove the pow'r knew of her Charms."

Many poems can be called realistic because they contain description or narrative consistently detailed and obviously applying to everyday existence. Many, indeed, are based directly on the poets' own experience, or upon situations in which they were involved. Poems about factual experience do not necessarily contain realistic detail, but at least the opportunity is there if the poet chooses to use it.

In Erle Robert's Mice (400), Prior is one of his own characters; like Chaucer, "Matthew" is told to make a rime. Responding to Bolingbroke's request, he likens two rollicking mice to himself and his old friend Charles (Montague), insinuating that since Montague now has a sinecure, he ought to have one too. Again, Prior asks his friend Dick (Shelton) for advice on how to treat his fickle sweetheart (516). Since the coquette will not listen to him, he says, there's no use to quote Cowley and Waller. She is more interested in the "long flaxen Wigg, and Embroiderd new Coat" of Thom Spark, who does not talk at all. In

9Our three poets are poorly represented among the writers of topographical poetry, in which particular details are a conspicuous feature. Aubin's study mentions only one by Gay, two by Swift (one written in Latin and one probably by Sheridan), and none at all by Prior. Swift's Latin poem, Carberiae Rupes (III, 315), is a description of the Carbery Rocks in the vicinity of Cork, visited in 1723. Someone has suggested that he wrote in Latin because he did not trust English for a serious realistic poem, implying a reluctance to use "low" words. But the pigeons nesting on the cliff, the sea calves, and the feeding goats washed away by a sudden storm seem at home in the couplet translation by Dunkin.
another poem Prior invites the Earl of Oxford to share with his friends the "Bacon-Ham, and Mutton-chine" he has prepared for them "At Matthew's Palace, in Duke-street" (399). To be sure, the invitation may owe its inspiration to Horace, and the ending sounds like conventional flattery; moreover,

To see Thy Servant from his Soul
Crown with Thy Health the sprightly Bowl (lines 9-10)

has a distinctly conventional air. To this extent, the realism is blurred.

Some Prior poems, fully developed by means of details from everyday life, seem removed from the purely personal. These are poems with enough universality, perhaps, to be remembered even if their authors should be forgotten. "Jinny the Just" lives, not because she may have been Prior's mistress, but because Prior's epitaph of more than a hundred lines has life in every phrase. His account of her character, her domestic accomplishments, and her zest for life uses details in anapestic tetrameter with rimed triplets—a rhythm somehow suited to vivacious Jinny (300). Another life-like sketch of Prior's is An Epitaph (461), in which he condemns the lackadaisical life of Jack and Joan. A brief epigram in five pentameter couplets gives a picture of an eighteenth-century lady, who divides her time "with equal prudence":

First writes her billet doux then says her prayers
Her Mass and Toilet, Vespres and the Play;
Thus God and Astorath divide the day. (542)

She has a higher social status than Joan, apparently, but Prior's appraisal is no more flattering.
Perhaps just as much entitled to be classified as pervasively realistic are some poems which have a mere touch of playful myth, added for entertainment or mockery. In the 1723 birthday poem (II, 740), which begins

Resolv'd my annual Verse to pay
By Duty bound, on Stella's Day;
Furnish'd with Paper, Pens, and Ink,
I gravely sat me down to think:
I bit my Nails, and scratch'd my Head,
But found my Wit and Fancy fled. . . .

Swift tells how he begged Apollo to help. Apollo said he was tired listening to pleas for inspiration from three other Deans; but he has given the poet a recipe involving much abacadabra and the names of half a dozen of Stella's acquaintances. Another poem involving a real girl (Prior's Her Right Name, 143) brings in Helen of Troy and Hebe in a comparison that has a familiar rather than the conventional air that might have been expected. A number of Prior's best poems might be used as examples of such skillful handling of classical touches.

In one sense, Swift is the most realistic of the three poets; as Herbert Davis says, the reader of his poetry hears always "the voice of a particular person speaking on a particular occasion and at a particular time. Even when he speaks as a moralist of generalities it always has an individual ring; one could not claim that it has been transformed, that it has suffered a sea change into something new and strange, timeless and eternal." As Williams says

(ed. note, I, xv), Swift "was constantly turning verses as a common part of his everyday life, so much so that no part of his writing is as complete an autobiography." In his verse, Dr. Ball has written, his life is set forth "as in a panorama" and "he reveals his character in all its phases."

Specimens are numerous. The Author upon Himself, written in 1714, gives a third-person character sketch of Swift, pictures the activities of those who frequent the taverns, tells of Harley's invitation to court and of Swift's friendship with ministers of state. Then the poem continues with the story of the gossip against Swift and the accusation that he has written a dangerous treatise "against the Spleen" (a playful departure from realism). Next comes his fall, then his restoration by Harley's favor, and finally his retirement (I, 193). Closer to his private life is Swift's To Charles Ford Esq on his Birth-day (I, 309). Among the characters are Stella, Sheridan, Corbet, and King. Written in the second person, the poem lines up its details to persuade Ford that he is better off in Dublin than in London. Incidentally Swift says he himself was at first dissatisfied in Dublin,

But now I act as other Folk,  
Like Pris'ners when their Gall is broke. (lines 55-56)

An Apology to the Lady C-R-T (II, 375) is memorable for Swift's explanation of his reaction when he went to accept her dinner invitation and found that she was not at home:

11Quoted by Williams (I, xlvi).
'Consider what it is to bear
'The powder'd Courtier's witty Sneer;
'To see th' important Men of Dress,
'Scoffing my College Aukwardness.
'To be the strutting Cornet's Sport,
'To run the Gauntlet of the Court;
'Winning my Way by slow Approaches,
'Tho' Crowds of Coxcombs & of Coaches;
'From the first fierce cockaded Centry,
'Quite tho' the Tribe of waiting Gentry;
'To pass to many crowded Stages,
'And stand the Staring of your Pages;
'And after all, to crown my Spleen,
'Be told -- You are not to be seen. . . .
(lines 145-158)

Two other enjoyable poems filled with details close to Swift's own life are The Journal (I, 276) and the imitation of Horace's Seventh Epistle addressed to Harley in 1713 (I, 169).

A realistic impetus is provided by political situations which call forth the poet's expression of adverse opinion. For the benefit of the Tories, Swift retells the old tale of the bundle of sticks that could not be broken, urging the ministers to stand together against the Whigs (I, 188). The affair of Wood's Halfpence called forth from Swift satiric poems as well as prose propaganda. Wood, an Insect (I, 350) celebrates the fact that the man famous for the debased coinage has been "heartilly maul'd" by the Drapier and that now he needs only to be scalded with melted copper. Swift has several poems on the subject, one of which is A Serious Poem Upon William Wood (I, 333), really a ballad in straggling anapestic couplets. Here is a sample of the detail and the style:

He can Eat, Drink and Sleep; now and then for a Friend He'll not be too proud an old Kettle to mend;
He can Lye like a Courtier, and think it no Scorn,  
When Gold's to be got, to Forswear and Suborn.  
(lines 43-46)

Swift has been praised for his ability to express "quite prosaic content--realistic, coarse, sensible, satirical--appropriately . . . in verse." (my italics).\textsuperscript{12} The most successful of descriptive-narrative poems are those whose details are so arranged that the reader can imagine himself participating in the experience. Two of Swift's most famous poems are of this kind--\textit{A Description of the Morning} and \textit{A Description of a City Shower}--though their satiric intent, noticeable in their distortion of familiar poetic expressions, is fairly obvious.\textsuperscript{13} By his carefully selected and organized details, Swift in these poems transmits a sense of immediacy which enables the reader to see and appreciate the workaday characters as they face their unglamorous life. If the reader himself has been caught in a shower--and who hasn't?--he is caught again. And only a little imagination is needed to turn that eighteenth-century dawn into any working day's beginning.\textsuperscript{14}

Swift surely had that "true genius" described by Robert Wolseley in 1685: the power which "can enliven the deadest Lump, 


\textsuperscript{13}Maurice Johnson, pp. 11-12; Davis, "The Poetry of Jonathan Swift," p. 108.

\textsuperscript{14}That Swift was aware of immediacy as a goal of realistic verse is indicated by his revisions in \textit{The Power of Time} (1727), explained by Johnson, p. 77.
beautifies the vilest Dirt and sweetens the most offensive Filth.\textsuperscript{15} Much of his verse can hardly be called "sweetened," though "appropriate" may be admitted.\textsuperscript{16} The period before 1725 does not include the "unprintable" poems analyzed and defended by Maurice Johnson (pp. 110-121). Perhaps even the most shocking of Swift's poems can be regarded as examples of "moral realism," to which the piling up of certain kinds of particulars contributes.\textsuperscript{17} But there are a number of violent, abusive passages in verses directed at various enemies—witty verses, to be sure, probably deserving to be called realistic, except that the element of exaggeration combined with particularization sometimes slides over into untruth.

Swift shows too little restraint, I think, in his character sketches of his enemies. A conspicuous example is The Description of a Salamander (I, 82), written in 1705 against Baron Cutts, who had earned the name of "Salamander" for his bravery under fire at the siege of Namur. In an extremely witty transposition of the name from a complimentary one to an insulting one, Swift went so far in portraying Cutts as a reptile that he excited indignation among those who

\textsuperscript{15}Preface to Rochester's \textit{Valentinian}. Quoted by V. de Sola Pinto, p. 86.

\textsuperscript{16}Cf. note 12, above.

\textsuperscript{17}Watt, "Realism and the Novel." According to this critic, "Moral realism" has a general use to indicate unwilling assent to the truth of the picture of life given by such writers as Swift—unwilling because the truths are not pleasant or flattering. Perhaps Auerbach's term "radical realism" would be a better one for Swift's excursions into the unseemly. Cf. \textit{Mimesis}, p. 431.
knew the attack was undeserved (ed. note, I, 82). As Williams says (idem), "Swift's scurrilous invective against a brave man is inexcusable."

Also "unmerited" (note, I, 301) is the libelous attack on Josiah Hort. "Bishop Judas" is portrayed in The Storm as a wretch, with a whore for mistress; a rake, a bully, a pimp, a spy. He'll "swear, blaspheme, and damn"; he "raves, and roars, and swears." Like some other satirical poems, this one is too abusive; wit is not strong enough to save it. Though the poem has classical machinery—Pallas and Proteus are asking Neptune to send a tempest—and though Swift refers to the object of attack by blank lines, Hort is easily identifiable from the rime; moreover, several other real persons and factual circumstances are brought into the story.

Falsified personal satire, like anything else that is false, may forfeit its claim to realism. Swift, I think, would agree; he knew how to tone down particularization in the interest of more broadly applicable satire. A short poem directed at Bishop Hort ten years after The Storm may contain fewer clever turns of phrase, but it will be remembered longer:

Lord Pam in the Church (cou'd you think it) kneel'd down,
When told the Lieutenant was just come to Town,
His Station despising, unaw'd by the Place,
He flies from his God, to attend on his Grace:
To the Court it was fitter to pay his Devotion,
Since God had no Hand in his Lordship's Promotion.

(III, 809)

These verses are not spoiled by too definite identification. Nor are they marred by scurrility. "True Poets . . . are not scurrilous in Satire" (II, 729).
It would be a mistake to presume that every poem with an autobiographical or a political basis should be called realistic—though the "occasion" and the subjectivity are realistic elements (see Ch. II). As an illustration, the epistle sent to the Tower in 1716 while Oxford was waiting trial is purely conventional, though it assures the prisoner of his friend Swift's loyalty (I, 209). The classical precedent is Horace, Book III, Ode II. From the style, one would not guess Swift to be the author.

If verses which use supposedly real-life details to the point of falsification are unsatisfactory, so are some fictional narratives. What may be lack of restraint seems like a controlled attempt to wring from the offensive part of the story—even if it is the main point—all the indecent implications possible. At least four of Gay's Tales are even less enjoyable than the most violent, abusive, or suggestive of Swift's pre-1725 verses. Gay seems to dwell on the kind of indecent spots that Prior handles so wittily. The demands of the rhythm and rime may be the key to Gay's failure to equal Prior's success; moreover, the pentameter couplets have the disadvantage of enforcing a slower pace.

In the short Equivocation, which is rather an anecdote than a tale, Gay does better. The narrative is well constructed, with

18 These tales present a classification problem. Like so much of Gay's realistic verse they use the conventional pentameter couplets and much "poetic diction." Like the fables, they end with a moral—albeit facetious—thereby linking themselves to the kind of poem which sets forth particulars for the sake of a general principle. Placing them here is a compromise.
enough details to set the stage for the conversation between the abbot and the prelate and to bring out the point. But there is no waste motion, no impression that the story-teller is padding the story. A True Story of an Apparition shows Gay's ability to use details to build suspense. The traveler has arrived at a lonely house on the edge of a wood and is "tuckt warm in bed" in "the lonesome room of terrors."

At first he hears the wind with hollow roar
Shake the loose lock, and swing the creaking door
Nearer and nearer draws the dreadful sound
Of rattling chains, that dragg'd upon the ground:
When lo, the spectre came with horrid stride,
Approach'd the bed, and drew the curtains wide!
In human form theghastful Phantom stood,
Expos'd his mangled bosom dy'd with blood.
Then silent pointing to his wounded breast,
Thrice wav'd his hand. Beneath the frightened guest
The bed-cords trembled, and with shudd'ring fear
Sweat chill'd his limbs, high rose his bristled hair. . . .
(lines 91-102)

Early eighteenth-century journalism, lampoons, and street ballads apparently had a good deal to do with the satirical verse of the Queen Anne poets, especially Swift. Certainly the readers of the time had a taste for burlesque, travesty, and parody. Swift was one of the most skillful of those who employed the negative, debunking, anti-"poetic," anti-illusionary approach. His achievement is remarkable, and his ability to transfer the everyday world to verse is beyond doubt. But I am inclined to agree with Sutherland, who calls attention to "a coarseness of spiritual fibre" in Swift's

19See Bond, English Burlesque Poetry.
verses. Some of the extremes of Prior and Gay, as well as Swift, may be accounted for by the inheritance from the Restoration period.

In some poems, commonplace or even vulgar elements are emphasized by the rhythm. Anapestic and other unusual meters can contribute to a humorous effect, since the reader may be distracted by the rhythm and feel that the poet is not serious. Prior's *Down-Hall* (550), as Eves says, "contains the stuff of life." The anapestic description of Prior's own journey (with John Morley, Harley's agent) from London to Down-Hall in Essex gallops like the horses all the way, fitting perfectly the conversation and the narrative as long as the men are riding. When they stop to talk to the landlady at the inn, the galloping rhythm keeps on.

Prior uses the same rhythm for *The Thief and the Cordelier*, turning to fun the incidents just before an execution (459). References to the activities of the men named in *Ballad* (192) are made in sing-song fashion. The vulgarizing effect of triple rhythm is seen in *A Critical Moment* (458), here quoted in full:

How capricious were Nature and Art to poor NELL?  
She was painting her Cheeks at the time her Nose fell.

This poor specimen hints that though Prior had the gift of turning very ordinary women into Dresden China, he was as aware as Swift of behind-the-scenes beautifying.

20 Sutherland, p. 83; see also Tillotson, *Essays*, pp. 80-81. Both these critics blame Swift for the later eighteenth century's fondness for periphrasis.

Just as the commonplace can be made interesting by being dressed in verse—conventional, as in Gay’s Eclogues; or familiar, as in Jinny the Just; or even irregular, like the uneven, prose-like line Swift uses for Mrs. Harris’s Petition (I, 69)—so material unpleasant or even offensive in itself can be restrained or neutralized by rhythm and diction. One critic has commented on a passage in Pope’s Dunciad: "The regular iteration of the couplet rime, the light quantitative regularity of syllabic succession, the sensitive control that prevents smoothness from passing into monotony, metaphor used not to enrich meaning but to produce indirect statement, and the protection, finally, of longwindedness: all set up an atmosphere of classical propriety which enables the reader to enjoy the satiric meaning without being entirely conscious of their essential vulgarity." Something of the effect described by Burgum may account for Dr. Johnson’s refusal to censure Prior for the indecency of his tales. They are, in my opinion, much more artistic than Gay’s. In most of them Prior uses the tetrameter couplet which is the badge of his familiar verse. He succeeds well in blending his materials and in avoiding monotony and overemphasis. In Eves’ judgment (p. 181), the tales have never since been surpassed "in ease, gayety and wit, knowledge of human nature, and command of the familiar style."

To the poems in which realism is incidental and those in which it is pervasive, we must add a third group in which conventional and realistic elements are blended in such a way that neither set seems in control. Some of these poems are so well balanced in their mixture of realism heightened by poetic language—or of "sublimity" restrained by foot-on-the-ground realism—that they suggest an important sense of the term classical. Usually the successful "mixed" poem is notable for its controlled pace, its restrained diction, and the correctness of its rhythm. Its tone may be familiar or formal, humorous or satiric. Such successful blending could hardly be an accident. Sometimes, on the contrary, there is evidence that it is carefully sought.

Some of the best poems have well-integrated classical machinery. Several narratives illustrate the planned combination of the mythical and the everyday, sometimes with a light satiric touch. In Cupid and Ganymede (272), for instance, Prior has a list of the items Cupid lost while gambling:

A Snush-Box, set with bleeding Hearts,
Rubies, all pierc'd with Diamond Darts;
His Nine-pins, made of Myrtle Wood;

• • •

His Bowl pure Gold, the very same
Which Paris gave the Cyprian Dame;
Two Table-Books in Shagreen Covers;
Fill'd with good Verse from real Lovers;
Merchandise rare! A Billet-doux,
Heaps of Hair Rings, and cypher'd Seals;
Rich Trifles; serious Bagatelles. (lines 13 ff.)

Ganymede isn't a fit playfellow, Venus tells her son. He's
An Imp as wicked, for his Age,
As any earthly Lady's Page.  

The remarkable way in which details from everyday life can en-
liven a poem that at first sight seems classical is well shown in
another narrative, the playful stanzas of Prior's The Dove (432).
Accompanied by Venus, who is masked like a woman of the streets at
a play, Cupid goes to Cloe's house to look for his mother's dove.
When the midnight callers batter at the door as St. Dunstan's
clock strikes one, Cloe's maid acts natural:

Thieves, Thieves! cries Susan; We're undone;
They'll kill my Mistress in her Bed.  

And the poet wonders:

Folks at Her House at such an Hour!
Lord! what will all the Neighbours say?  

Cloe usually goes to bed at ten, we are told, unless she stays up
to play picquet. As Cupid searches vainly through wardrobe and
closet, and "Turns all her Furbeloes and Flounces," Cloe suggests
that the "poultry" may have drowned in the tea-pot.

In Prior's version of the Baucis and Philemon story, The Ladle
(202), the visiting gods, both of whom show eighteenth-century
courtesy, are welcomed into the parlour to chat of war and politics.
The honest old farmer and his wife

Had struggl'd with the Marriage Noose;
As almost ev'ry Couple does:
Sometimes, My Plague! sometimes, My Darling!
Kissing to Day, to Morrow snarling;
Jointly submitting to endure
That Evil, which admits no Cure.  

(lines 41-42)

(432)

(lines 39-40)

(lines 35-36)

(lines 81-86)
Swift's stanzaic Apollo Outwitted (I, 119) has been previously mentioned (p. 37, above) as an example of the way in which a god can be an eighteenth-century nobleman in disguise. Apollo tells Ardelia (Mrs. Finch) that she can have one wish come true; Ardelia wishes she may always have a Muse on call; at the crucial point she calls Thalia as chaperon and fends off the amorous Apollo.

In The First of April (I, 320), Swift makes use of mythological machinery to compliment another friend. Apollo sends all nine of the Muses (not leaving even one behind to be invoked by the poets!) to relieve Mrs. Cope of the care of her family. Not knowing the god is playing an April-Fool joke,

They peep'd and saw a Lady there
Pinning on Coifs and combing Hair;
Soft'ning with Songs to Son or Daughter,
The persecution of cold Water. (lines 29-32)

Swift goes on to describe the kind of life the Lady leads:

Still pleas'd with the good-natur'd Noise,
And harmless Frolicks of her Boys;
Equal to all in Care and Love,
Which all deserve and all improve.
To Kitchin, Parlour, Nurs'ry flies,
And seems all Feet, and Hands, and Eyes.
No Thought of her's does ever roam,
But for her 'Squire when he's from home;
And scarce a Day, can spare a Minute
From Husband, Children, Wheel, or Spinet. (lines 33-42)

The Muses see that their help is unnecessary "where she presides / With Virtue, Prudence, Wit besides."

Longest and best of Swift's mythological-realistic poems is Cadenus and Vanessa (II, 686). Into it he puts his understanding of
the ways of the world, his attitudes toward women, and the story of Esther Vanhomrigh's infatuation for him. With these ingredients he combines a detailed account of a trial at the court of Venus, of the wonderful Vanessa's creation, and of her endowment with wisdom and its concomitant manly virtues, as well as beauty and feminine charms. Among the best of the life-like touches are the conversations of the fops and dames (lines 316 ff. and 363 ff.) The argumentative presentation of the affair between Vanessa and the Dean is not exactly realistic, probably because of the avoidance of directly reported conversation. But the Goddess of Love's education by way of Vanessa's experience becomes an instrument that enables Swift to solve his own rather embarrassing problem gallantly.

Though the myth in some of Prior's most successful poems has been called pure decoration (Eves, p. 212), the classical references are not simply added on, as, for example, are appeals to the Muses in many poems of the period; on the contrary, they provide illustrations necessary to the meaning. For example, Venus Mistaken (in which Venus mistakes Cloe's picture for her own and Cupid impudently asks, "Who's blind now, Mamma?") would have been nothing without the myth (277). The same holds true of Cupid Mistaken (276) and Cupid in Ambush (675).

Prior finds other ways to mingle details from myth and tradition with everyday life. An English Padlock (227), though the myth of Danae is a take-off point, and though it is modeled on Ovid and owes something to Juvenal, is reminiscent of The Country Wife (ed. note,
Both rhythm and details are in the familiar vein. The description of a tearful woman in *A Better Answer* (450)—

> Dear Cloe, how blubber'd is that pretty Face?
> Thy Cheek all on Fire, and Thy Hair all uncurl'd:
> How can'st Thou presume, Thou hast leave to destroy
> The Beauties, which Venus but lent to Thy keeping?
>(lines 1-8)

reflects Prior's personal experience. As his patron Apollo returns each night to his Thetis, the poet says, he himself will come home to Cloe after his wanderings. One of Prior's best, this poem is especially memorable for the graceful way in which the poet-lover's offense is turned into a compliment:

> What I speak, my fair Cloe, and what I write, shews
> The Diff'rence there is betwixt Nature and Art:
> I court others in Verse; but I love Thee in Prose:
> And They have my Whimsies; but Thou has my Heart.
>(lines 13-16)

In an earlier work (*Written at Paris, 1700. In the Beginning of Robe's Geography*) Prior asks Rhea, goddess of earth, for twenty acres, "For Pasture Ten, and Ten for Plow," to which he can retire. After the homely middle section, with its particulars—

> To have a Garden, House, and Stable;
> That I may Read, and Ride, and Plant,
>(lines 9-10)

and

> For Me, and John, and Nell, and Crop...
>(line 19)

--the poet requests Rhea to chain up Revenge and Pride to a far-off rock and to tell Venus not to let Cupid come around bothering him (188).
Mythological openings for panegyric are common, of course, but a classical beginning can also launch a realistic complimentary poem. One of Swift's poems to Stella opens by saying that Pallas saw Stella had too much Wit for a girl, and gave her Honour to balance it (II, 723). This poem contains a delightful sketch of Stella, often quoted (lines 70-84). The catalogue of passions, specific though abstract, is not enough to spoil the realism (lines 45-50).

As Swift's work demonstrates, mythology can be used to introduce a real-life attack, like the one on Mrs Mary Manley. Apollo and Cupid are represented as the donors of Corinna's talent for speaking and writing satire (I, 149). Prometheus (I, 343), one of Swift's satires against Wood's halfpence, likewise has a basis in myth. Wood is represented as having tried to steal the chain of gold that leads to His Majesty and exchange it for a brass one. The poet hopes Jove will turn the brazen chain into a rope and tie Prometheus high in the air where the English crows can substitute for the vultures of the legend. This poem contains a clever catalogue of particulars:

Whigs, Tories, Trimmers, Hannoverians,
Quakers, Conformists, Presbyterians,
Scotch, Irish, English, French unite
With equal Int'rest, equal Spight,
Together mingled in a Lump,
Do all in One Opinion jump . . . (lines 13-18)

"All Parties and Religions joyn" against the luckless Wood.
The satire in which Swift uses a mixture of classical and realistic elements is among his best. When he refrains from language bordering on the violent, the vituperative, or the indecent, he is likely to approach the smooth, poised tone that makes the best work of Prior so delightful. The comparison may be misleading, however, unless qualified; for Prior's best verse is not personal satire—indeed, in his few attempts in that direction, he was less successful than Swift.

Classic balance can be credited, I believe, to at least one well-known Swift satire which shows a different kind of mixture from the one we have been discussing. In A Satirical Elegy On the Death of a late Famous General (I, 296) there is no mythology, and only a brief apostrophe hints at neoclassic convention. Though called by Swift's editor an "ungenerous attack," it seems to be universalized; that is, it could be the account of the death of almost any unmourned great man. The title and the generalization at the end indicate that Swift may have been aware that the too particular has limitations. Realism comes, not only from the particular deeds of Marlborough, but from such lines as the following:

Well, since he's gone, no matter how,
The last loud trump must wake him now:
And, trust me, as the noise grows stronger,
He'd wish to sleep a little longer.
And could he be indeed so old
As by the news-papers we're told?

(lines 5-10)
Even what seems to be most specifically for this mighty one—namely, no widow or orphan mourns now, but he caused them to weep before he died—could be said of many another.

Among the well-balanced poems are some which seem to exploit for effect the contrast between style and subject matter. Gay is the author of An Elegy on a Lap-Dog (206). In pentameter couplets, it mixes muses and chamber-maids, personifies Superstition as a "tormented guest," and urges Celia to console herself with a lover. At the end is an uncomplimentary note on mankind:

Here Shock, the pride, of all his kind, is laid;  
Who fawn'd like man, but ne'er like man betrayed.

Nearest to realistic detail is this sign of the maiden's despair:

Her Mechlen pinners rent the floor bestrow,  
And her torn fan gives real signs of woe.  
(lines 15-16)


Swift's skill in handling style-subject contrasts is well shown by a brief poem which makes use of a touch of conversational idiom and a proper name to help his apparently conventional narrative in its descent to the everyday. Here are the concluding lines of To Mrs. Biddy Floyd (I, 117):

Jove mix'd up all, and his best Clay imploy'd;  
Then call'd the happy Composition, Floyd.
The handling of details in this poem is especially interesting. A casual reading gives an impression of conventionality: Cupid and Jove, the Graces and Venus do little to enliven four line-long series of abstract nouns. But the proper name at the end is a warning that some connection with real life is to be expected; a rereading of what seemed at first to be half a dozen conventional couplets reveals that the "ingredients" from which Jove forms the new recipe are not the usual ones from which Beauty is made. In the country Jove finds Truth, Innocence, Good Nature, and Serenity; then Cupid eliminates "the Demure, the Awkward, and the Coy." From the Court come "Breeding, and Wit, and Air, and decent Pride," but once again there is the discarding "Of Nice, Coquet, Affected, Pert, and Vain." The reader learns Swift's opinion of womanly virtues, as well as of the "spurious Grain." Besides being a splendid example of the handling of details—though they are abstract rather than concrete—To Mrs. Biddy Floyd illustrates Swift's method of expressing disapproval of something by approving its opposite.

Prior is particularly adept at contrasts, his Alma: or, The Progress of the Mind (470), a unique philosophical discussion in familiar style, providing an excellent long example of the blending of disparate elements. It contains references to people, places, and events of Prior's own time, as well as humorous remarks about famous philosophers, scientists, kings, and literary figures of the past. Throughout the poem, particular details reinforce the arguments. The following sample is picked at random:
Observe the various Operations
Of Food, and Drink in several Nations.
Was ever TARTAR fierce or cruel,
Upon the Strength of Water-Gruel?
But who shall stand His Rage and Force;
If first he rides, then eats his Horse?
Sallads, and Eggs, and lighter Fare
Tune the ITALIAN Spark's Guitar.
And, if I take Dan CONGREVE right;
Pudding and Beef make BRITONS fight.
TOKAY and COFFEE cause this Work,
Between the GERMAN and the TURK:
And Both, as They Provisions want,
Chicane, avoid, retire, and faint.

(Canto II, lines 240-253)

A more serious philosophical problem is set forth as follows:

Now, RICHARD, this coercive Force,
Without your Choice, must take it's Course.
Great Kings to Wars are pointed forth,
Like loaded Needles to the North.
And Thou and I, by Pow'r unseen,
Are barely Passive, and suck'd in
To HENAUlT's Vaults, or CELIA's Chamber,
As Straw and Paper are by Amber.
If we sit down to play or set
(Suppose at Ombre or Basset)
Let People call us Cheats, or Fools;
Our Cards and We are equal Tools.
We sure in vain the Cards condemn:
Our selves both cut and shuffl'd them.

Poor Men! poor Papers! We and They
Do some impulsive Force obey;
And are but play'd with:--Do not play.
But Space and Matter we should blame:
They palm'd the Trick that lost the Game.

(lines 222-242)

Gay appreciated Prior's variety, paying tribute to the older poet in his Epistle to Bernard Lintott (172):

Let Prior's muse with soft'ning accents move,
Soft as the strains of constant Emma's love:
Or let his fancy choose some jovial theme,
As when he told Hans Carvel's jealous dream;
Prior the admiring reader entertains,
With Chaucer's humour, and with Spencer's strains.
(lines 59-65)

Gay implies that Prior chose a style to fit each occasion. He does not suggest that opposition of theme and treatment might account for Prior's success. I think the ability to handle contrasts is the key to the genius of both men, as well as to Swift's.

Besides poems which contrast style and subject matter, there are a few which show a deliberate contrasting of styles. For example, Prior's Daphne and Apollo (413) is a conversation in which Apollo's speeches read like neoclassical translations of Ovid, but Daphne's are cleverly detailed and familiar. She makes fun of everything Apollo says; when he tells her he can foretell the future ("What is to come by certain Art I know"), she replies, "Pish Partridge has as fair pretence as Thou." Daphne lays down the hard conditions on which she will accept Apollo's love: he is to come read the Courant with her father; to bring her home a little jewel, or a lacquered cabinet that he (being the sun god) can easily pick up in his travels; and, most important, to make her his wife—he's not going to be allowed to philander like Father Jove. He is sure to outlive her, she explains, and married life won't be so bad:

And after all you're half your time away
You know your business takes you up all day
And coming late to Bed you need not fear
What ever Noise I make you'll sleep my Dear
Or if a Winter Evening Shou'd be long
E'en read your Physick Book or make a Song.
Your Steeds, your Wife, Diaculum, and Rhime
May take up any Honest Godheads time.
(lines 75-82)
This is one instance of a familiar tone achieved with the pentameter. It is not among Prior's best work.

Once Prior contrasts two styles and talks about it. In the letter to Boileau after Blenheim (220), after carrying on an imaginary argument with the French poet about the difficulty of writing, he demonstrates his command of both panegyric and less solemn verse. After a long high-flown passage he writes (line 182), "But We must change the Style"; and he proceeds to do so.

Another kind of blended poem is the fable. Some fables are tales of varying length, with human beings as characters, but with a moral tacked on at the end. One of the best of Prior's tales of this type is Protogenes and Apelles (463), the Pliny story of two artists who recognize each other's work. The narrative is enlivened by the character of the servant woman, direct reporting of delightful conversation, and Prior's apology for mentioning six-o'clock tea:

Tea, says a Critic big with Laughter,  
Was found some twenty Ages after:  
Authors, before they write, shou'd read:  
'Tis very true; but We'll proceed. (lines 45-48)

The moral of the story is that men should leave traces of their lives that will show how they tried to better their art and win their country's praise. Another tale with a pseudo-moral is The Conversation (523), a poem realistic even though one of the characters is a type. References to several real people and to Prior's political and literary activities are made in the course of Damon's talk with an unknown man who turns out to be Matt Prior himself.
Colloquial expressions (like "downright Dunstable," meaning "plain-spoken"), the rather startling lucky chance (line 67) that interrupts Damon, and the surprise ending of the poem are all set forth in the familiar tetrameter couplets. After the "ending" comes the moral in pentameter couplets, addressed to Dorset:

With DAMON's Lightness weigh Thy solid Worth;
The Foil is known to set the Diamond forth:
Let the feign'd Tale this real Moral give,
How many DAMONs, how few DORSETS Live. (lines 89-92)

This real ending is an anticlimax, but perhaps we could say that the foil sets forth the diamond in a way Prior may not have meant.

In one Prior poem (543), the characters are personified abstractions. Truth and Falsehood are two girls who go out walking; Sister Truth is inveigled into going bathing, and Falsehood runs off with her "snowy robes," having discarded her own "tawdry vest." Since then Falsehood masquerades as Truth, and Truth goes bare. The picture of Falsehood—rolling her eyes in church, telling secrets, shedding tears, pleasing, and promising—has a timely touch in its reference to the South Sea Bubble:

While rising-stock Her conscience pricks,
When being, poor thing, extremely gravell'd,
She secrets ope'd, and all unravell'd. (lines 38-40)

In the fables more strictly so called, animals are the characters, but the details refer to human life. Sometimes the moral is implicit; sometimes it is baldly stated. In A **Simile** (244),
the foolish squirrel in a rolling cage who thinks he is climbing
reminds Prior of the writers of high-flown poetry:

In noble Songs, and lofty Odes,
They tread on Stars, and talk with Gods.
Still Dancing in an airy Round:
Still pleas'd with their own Verses Sound.
Brought back, how fast soe'er they go:
Always aspiring; always low. (lines 13-20)

The Flies (453) reflects Prior's dislike of factions; he says individuals in the State take credit for what their party has done.

Swift's Fable of the Bitches (1, 207) violently opposes an attempt to repeal the Test Act.

Similes and analogies involving animals enliven poems of different kinds that cannot be called fables. Details are usually plentiful. For example, Prior uses the chameleon's ability to adapt itself to its environment to open his discussion of the young squire who comes to town and falls in with whatever "gang" will lend him their colors. If he joins those who "read and comment upon News" and drink their coffee "without Lace," he'll mimic their week-old news reports and set himself up to give advice to leaders of the world; if he settles for the Hum-Drum Club, he'll talk about stocks, and despise wit and learning; or, if he is lucky enough, he may be able to drink champagne with the Wits and quote verses written on glasses. The poem begins:

As the Chameleon, who is known
To have no Colors of his own;
But borrows from his Neighbour's Hue
His White or Black, his Green or Blew;
And struts as much in ready Light,
Which Credit gives Him upon Sight;
As if the Rain-bow were in Tail
Settl'd on Him, and his Heirs Male . . .
(269, lines 1-10)

The poet always has two sets of particulars to draw on when he uses such comparisons.

Sometimes, indeed, he has three. In Alma, the Mind, personified as a woman, is likened to a lonely deer as the philosophical argument rages. Some of the details apply to the woman, some to the animal, some to the mind:

Poor Alma, like a lonely Deer,
O'er Hills and Dales does doubtful err;
With panting Haste, and quick Surprise,
From ev'ry Leaf that stirs, She flies;
'Till mingl'd with the neighb'ring Herd,
She slights what erst She singly fear'd:
And now, exempt from Doubt and Dread,
She dares pursue; if They dare lead:
As Their Example still prevails;
She tempts the Stream, or leaps the Pales.
(Canto III, lines 112-123)

In The Dove, Cloe, awakened at night by Venus's emissaries, is compared to a fearful hare and to a quaking partridge that "cuddles low behind the Brake" to escape the falcon (Prior 434, st. xiii and xiv). Cloe looks round frantically and dives under the bed clothes.

Prior's The Turtle and the Sparrow (529), with birds carrying on an argument in a way reminiscent of the medieval owl and nightingale, has an especially enjoyable combination of elements. The poet supplies a moral in a conventional verse at the end. The Turtle-dove's wails, her meditation on mortality, and her determination to remain faithful to "Columbo, dead and gone" are based on
Bion's Lament for Adonis. There are other conventions aplenty--neoclassical epithets, inversions, apostrophizing; references not only to particular gods and goddesses, but to fauns and fairies, dryads, and naiads. As well integrated as these elements, however, are references to Chaucer and La Fontaine, Matthew Prior and Tom Southerne, Henry VIII and Robin Hood; most of these names come in the speeches of the Sparrow, whose ornithoid disguise can not conceal the fact that he is a practical man of the world. The weeping widow to whom he tells his love affairs must know something of the world, too, judging by her description of city life as she sends her suitor away (see p. 47 above).

Besides the unflattering view of the urban environment, there are other brief references to English life--like the allusion to Dunmow bacon (line 231), Dunmow being the town in Essex where a flitch of bacon is given to the couple who can swear at the end of the first year that they have not quarreled or regretted their marriage. The fable form makes possible some excellent humorous effects, like the Sparrow's philosophizing on cuckoldry (lines 295-330) and his account of his own transgressions:

Sometimes forsooth, upon the brook
I kept a Miss, An honest Rook
Told it a Snipe, who told a Stear,
Who told it Those who told it Her.
One day a Linnet and a Lark
Had met me strolling in the dark;
The next, a Wood-cock and an Owle
Quick sighted, grave and sober fowle,
Would on their Corp'ral Oath allege
I kiss'd a Hen behind the Hedge.

(lines 357-366)
The portraits of the Sparrow's wives are well drawn. "Wife the First," the Sparrow tells the Turtledove, was

A handsome, senseless, awkward Fool
Who would not yield, and could not rule

... Count me the leaves on yonder Tree,
So many different Wills had she,
And like the leaves, as chance inclined,
Those Wills were changed with every wind:
She courted the Beaumonde to-night
L'Assemblee her Supreme delight.
The next she sat immured, unseen,
And in full health enjoyed the spleen.
She censured that, she altered this,
And with great care set all amiss;
She now could chide, now laugh, now cry,
Now sing, now pout, all God knows why.

(lines 200-215)

Another wife was "peevish, noisy, bold, / A Witch engrafted on a scold"; a short while after marriage she began to show her true face:

The Plagues o'er all the Parish flew;
Her stock of borrowed tears grew dry
And native tempests armed her eye,
Black clouds around her forehead hung,
And thunder rattled on her tongue.

(lines 395-407)

At the death of this one (the fifth), the Sparrow rejoices and looks around, hoping for better luck. His burst of honesty ruins his friendly conversation with the Turtle.

This poem well demonstrates not only Prior's skill in mingling discordant elements but his ability to handle details so that they
become part of the structure. The following single passage will be analyzed to show the way details are carefully embedded:

All must obey the general Doom,
Down from ALCIDES to TOM THUMB,
Grim PLUTO will not be Withstood
By force or Craft, tall ROBINHOOD
As well as little JOHN is dead
(You see how deeply I am read).
With FATES lean Tipstaff none can dodge,
He'll find You out where e'er You lodge.
AJAX to shun his general pow'r
In vain absconded in a Flow'r.
An idle Scene TYTHONUS acted,
When to a Grasshopper contracted:
Death struck them in those Shapes again
As once he did when They were Men.
For Reptils perish, Plants decay,
Flesh is but Grass, Grass turns to Hay,
And Hay to Dung, and Dung to Clay.  (lines 103-119)

The first line is the general statement. Then two illustrations are given to enforce the "all"—"from Alcides to Tom Thumb" (from the large and strong to the tiny and weak); and, second, both "tall Robinhood" and "Little John" (meaning the tall and the short, or the master and the servant). Next the generality is rephrased in concrete terms, so that "gen'ral Doom" is now "Fate's lean Tipstaff," as in Holbein's Dance of Death (ed. note, p. 986). The all-encompassing ("gen'ral") nature of death is emphasized by two additional but relevant details, one of them in the second person: no one can evade him ("none can dodge"); and no matter where you stay (hide), death will find you. Then follow two examples, both from mythology, of persons who have tried to hide and evade: Ajax, from whose blood a flower grew, who may represent those who seek refuge in beauty, art,
or any of the activities that lift human life; and Tythonus, changed to a grasshopper, who may represent those who abandon their best human qualities to seek refuge in lower life, thereby attaining a kind of death. The next two lines give the result of the attempted evasion, a result which supports the generality: death found them both. But another generality is implied: death applies not only to men, but to all things living; it strikes flowers and grasshoppers. The triplet gives six concrete examples of non-human things which die, or change their form in a way analogous to dying.

Moderation and well-controlled pace, as well as realistic detail, help Swift achieve similar success in The Progress of Poetry. This poem tells of the farmer's goose who can't fly, who can't even cackle when she's well fed, but who sings on the wing when she's hungrier. The poet is like the goose: when he has his third night's profits, he sits around and drinks and gets lazy (Pegasus would break a girth if he tried to lift him); but hungry, "he singing flies" (I, 230). In Vanbrugh's House (I, 78), the silkworm which "flutters when he Thinks he flyes" provides Swift with an analogy that leads to a famous description of poetic failure:

Just such an Insect of the Age
Is he that scribbles for the Stage;
His Birth he does from Phoebus raise,
And feeds upon imagin'd Bays:
Throws all his Witt and Hours away
In twisting up an ill-spun Play:

...
And borne on fancy's Pinions, thinks,
He soars sublimest when he Sinks:
But scatt'ring round his Fly-blows, dyes;
Whence Broods of insect Poets rise.  (lines 39-54)

Incidental fables embroider several of Gay's pre-1725 works. For example, a delightful story of the crow and the lark brings to a close his Epistle to Paul Methuen (161). It follows a discussion of certain witty poets who are criticized by dull ones, with the implication that the dull ones are never criticized: "To shoot at crows is powder thrown away." Gay is more famous as a fabulist than any of his contemporaries; sixty-six fables in two series (1728 and 1738) were the sources of much of his eighteenth-century popularity. The Fables, most of them ostensibly about animals, are short stories in tetrameter couplets, with a moral at the end of each. Details abound, but few of the fables are as delightful as Prior's or Swift's best.

By emphasizing the satisfactory mixture of various elements in the poems in this group, I do not mean to imply that all those discussed in the other two sections can be denied artistic excellence. But it does seem that the best work of all three poets is mixed, blended, to some extent balanced. "Poetic diction" applied to everyday material, colloquial language applied to traditional or philosophical material, juxtapositions of formal and informal elements for satiric purposes, realistic elements leavening the conventional, mythological characters in everyday settings—these are the blends that a modern reader can most easily enjoy and admire.
Realism brought about by the use of everyday details or by some kind of particularization flourished alongside convention in the first quarter of the eighteenth century. In the most conventional poems, as I have shown, elements of everyday realism can be found enlivening or decorating them, or perhaps interfering with their effectiveness. It now remains to be seen whether any kind of realistic elements can be detected within the "neoclassic" conventional expressions themselves.

The stock diction of neoclassical poetry, combined with the regular rhythm, can pull against realism by lulling the reader's perceptions. This is usually true even when everyday details are plentiful, as in Gay's Trivia, for example. It is even more likely to be true when the subject matter is complimentary, elegiac, or meditative. Examples are easily found in Prior's Ode, Humbly Inscrib'd to the Queen (232) and the Ode in memory of Villiers (217). Nevertheless, realism of a kind can be found in "poetic diction" itself—in descriptive terms which appeal to the senses or make other terms in the context perceptible by the visual or aural imagination.

When "what is usually called Poetic Diction" is used, according to Wordsworth (1800 Preface), the reader is "utterly at the mercy of the Poet, respecting what imagery or diction he may choose to connect with the passion." Somehow this seems less important than the fact
that the poet is likely to take for granted the reader's stock response to a noun, for example, and give the noun a modifier that will merely reinforce the obvious. This likelihood accounts for adjectives that present no definite picture, as in "youthful, handsome Charioteer" (Prior, 245, line 8) and for ill-chosen modifiers like "warm" in Gay's

Rills of warm blood his burnish'd Armour stain.
(217, line 80)

It accounts also for adjectives that do not seem to be necessary, or that add nothing at all to the meaning of the noun. Such are the "expletive words," as Blair called them, which "cloy and enervate" description instead of adding anything to it.² Purely tautological epithets are surely rarer in Prior, Swift, and even Gay, however, than in later eighteenth-century poets.

Deliberate tautology is found in Virgil, according to Deane, where it is conducive "to the pastoral atmosphere of agreeable semi-reality."² I am not convinced that our poets were seeking semi-reality; in them, however, as in poets of the later eighteenth century, some tautology may be due to the inability to think of more effective modifiers. A few examples of the tautological are Prior's "Sun's golden ray" (690, line 5), "liquid Main" (219, line 57), and "Gleby Land" (330, line 696), and Gay's "leafy bowers" (153, line 60). Not

² Idem.
exactly redundant, but reading also like fillers are the adjectives in "gilded chariot" (Prior, 245, line 18) and "rising Flood" (219, line 61). Gay's "chilly dews" (153, line 60) are in this class. The important point to note is that filler modifiers need not sacrifice concreteness.

Trite expressions turn up all too often. Such combinations as "dire Effects," "secret Passions," "constant flame," "dazzled sight," "vulgar Herd"—to choose almost at random—are only a degree less deadening than lines like "O'er flow'ry Vallies, and thro' Crystal Streams" (Prior, 356, line 842) or passages like

The verdant Rising of the flow'ry Hill,
The Vale enamell'd, and the Crystal Rill,
The Ocean rolling, and the shelly Shoar . . .
(365, lines 158-160)

But even in lines of this kind (and they are infinitely more frequent in Gay than in Prior) visual imagery is as often to be found as not.

If tautology and triteness can be charged to epithets in this period, the quantity of the modifiers is an equally conspicuous fault; the number of adjectives in the more conventional poems is appalling. Trochaic adjectives combined with monosyllabic nouns are probably the predominant "neoclassical" trait. Besides some of the examples above, Prior has clusters in many poems. "Flow'ry Hill," "pleasing Song," "hasty Wings," and "sickly Bed," as well as several more, appear on the same page in Solomon (365); within a few lines in the same poem occur "empty Fears," "endless Cares," "secret Snares," "vengeful Foe," "pathless Woods," "anxious Doubts" (363-364). A three-page poem has "hoary
Age, "fleeting breath," "liquid main," "rising flood," "dreary shoars," "dismal pow'r," "endless reign," "destin'd Hour," and a dozen more (217-220). Even in a little poem which is nearer the kind of thing that has brought Prior his place in the literary histories, he can mix the adjective-noun combinations which are so conspicuous in his century. This early poem, In Imitation of Anacreon (258) begins informally:

Let 'em Censure: what care I?
The Herd of Criticks I defie.
Let the Wretches know, I write
Regardless of their Grace, or Spight.
No, no . . . .

but before it has run its course of sixteen lines, it has "warbling Nine," "endless Theme," and "empty Praise."

The wide range of trochaic adjectives can be seen in Swift too. In his early poems occur "flowry Vales," "longing Eye," "greedy Ears," "foolish Fire," "worthless Verse," "senseless doubt," "bloody Scar," "tunefull Throng," "bashfull maid," and "golden wings," along with the more interesting "bubbled Fools" and "saucy doom," and the prosaic "cheaper Rate" and "goodly Pile." Polysyllabic adjectives modifying monosyllabic nouns are also common. The following examples from Swift can not claim concreteness; their appeal is to the understanding rather than the sense: "amazing Joy," "deluding Muse," "ungrateful Tast," and "delightful Strand."

Because there are so many adjectives, and because some seem to be chosen merely for the rhythm, the tendency is to overlook the excellence of most of them. That is, concrete nouns modified by adjectives
calling for visual or aural response are kept from being perceived by the sheer weight of numbers distracting the reader's attention. Accurate though they are, expressions like Gay's "mighty Caesar," "bustling crowds," "prancing steeds," "mould'ring frame," "streaming eyes," "doleful Cry," and "sudden show'r" seem too obvious to be interesting. On the other hand, factual information necessary for the narrative or description being developed is provided by "cheapest tailor," "the shrieking beau," "celestial crimes," "reeking Purple," and "shrivell'd Muscles."

Much eighteenth-century poetry, as Davie says, is bad because of the luxuriance of epithets. This critic points out, however, that luxuriance of epithets in the good poets "is often the condition of an unusual metaphorical force residing in the verb." A couplet from Prior, I think, illustrates this point:

Causes unjudg'd disgrace the loaded File;
And sleeping Laws the King's Neglect revile.

(353, lines 722-723)

Without "sleeping," the line could not take the verb "revile," which fits wonderfully into the context of Solomon's self-reproach. Even when such merit can not be claimed, however, many adjective-noun pairs that have the familiar rhythm and ring are not thoughtless combinations. When Acheloüs shows Hercules his "forky Tongue with hissing Sound," the reaction of a reader may be, "here are more of those adjectives, both -y and participial." Such modifiers are over-abundant, admittedly, and may cancel out the sense appeal, but the

shape of the tongue and the sound it makes are in the poem (Gay, 97, line 78). Convention admits realism when adjectives that appeal to the senses are used.

Gay, the most prolific inventor of "poetic" epithets in our trio, demonstrates that poems can be realistic in spite of them, like Trivia, or somehow satisfying because of them, like A Contemplation on Night. Simple adjectives based on sense-appeal can be found in most of his poems, like the "thirsty wool" in The Story of Arachne (89, line 14). Even in The Fan, most of his combinations seem appropriate, some of them concrete and vivid in themselves, though almost smothered in their contexts. In his more realistic "town eclogues," Gay uses adjectives whenever he needs them in his line; but often his care in selecting them is evident. An example of a fortunate choice is the "steady hand" of the servant who brings in a band-box to the aging beauty in The Toilette (137, line 100). The steadiness of her hand points up the contrast between her character and that of her mistress, but the adjective does not sacrifice its concreteness.

Except when he is deliberately making fun of "poetic diction," Swift seems to take care to choose his adjectives for their appeal to both the senses and the understanding. In such a phrase as "musty Morals" (I, 27), the concreteness is in the modifier. If sense appeal is lacking in adjectives, likely the nouns they modify will be concrete. The dog looking for hospitality (The Fable of the Bitches, I,
208) is described with modifiers that call for understanding and judgment:

With fawning Whine, and rueful Tone,
With artful Sigh and feigned Groan,
With couchant Cringe, and flattering Tale . . .

The whine, the sigh, the groan are aural; "couchant" and "flattering" are suggestive enough to call up the picture. The imagination is free to decide about the dog's size, color, and breed.

Though usually counted a feature of "poetic diction," compound epithets are absent from the pre-1725 work of Swift, rare in Prior's, and inconspicuous even in Gay's. Prior has "long-wish'd Night" and "swift-winged Night" in Solomon, both suggestive rather than concrete. Most of Gay's compounds are literal: "new-invented wounds" (85, line 328) is one of the least impressive. London is a "law-defended town" (81, line 145), and the lighthouse has a "far-shooting ray" (86, line 345). A little less literal are "ill-meaning satyr" in the Epistle to Pulteney (156, line 29); "short-liv'd pleasure" in Araminta (202, line 102); and "slander-selling Curll" (163, line 80). Compound epithets may be overused later in the century, but it would seem that the earlier poets did not exhaust either the poetic or the realistic possibilities of this device.

Some of the compound epithets in Gay's poems do have sense appeal: "the wide-gathering hook" (113, line 287); "the wide-circling net" of the fisherman (line 275); the "well-poised shield" of Athena (p. 91, line 116). The Tea-Table has "a laughter-loving dame" (line 7); a certain town is noted for its "white-leg'd chickens" (152, line 16);
"not a gold-clock'd stocking moves unseen" at the opera (160, line 190). The humane fisherman, Gay tells us, deludes his prey with "the fur-wrought fly," not with living insects (113, line 270).

No device of "poetic diction" has received more uncomplimentary criticism than periphrasis. Yet even periphrases are not devoid of sense appeal—a fact not surprising when we remember their kinship with Old English kennings—and hence are more or less concrete. Even "the feather'd choir" (Gay, 109, line 95), for instance, appeals to both eye and ear. The collective noun puts this specimen in a class with the most-talked-about of the neoclassical periphrases, and the same can be said of Gay's "deep-mouthed train" (115, line 381) to designate the barking hounds. The synonyms for honey (Rural Sports, p.109) also have sense appeal—"fragrant Dew," "golden Treasures," "liquid Sweets."

Perhaps open to the suspicion of triteness are Gay's "winged boy" (Cupid) and "twinkling Orbs" (stars), and Swift's "gilded Vapours" (clouds; II, 386). But even these are vivid enough. There are, to be sure, many periphrases (like "Neptune's bounds"[Gay, 109, line 99]) that lack visual or aural imagery. Swift, for instance, uses "Learning's little Houshold" as a playful synonym for the Ark (I, 16). Appreciation of these depends on the mind alone. Some periphrases hesitate on the boundary, a concrete noun, perhaps, being modified by an adjective that requires more than sense reaction; one example is Prior's telescope, which he calls the "Artist's intervening Glass" (208, line 37).
Usually in handling periphrastic expressions, our poets are as specific as could be desired—like Milton, whose periphrases used as synonyms are often exact and particular. Though Gay seems to avoid the word bees, he speaks of "the waxen cells" which the "careful" insects "distend with sweets" (109, line 88).

According to Davie (p. 5), the poet is using "diction" when he seems to be thrusting aside words that want to get into the poem, giving the reader the feeling that some words would simply never be allowed in. With Prior and Swift, in my judgment, one almost never has the "feeling" that words are thrusting to be let in. With Gay, obvious examples might be the words bird, fish, rainbow, bee, honey, when the things normally designated by them are presented periphrastically. But Gay's other and infinitely more abundant uses of poetic diction are not evidence that he is deliberately fending off words. Rather, they sometimes give the impression that he is governed by considerations of rhythm and rime to the extent of using more words than his meaning calls for.

Periphrasis, it seems to me, results more from the demands of rhythm and rime, or from a desire to heighten the tone by adding a fancy touch, than from reluctance to use homely words. Since periphrastic expressions are often used when no vulgar references are in prospect, to be unrealistic is evidently not the poet's intention.5

5 But see Davie, p. 9.
In one of his translations from Ovid, Gay calls the rainbow "the spacious humid arch ... / Whose transient colours paint the splendid air." Yet his description of Arachne's transformation into a spider, in the same poem, has

> Her bloated belly swells to larger size,
> Which now with smallest threads her work supplies.

What test of propriety belly could pass that rainbow would fail may be one more mystery of neoclassicism. More likely the dressed-up literal description of the rainbow only incidentally avoids the key word. Though "humid" and "transient" are certainly more than fillers, they would not be there if the line were shorter. Similarly Gay uses another periphrastic expression, "the croaking brood" (82, line 202) to describe a French delicacy--frogs, apparently. Yet a homely snail appears two lines later unadorned except by the adjective "slimy."

Moreover, periphrasis sometimes follows the use of the very word that the circumlocution might be assumed to be avoiding. "Hound" and "dogs" both precede "the deep-mouthed train" (Gay, 115, 381); "fisher," "fisherman," and "fish" occur within a few lines of "the finny race" (112, line 253) and "the scaly breed" (111, line 173) in Rural Sports; and "fish" in the line above "the mute Race" in Solomon (314, line 107). Less round-about epithets often follow literal terms, as "muses O'llo" follows the literal "miscellany" in Gay's Epistle to Lintott (171, lines 7, 9).

Two examples of rime-controlled periphrasis will suffice. In Zerbin and Isabella (208, line 106), Gay uses "the sanguine tide"
(instead of blood) for the sake of a rime with "side." Prior parallels the name of a specific wind instrument with a metonymic circumlocution that might mean any or all strings:

The artful Youth proceed to form the Choir;
They breath the Flute, or strike the vocal Wire.
(378, lines 655-656)

Another kind of periphrasis is found in Gay's "th' uncloudy skies" (109, line 108). In spite of the awkward effect of the elision, Gay may have wanted the reader's picture of the clouds to emphasize the absence of them in his sky; "sunny" would not do. (His preference for "uncloudy" when he might have used "cloudless" incidentally reveals the typical fondness for adjectives ending in -y.)

Another sign of "poetic diction" is excessive Latinism. Though Prior's claim to a place in literary history rests most of all on his light verse, he is a solemn example of a poet who did not think Latin words incompatible with poetry. Even when he is addressing his Cloe, he can write a line like "Deign on my Work thy Influence to diffuse" (279, line 24). In one poem, Cupid--the "Vagrant"--is "incumber'd" in a silken string (271, line 18). In another, Venus calls her son a "parricide" (277, line 10). In several love poems rather heavy words of Latin derivation stand out, as in To Cloe Weeping: "Thy Heart, obdurate against Love" (271, line 12).

Latinisms--"nubile," "pensile," "subjugate," "diffusive," "per­vious," "potent," and many more--blossom in parts of Solomon. In a short space of six lines (about fish, 314) are "enquire," "engender," "respire," "immense," "multitude," "impetuous"; and in lines
immediately following this cluster are "directing," "inverted," "indu'd," and "educate." In Carmen Seculare Prior bids Janus command History to record King William's exploits carefully in order that in every "revolving Age" each Sire shall

... inculcate to his Son
Transmissive Lessons of the King's Renown.
(166, lines 163-164)

The poet speaks of the "Ray distinguishing the Patriot's Breast" and of British kings "too Industrious to be great." It is interesting to remember that this poem was too much for even Dr. Johnson.6

Although Latin words in such quantity deaden the verse, occasional use is compatible with effects that depend to some extent on a hint of realism provided by other means. Of his abandoned sweetheart, Solomon says:

She read; and forth to Me She wildly ran,
She kneel'd intreated, struggl'd, threaten'd, cry'd;
And with alternate Passion liv'd, and dy'd . . .
(355, lines 819-822)

6 Latinism of construction, found in blank verse under the influence of Milton, is not conspicuous in Prior, Swift, or Gay. See Deane, p. 42. Rural Sports, however, is among the rimed technical treatises influenced by Milton. See R. D. Havens, The Influence of Milton on English Poetry (Cambridge, Mass., 1922), Appendix D. Havens' Appendixes list only Gay's Wine and four insignificant works of Prior as being influenced by Paradise Lost.
This seems a judicious mixture, with active, fairly specific verbs that make "alternate Passion" a challenge rather than an indigestible interpolation.

If Prior sometimes went to extremes, at least he knew how to write good narrative and description that depended on a mixture of Latin-derived and Anglo-Saxon words. An example is Solomon's story of Adam's banishment (371, lines 357-372):

Scarce tasting Life, He was of Joy bereav'd:
One Day, I think, in PARADISE He liv'd;
Destin'd the next His Journey to pursue,
Where wounding Thorns, and cursed Thistles grew.
E'er yet He earns his Bread, a-down his Brow,
Inclin'd to Earth, his lab'ring Sweat must flow:
His Limbs must ake, with daily Toils oppress'd;
E'er long-wish'd Might brings necessary Rest:
Still viewing with Regret his Darling EVE,
He for Her Follies, and His own must grieve.
Bewailing still a-fresh their hapless Choice;
His Ear oft frighted with the imag'd Voice
Of Heav'n, when first it thunder'd; oft his View
A-ghast, as when the Infant Light'ning flew;
And the stern CHERUB stop'd the fatal Road,
Arm'd with the Flames of an Avenging GOD.

Of the eighteen words derived from Latin, only "oppressed," "necessary," and perhaps "inclin'd" and "pursue" stand out. The Anglo-Saxon words (exclusive of connectives and pronouns) number twenty-five; there are two words from Old Norse, two from French, and one from Hebrew.

Words of Latin derivation can be effective in humorous or satiric contexts. F. Elrington Ball comments on the intensity of the passage
(I, 174) in which the description of Swift's life as a "Dean compleat" occurs. There is an interesting catalogue:

Suppose him gone through all Vexations, Patents, Instalments, Abjurations, First-Fruits and Tenths, and Chapter-Treats, Dues, Payments, Fees, Demands and Cheats . . .

Such heavy words are not always in clusters, even in satire. A single unexpected one may be slightly amusing, like the one I have italicized below (I, 305, lines 59-60):

His ghostly Visage with an Air Of Reprobation and Despair.

A probably unintended humorous touch comes from the mixture of colloquial and solemn in Prior's account of the great king's time of degradation:

In Regal Garments now I gravely stride, Aw'd by the PERSIAN Dam'sel's haughty Pride. Now with the looser Syrian dance, and Sing, In Robes tuck'd up, opprobrious to the King. (357, lines 895-898)

The two pictures of Solomon are clear. "Tuck'd up" makes one forget for a moment that

Indeed poor SOLOMON in Rhime Was much too grave to be Sublime. (525, lines 63-64)

But "opprobrious" is a quick reminder.

The figure of speech most associated with neoclassicism is personification, which, according to Wasserman, is an instrument of "vivid and detailed particularization and materialization." The eighteenth century, as this critic says, "recognized the personified

abstraction, not as a device for abstracting and universalizing, but as a means of clothing the universal in imagery effective to the senses, or transferring the abstraction from the intellect to the imagination.\(^8\) Personification can be an instrument in giving the reader "a strong sense of the real world."\(^9\)

Though personification was held in high esteem among the ancients, the Queen Anne poets used it much less frequently than English poets who wrote later in the eighteenth century.\(^10\) More remarkable is the fact that the poets of the first part of the century developed their personifications less fully than those who came later. An extended treatment of abstractions like that in Prior's story of the misadventure of Truth and her sister Falsehood (543) is rare. More often the poets of the early eighteenth century preferred to use well-known gods and goddesses when qualities or character traits needed personifying, and this habit carried over into narrative, as in Swift's Cadenus and Vanessa, Apollo Outwitted, and others.

Short passages picturing personified abstractions as acting, however, are fairly frequent. Benevolence smiles, guides the lady's conversation, and resides in her eye (Gay, 149, lines 55-56). Commerce "rears her head" and "bids Britannia's fleets their canvas spread" (151, lines 149-150). Most of Gay's personifications depend on the


\(^10\) Ibid., pp. 5-6.
use of a feminine (more rarely, masculine) pronoun and the attributing of an action, a quality, or a possession to the abstraction envisioned. Often a small letter is used, as in "Here blooming health exerts her gentle reign, / And strings the sinews of th' industrious swain" (108, line 34). In a humorous context Gay uses a single-line personification with conspicuous lack of euphony:

Then war shall bathe her wasteful sword in gore.  
(63, line 182)

The "war-sword-gore" combination and the long a's in "bathe" and "wasteful" attract attention to the personification and make it rather horribly a memorable picture of war.

The "heav'n-born Charity," "the meagre Want," and the "selfish Avarice" of Trivia; Commerce gasping in the Epistle to Snow (line 11); the learning which "droops and sickens" in the Epistle to Methuen (line 3)—these indicate Gay's range. Occasionally he uses the pathetic fallacy:

The rolling streams with watry grief shall flow,  
And winds shall moan aloud . . .  
(47, lines 35-36)

This use may be regarded as preromantic, perhaps, but in the satiric context of The Shepherd's Week it counts as conventional personification.

The early odes of Swift present numerous examples of personification, and there are occasional uses in his later poetry. In a poem written in 1716, To the Earl of Oxford, Late Lord Treasurer (I, 210), Death pursues the Coward; Fear lends him Pinions; Virtue "knows not to repine" and "loves to try / Some new unbeaten Passage to the Sky."
Swift, again, speaks humorously of "Hope's aspiring Plumes" (I, 252). In a poem to Stella, he writes:

Your Virtues, all suspended, wait
Till Time hath open'd Reason's Gate.

(II, 730, lines 95-96)

A longer passage also personifies by linking action verbs to abstract nouns:

Pale Envy sickens—Errour flies—
And Discord, in his Presence, dies—
Oppression hides, with guilty Dread,
And Merit rears her drooping head.

(II, 387, lines 121-124)

Personified places—Belgia, Albion, Britannia—turn up in several of Prior's poems. In expressing his wish for a life of retirement, he follows the realistic description of what he wants by a suggestion that Revenge and Pride should be tied to a rock far away from his haven (189, line 26). Another example of the undeveloped conventional personification of an abstraction is

That gentle Peace might quell Bellona's Rage.

(217, line 14)

Like Gay, Prior can personify inanimate things; sometimes he attains originality and a little more development than usual. Speaking of the time when the crooked shall be made straight, Solomon says that the streams will be "obscurely sepulcher'd"; in the same passage he continues:

By eating Rain,
And Furious Wind, down to the distant Plain
The Hill, that hides his Head above the Skies
Shall fall.

(321, lines 371-374)
The modifiers of "Rain" and "Wind" inject a humanizing element that provides a setting for the action-personification of "Hill."

All three poets assign humanizing emotions and attitudes to inanimate objects. Gay has "the faithless oar" (76, line 518). Prior speaks of the "conscious door," behind which the eavesdropper stands (681). Abstractions can be similarly treated, as in Swift's "furious Din" (I, 340) and "faithful Silence" (I, 210), and in Prior's "submissive Dread" (343) and "indulgent Fame" (234, line 65). Solomon bids his friends strew his bed with fresh Roses "'till the impov'rish'd Spring / Confess her Want" (338, line 174); pleasure is a "wanton Phantom" (341, line 295); the Fair is armed with "flowing Sorrow" (348, line 567). Aural appeal in personification is found in "the inward Cries of Care" which Solomon says can not be drowned out by music (370, line 319). However, emotions or attitudes are sometimes attributed to inanimate objects without a realistic effect. Gay's "mournful scutcheon" (154, line 98), and his "tall jar" that "erects his costly pride" (135, line 53) seem overdone; "fighting Zephyrs shar'd her am'rous pains" (198, line 14) is little better.

Realism of a kind can be attained by combining with an abstract noun an adjective that denotes emotion. In Solomon appear "sad Distrust" (369, line 315), "wretched Mem'ry" (346, line 473), "hopeless Love" (356, line 834), "soft Joy" (333, line 9), and "The fond Pursuit of fugitive Delight" (360, line 989). As Chapin suggests, when an emotional effect is achieved by such a use of abstract words, "the
effect on the reader is not different in kind from that which is achieved through particularized description.11

Static imagery in personification is related to painting, and fondness for images of the frozen or statuesque comes from a liking for imitating painting and sculpture. The pictorial tradition accounts for the detailed descriptions of abstractions in later eighteenth-century verse.12 Though pictorialization is less extravagant and less common in the earlier period, some instances can be found. A reminiscence of many paintings occurs, for example, in Gay's picture of "the little loves" (cupids) rejoicing and clapping their wings when "noble Sheffield" plays the lyre (172, line 48). The description is brief.

A longer picture occurs in Colin's Mistakes, in which Prior imitates Spenser:

Liberal Munificence behind Her stood;  
And decent State obey'd her high Command;  
And Charity diffuse of native Good  
At once portrays her Mind, and guides her Hand.  
As to each Guest some Fruits She deign'd to lift,  
And Silence with obliging Parley broke;  
How gracious seem'd to each th' imparted Gift?  
And how more gracious what the Giver spoke?  
(547, lines 51-58)

In one of Prior's odes (237, line 140),

Pale Death attends their Arms, and ghastly Desolation.

11Personification in Eighteenth Century Poetry, p. 111. Chapin's examples--"Lonely Want" and "hopeless anguish"--are taken from Johnson.

In another (218, lines 21-22),

Imperious Death directs His Ebon Lance;
Peoples great HENRY's Tombs, and leads up Holben's Dance.

In Carmen Seculare "Unspotted Honour" stands by King William's side;
"fair Virtue" decks his head; "establish'd Freedom" claps her wings--
her "joyful Wings," of course. Victory, with a palm in her hand and
a laurel on her head, speaks to Marlborough at Blenheim (224, lines
130 ff.) A more familiar picture is found in Prior's Ode to Queen
Anne (235, line 95), where "Impartial Justice holds her Equal Scales."

Sometimes action verbs remove the picture from the static
originals, reminding us of the way the imagination has been stimulated
to poetic expression by other arts. How pictorialization, static in
the beginning, can lead to imagined sounds when active verbs bring the
picture to life, is illustrated in Prior's imitation of a passage from
Erasmus (451). After a ten-line description of Reason on her judgment
seat, the gloom is interrupted by "fantastic Minstrelsy," whose
"Jingling Bells affect our captive Ear." Only by appreciating the
power of familiar pictures to stimulate the imagination, however,
can one think of calling such a poem realistic.

"All critics and poets of whatever school," writes Hagstrum,
"accepted the association conveyed in the common phrase 'Fancy's
pictures.' Neoclassic poets like Pope, Gay, Swift, and Prior con-
sistently associated fancy and painting."13 These poets did not, how-
ever, as mentioned above, carry pictorialism so far as those who

wrote later in the century, when formal pictorial organization (leading
from scene to scene, tableau to tableau, or picture to picture in
a gallery) was often used. There are several examples of address-
ing the painter, a tradition inherited from Anacreon. And one long
iconic passage occurs in Prior's adaptation of The Second Hymn of
Callimachus, which pictures Apollo:

From his Robe
Flows Light ineffable: his Harp, his Quiver,
And LICTIAN Bow are Gold: with golden Sandals
His Feet are shod; how rich! how beautiful!
Beneath his Steps the yellow Min'ral rises;
And Earth reveals her Treasures. Youth and Beauty
Eternal deck his Cheek: from his fair Head
Perfumes distill their Sweets; and cheerful HEALTH,
His dutious Handmaid, thro' the Air improv'd,
With lavish Hand diffuses Scents Ambrosial.

(467, lines 41-52)

This passage is almost unique. It occurs, incidentally, in one of
the four poems showing Miltonic influence (see note 6, above).

If length of development by detail were the only criterion of
realism, then it would have to be said that pictorialization is less
realistic in the 1700-1725 period than later. However, pictorial
passages are subject to the same kind of qualitative examination as
the poetry as a whole; comparison of pictorial passages with those
written later is beyond the scope of this investigation.

As noticed earlier in this section, concreteness brought about
by visual and aural imagery partially or wholly redeems for realism
many expressions at first sight purely conventional. Before proceed-
ing to a discussion of some of the principles that guided the poets,

14 Ibid., p. 117.
it may be well to look briefly at figures of speech characteristic of poetry in general—figures sometimes said to be scarce in poetry of the neoclassic period.

A brief look at other poetic expressions—the kind not usually tagged as "poetic diction," with derogatory connotations—is justified at this point in a discussion of realism. Poetry is supposed to be the vehicle of what may be called "realization." At the very least, if the poem is good, the reader will share an appreciation of some truth which he knew but did not know fully; or he will enjoy a vicarious experience which his mind approves as true to human experience in general.

The Augustan way of using images was the way of ordinary speech: images help make, support, or illustrate a point; they outline a picture. The suggestiveness of image so prized by contemporary poets and by poets of the Romantic period represents an opposing aim. As Quayle says, the magic power of evocation was scarce in the eighteenth century. Of Dryden's words, T. S. Eliot remarks that "their suggestiveness is almost nothing." But he also says that they "state immensely."


16 Poetic Diction, p. 203.

The dearth of evocative power—usually associated with metaphor as well as with words rich in connotations—has nothing whatever to do with the kind of realism discussed in Chapter III. It does, however, have much to do with the power of the poetry to give the reader an impression of reality.

Metaphors and similar figures of speech are not entirely absent, but those that do appear are not handled in such a way as to extract the full value from them. There are some exceptions; for example, Prior's comparison of love to a double plant (340, lines 247-256) and Solomon's prayer for his ship-wreck'd soul (379, lines 675-681). But when Prior describes Reason as "A Chain which Man to fetter Man has made, / By Artifice imposed, by Fear obey'd" (354, lines 790-791), the unlikelihood of obeying a chain interferes with the effectiveness.

One really good figurative passage illustrates how the poet can derive less than full value from a metaphor when all the materials are apparently present to his imagination. Transient human life is Prior's subject in this passage:

A Flow'r, that does with opening Morn arise,  
And flourishing the Day, at Evening dyes;  
A Winged Eastern Blast, just skimming o'er  
The Ocean's Brow, and sinking on the Shore;  
A Fire, whose Flames thro' crackling Stubble fly;  
A Meteor shooting from the Summer Sky;  
A Bowl a-down the bending Mountain roll'd;  
A Bubble breaking, and a Fable told;  
A Noon-tide Shadow, and a Mid-night Dream;  
Are Emblems, which with Semblance apt proclaim  
Our Earthly Course . . . (376, lines 575-585)

All these things "are Emblems," announces Solomon, and we feel a sense of Anti-climax. This is poetry of statement indeed. Similes and
analogies, too, though often effective poetically, may be evidence of
this shying away from metaphor.

Swift seems to prefer simile. Of his writing, he says, "Each
line shall stab, shall blast, like daggers and like fire" (I, 37,
line 91). "Slow Vengeance" is "like a Blood-hound" (I, 210). In a
personal poem, he compares a fault in Stella to

Aetna's Fire,
Which, tho' with Trembling, all admire;
The Heat that makes the Summit glow,
Enriching all the Vales below. (II, 731, lines 105-108)

Real metaphor in Swift turns up in satire: the directors of the South
Sea project are a plague of locusts (I, 258, lines 205-208); and

Money, the Life-blood of the Nation,
Corrupts and stagnates in the Veins,
Unless a proper Circulation
Its Motion and its Heat maintains. (I, 239)

Prior too seems less self-conscious when faced by the prospect of
metaphorical language in a humorous poem:

A Wall of Brass and one of Lead
Divide the Living from the Dead.
Repell'd by This, the gather'd Rain
Of Tears beats back to Earth again;
In t'other the Collected sound
Of Groans, when once receiv'd, is drown'd.
(534, lines 152-157)

This use of metaphorical language in less than the most intense fashion
reflects the attitude that figures were supposed to be ornamental.

Like all the devices of conventional diction, they were added to
raise the tone of the poem.
iii

In spite of the often-criticized faults of "poetic diction," much of it has an element of concreteness. Moreover, the conventions that govern it are compatible with particular details, if they are skillfully intermingled. The real poets exercised discrimination in handling it, and probably enjoyed the challenges it presented.

A poet had a right to be proud if he could raise unlikely material to an appropriate poetic level. As Wolseley wrote in 1685:

> . . . the baser, the emptier, the obscurer, the fouler, and the less susceptible of Ornament the subject appears to be, the more is the Poet's Praise, who can infuse dignity and breath beauty upon it, who can hide all the natural deformities in the fashion of his Dresse, Supply all the Wants with his own plenty, and by a Poetical Daemonianism possess it with the Spirit of good sence and gracefulnesse, or who, as Horace says of Homer, can fetch Light out of Smoak, Roses out of Dunghills, and give a kind of Life to the Inanimate. . . .

Note the mention of gracefulness. This was the primary aim of the conventional devices for raising the tone of poetry.

Prior, Swift, and Gay did not think of convention as opposed to realism. Rather it was a means of transposing life into another key -- not, it appears, the means modern readers approve most readily, because our own conventions are so different from theirs.

18 Preface to Rochester's Valentinian. Quoted by V. de Sola Pinto, "Realism in English Poetry," Essays and Studies, XXV (1939), 81-100.
CHAPTER V

A NOTE ON DECORUM AND STYLE DIVISION

Though the times and their manners were artificial, Augustan poets did not rely on poetic conventions more than poets in other ages.¹ They did have a framework of critical theory to guide them in their choice of metre, diction, and imagery. Their insistence on clarity led to the predominance of statement over metaphor, and their passion for smoothness led to unobtrusive clichés which slid into the verse. Probably as important as adherence to these principles was their allegiance to decorum.

The Augustans were aware of two kinds of decorum.² Restoration comedy violated "outer decorum"—which was "required by the moral and exemplary function of the drama as a social form. To arouse delight in the immoral and the obscene was indecorous and untrue to nature."³ But only rarely, according to Gallaway, was decorum of diction associated with "delicacy and moral purity."⁴ Inner decorum, the kind usually referred to simply as "decorum" in discussions of

² R. G. Davis, in Levin symposium on Realism, CL, III (1952), 209.
³ Idem.
⁴ Reason, Rule, and Revolt in English Classicism (New York, 1940), p. 164; p. 179, note 15.
neoclassicism, concerns the suitability of the style to the subject matter and the occasion.

"The all-important element of decorum" is "the awareness of different levels of language and verbal tone, the choice of diction and imagery appropriate to the occasion at hand." In theory, the higher genres required of the poet a vocabulary and style that proclaimed his intention to be serious and decorous. In the lower genres he could be flippant, mocking, or vituperative; or calm, unpretentious, familiar. If he portrayed characters or reported their speech, he had to be especially careful that the language was appropriate to their station in life.

Decorum is of course concerned with the division of styles, which, according to Erich Auerbach, distinguishes literary periods when ancient classical ideals are imitated. Style division was one of the classical elements in the Renaissance. In a classical age, says Auerbach, serious poetry will be written in an elevated style, whereas "lower" genres will adopt a vocabulary and rhythm closer to everyday life. Everyday reality can find a place in literature "only within the frame of a low or intermediate kind of style, that is to say, as either grotesquely comic or pleasant, light, colorful, and elegant.


entertainment." The intermediate kind, which is also known as the familiar style, became the vehicle for the most interesting poetry of Augustan England.

Since poetry in Queen Anne's day was regarded as "something that ought to be social," in the sense that it belonged to "the province of manners," the familiar style is urbane. As Davie says, it is the style of assurance, of confident community. It "derives from the mean style of the Elizabethans, distinguished by them from the high style, proper to the heroic poem and the hymn, and from the base style of satire and pastoral." Related to what Coleridge called "neutral style," according to Davie, the familiar style is comparatively prosaic.

Decorum was responsible for the deliberate decoration of language that led to the famous neoclassical conventions. When a poet wanted to write panegyric, elegiac, or didactic poetry—or if he translated an ancient work—he tried to fit his style to the subject and the occasion. Artificiality grew more noticeable as the spoken model disappeared with the social changes that accompanied England's development into a bourgeois state. At the opposite extreme from the "high"


10 Ibid., p. 140.
style, the influence of Horace and Juvenal guaranteed that Augustan poets with a realistic bent had models from classical antiquity. They could observe decorum and still take advantage of the everyday material surrounding them, provided they kept to the lower kinds of verse, satirical or humorous.

Several forces were working for realism in the early part of the century. One was the momentum of the Restoration inheritance. The common use of daily life as material for literature during the period following the Restoration has been noted by Sherburn. Furthermore, realism distinguished the work of minor Restoration poets, whose poems in the lower genres, according to Sherburn, "were written in a familiar, facetious, and at times even a vulgar or actually indecent tone." Restoration court poetry, too, was "in touch with a genuine popular culture of the street and the tavern." Dryden had confirmed the view that contemporary life was the best material for an Augustan poet.

Several critics have called attention to another realistic force --the reaction against metaphysical poetry. The effort to check extravagance, says Gallaway (p. 53), brought about a plainer style that made factual detail more easily assimilated. Another reaction,

12 Ibid., p. 733.
14 Jack, pp. 155-156.
resulting in "critical realism," according to J. C. Hunt, was the reaction against prevailing non-realistic tendencies in the literature of the Renaissance. The second great realistic school of English poetry, writes V. de Sola Pinto, was established by the courtier poets of the Restoration and was linked to medieval realism by Dryden's admiration of Chaucer; its realism is a result, according to this critic, of poetry's attempt "to survive in the hard, mechanical universe created by the philosophers and scientists of the seventeenth century."

Other factors have been noticed. The periodical essays may have given suggestions to the poets for topics and details based on the life of the times. The close connection of the Queen Anne poets with political affairs was surely an influence toward realism. The ballads written by all three of our poets, as well as the strain of indecency, remind us of the sub-literary writings so voluminous in Augustan England.

The poets had plenty of commonplace, everyday material at hand, and precedent for using it. And they did use it, as we have seen.

Sherburn's excellent summary of the "unique fusion" of opposites in the eighteenth century implies opposition between decorum and realism. (824). Any limitation on what a poet could say or when he

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15The Elizabethan Background of Neo-Classic Polite Verse (Baltimore, 1941), p. i.

16"Realism in English Poetry," Essays and Studies, XXV (1939), 81-100.
could say it would seem to restrict his freedom to be sincere, honest, and "realistic." Nevertheless, Sutherland's opinion that the eighteenth-century poet "was beset by inhibitions," and had "to avert his eyes" from much that went on, does not apply, I think, to the first quarter of the century. Ian Jack, whose *Augustan Satire* recognizes the realistic diction of much of the poetry of the period, makes an important reservation. No reputable Augustan poet, he says, "had the slightest hesitation in using familiar words in his verse, so long as decorum was not violated" (p. 149; my italics).

Just as conventional language could sometimes point in the direction of realism, so could decorum. For one thing, the very strictness of decorum brought about burlesque of the more solemn genres and led to the development of new forms—town eclogues, for example, like Gay's. In the second place, those with talent for mockery turned it against the conventions, as Swift did in *Apollo's Edict* and many other poems. Swift early realized the danger of overdoing "poetic" conventions and letting them become monotonous even when they made good sense. He also recognized the inherent silliness of many expressions popular even at the beginning of the century. Convention became the object of satire.

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18. R. P. Bond, English Burlesque Poetry, 1700-1750 (Cambridge, Mass., 1932), p. 113. See also Sutherland, Preface to Eighteenth Century Poetry, Ch. IX.
An even more important factor in bringing about the mixture of realism and conventionality was the serious attitude toward life which the poets managed to reflect in their apparently flippant verse. Saying this may be the same as insisting on the fundamental seriousness of satire, or on the seriousness of humor; but whatever the explanation, these poets were good writers of verse that would take realistic details, and they did mix everyday realism in the more serious poetry, besides insinuating serious ideas into the lower kinds.

The most memorable verse of the Augustan Age is light verse. As Herbert Davis says, "All the most significant poetry of the Augustans is modulated inevitably to a conversational rhythm. This is certainly true of Swift; it is perhaps equally true of Pope and Prior and Parnell and Gay."\(^1\) The word significant suggests that this poetry may reflect serious attitudes toward life. Wimsatt shows that the Augustan way of looking at reality—the intellectual, witty, satirical way—produced poetry he describes as "the last stand of a classic mode of laughter against forces that were working for a sublime inflation of ideas and a luxury of sorry feeling."\(^2\) These forces pulled toward the "sublime view" on the one hand and "sentimental softening" on the other.


\(^2\) W. K. Wimsatt, Jr., "The Augustan Mode in Eighteenth Century Literature," \(\text{ELH, XX (1953), 1-14.}\)
Not only has "light" Augustan poetry in general been treated seriously because it reflects one way of looking at the world; but poets covered by this study have drawn similar critical comment individually. Leavis says of Swift:

Though very individual, he has still a representative quality: lacking the Augustan politeness, he seems, with his dry force of presentment, both to make the Augustan positives ... look like negatives, and to give the characteristic Augustan lacks and disabilities a positive presence. In the absence of the superficial Augustan urbanity the Augustan assurance lies exposed as a spiritual poverty, its hollowness brought out by Swift's very force. If it be urged that Swift's verse comes for the most part under the head of light verse, that may be granted without in the least detracting from the account just given of its serious significance. 21

Armens, who in John Gay, Social Critic emphasizes the serious motives of Augustan satire, and who reminds us that others have seen the light verse as fundamentally serious toward life and art, has made Gay seem like a very important critic of his times.

Prior, according to Bernard Groom, "in such pieces as the lines Written in the Beginning of Mezeray's History of France or those For My Own Monument, has the charm of seriousness without gravity." 22

Another assessment seems equivocal:

There is, for some, a sense of heartbreak even in Prior's merriment. "Moral and intellectual bankruptcy" has become a cheap phrase, but it does describe the spiritual condition of England at the turn of the eighteenth century, and Prior, with all his


22 The Diction of Poetry from Spenser to Bridges (Toronto, 1955), p. 133.
merriment and poetical pranks, best shows it. Whether he adopts the manner of Butler or the more modish method of French travesty with *vive la bagatelle* for motto, he represents a phase of English culture of the most dismally skeptical sort.\(^3\)

The fact that the poets took the trouble to polish light verse so carefully—that they took it seriously as light verse—suggests the likelihood of their letting it reflect their attitudes.\(^2\) The presence of everyday material in this light verse was in line with decorum, and making light verse serious was one way to overcome the strictness of the arbitrary style division. Chapter III of this study has shown that materials from everyday life turn up in unexpected places. Perhaps the division of styles was less confining than theory would indicate; or perhaps Prior, Swift, and Gay failed occasionally in their attempts to live up to decorum.

These poets, I think, meant to adhere to the style division, and they may have thought they were doing so. The fact that they had classical precedent for bringing everyday material into light verse—material they enjoyed handling—may gradually have led them to relax their vigilance against letting it intrude in serious poems. An


\(^3\)E. M. W. Tillyard, *Poetry: Direct and Oblique* (London, 1934), pp. 98-99. The concealment of seriousness by means of "delicacy of the rhythm, the antithesis, the packed sense" is pointed out by Tillyard as evidence of the superiority of Augustan light verse over the looser, more monotonous, more sentimental light verse of the nineteenth century.
opposite explanation is possible, however. Swift and Gay are credited by Josephine Miles with prolonging "the vernacular satiric line," with its accompanying colloquialism, "a short way into the eighteenth century." That "satiric line," which accompanies the most realistic verse of the period, died out later. Perhaps what we have, then, is a motion away from realism rather than toward it, even at the beginning of the century.

Both the early and the later eighteenth century showed a tendency to mix styles, though in different ways. In the later decades, the trend was toward dressing up such things as topographical descriptions and how-to-do-it articles in "poetic diction." In the period of this investigation, though realism sometimes entered serious poetry by way of conventional diction, more often everyday details carried with them their everyday language. Several reasons for the early century mixture suggest themselves: the poets' great enjoyment of everyday material and their skill in handling it; the desire for a satiric contrast between style and subject matter; and the impulse to satirize the high style itself as its artificiality became more apparent.

CHAPTER VI

CONCRETENESS AND PARTICULARITY IN THE NEOCLASSIC PATTERN

In spite of neoclassic belief that the real was the universal and that particulars falsified the truth, realism based on details was conspicuous in the poetry of the first quarter of the eighteenth century. Moreover, in spite of conventions which often resulted in blurring the edge of actuality, a measure of concreteness was sometimes attained even in conventional expressions.

This study began with the observation of contradictory opinions of modern critics regarding the neoclassic period and the realism of neoclassic poetry. As pointed out earlier, disagreement about what is "realistic" and what is "neoclassic" presented special problems in conducting the investigation. Substituting the expressions "realistic elements" and "realistic techniques" for one of the broad terms partly overcame one difficulty. The other—a semantic problem which I can not claim to have solved—has been partly evaded by discussing certain conventions often occurring in the poetry of the first quarter of the eighteenth century and commonly associated with neoclassicism. Examination of the poetry of Prior, Swift, and Gay indicates that neither concreteness nor particularity was incompatible with these conventions. Now another question arises: How do the
concrete and the particular fit into a literary pattern apparently devoted to the "cult" of "general properties and large appearances?"

Most kinds of realism probably can be discussed with the words concrete and particular used interchangeably. But three exceptions have been noted. In the first place, there is such a thing as particularization of abstract terms by more specific terms that yet remain abstract (see p. 80, above). Secondly, general statements having to do with facts or situations and making use of abstract terms are sometimes spoken of as "realistic," when what is meant is that they are psychologically acceptable, or true to human experience. Thirdly, concrete is a better word than particular to apply to adjectives associated with sense perception; such adjectives often particularize to some degree, but need not be the most specific modifier possible. Now I come to another reason for not equating realism and particularization; this reason involves the poets' use of general terms for physically perceptible objects, especially when particular terms would be possible, perhaps even preferable.

According to Wasserman, the eighteenth century followed Hobbes and Locke; the pyramid of perception had as its apex the understanding of abstraction. Says Wasserman: "Most agreed that an abstraction is fashioned by attaching a general term to an individual object, making

one stand for many, so that mankind, for example, is but a general term applied to the image of an individual man; or by stripping from classes all that is temporary, accidental, and individual, but never so completely that the sensory images are entirely divorced from the generalization."²

But there are other ways to generalize besides using the kind of abstractive process described here. A common way is to use class names without particularization. A writer may use the plural of a noun that applies to all members of a class: "bowers," "trees," "waves," "chairs." These can be particularized slightly by means of modifying adjectives; Gay, for instance, has "creaking Chairs" (6, line 194). Some of these class names—certainly not all plural nouns—can also be particularized in a context by substituting a more specific word, perhaps "rocker," "highchair," "armchair," or the plural of one of them. Another kind of generalization results from using a singular noun which can apply to any one of a large class of things; without further specification or without qualification by modifier, no definite picture of the thing will present itself to the imagination. For example, "snake," "song," "crown" may leave the context or the reader's imagination to supply a great deal about the kind of snake, crown, or song; but the poet can say "the laurell Crown" and supply a more definite visual image. Poetry of the first quarter

of the eighteenth century uses both kinds of particularization—that is, modifiers and specific substitutions.

General nouns are not necessarily unrealistic; they are often concrete, like the ones just discussed, and they are more likely to be suggestive than particular nouns. Sometimes, to be sure, they seem more general than they need to be, like the "Flowers and Fruits" that filled the horn in Gay's story from Ovid (97, line 102). But often shortly after an expression of this kind will be a reference more specific: "And ruddy Apples for the second Board," occurring five lines after "Flowers and Fruits," particularizes what is already concrete. Again, the general "sweet-smelling flow'rs" are presented as the "bounteous product of the Spring" (74, line 428), but Gay follows immediately with the more specific "elder's early bud, / With nettle's tender shoots, to cleanse the blood." The reader's expectation of the specific is held off; meanwhile his imagination is free.

Another example from Gay is "your closest bowers" (108, line 58), which is followed by the enumeration of "the tall oak," "the beech," "the brook," "the hazle," and by mention of falls and their sound in the woods. True, it is a "murmuring" brook, the beech gives "a mutual shade," and the falls are described as "frequent," all of these epithets being somewhat less than vivid. Yet the general noun itself is concrete, and it is developed by other words more specific.
Many of Prior's general nouns are made specific in lines following. For instance, note "music" and "choir" in the passage from Solomon quoted below:

Often our Seers and Poets have confest,
That Music's Force can tame the furious Beast;
Can make the Wolf, or foaming Boar restrain
His Rage; the Lion drop his crested Mane,
Attentive to the Song; the Lynx forget
His Wrath to Man, and lick the Minstrel's Feet.
(335, lines 66-70)

...the cheerful Choir
Parted their shares of Harmony: the Lyre
Soften'd the Timbrel's Noise: the Trumpet's Sound
Provok'd the DORIAN Flute (both sweeter found
When mix'd:) the Fife the Viol's Notes refin'd;
And ev'ry Strength with ev'ry Grace was join'd.
(lines 74-80)

The word "beast" in the second line is also followed by particularization. Prior weaves in the three sets of specifications without resorting to any mere catalogue.

Sometimes general terms are justified by the negative implications of the sentence. For example,

No warbling chears the woods; the feather'd choir
To court kind slumbers to their sprays retire ... 

and

No rude gale disturbs the sleeping trees,
Nor aspen leaves confess the gentlest breeze ... 

do not call for a picture in the poet's mind that corresponds with the less-than-specific "trees." He does not have to see birds to know that they have gone to roost; he sees quiet trees, and realizes they are quiet because the wind is not blowing. Not only is there
no gale; there is no breeze either. Yet we are asked to picture the "rude gale" and the "gentlest breeze," because the poet knows how the aspen would look if the wind were blowing (Gay, 109, lines 95 ff.).

If the poets sometimes go astray by applying adjective modifiers to what does not need particularizing, as in "lyric bard" and "harmonious lyre," redundancy results; particularity remains. No doubt they did enjoy thinking of each specific thing as a member of a class, one of an order of beings. But juxtaposition of general and specific is not evidence that they wrote without a clear vision or that they wanted to prevent the reader from receiving one quite as clear as their own.

ii

The neoclassicists would not have liked to be called non-realist- tic. Their devotion to the unities was based on desire for extreme realism; so was their objection to Italian opera. They insisted that imaginative creations be true to nature. Addison condemned personified abstractions as epic characters because they lacked the "Measure of Probability" he thought "requisite in Writings of this Kind" (Spectator 273). Johnson condemned allegorical persons who were absurdly made to "conduct actions" (Life of Pope); he also found fault with Prior on the basis of lack of realism. The neoclassicists thought that the

3C. F. Chapin, Personification in Eighteenth Century Poetry, p. 18.

4Johnson thought Prior's love verses were "not dictated by nature"; adapting a line of Prior's, he turns it against the poet: "He talks not like a man of this world."
presentation of life in literature was justified by moral purpose,\textsuperscript{5} and there was no objection to the poet's including realistic details for delight, except when there was danger of falsification.

Even neoclassical condemnations of the particular are the result of a concern for realism, not antipathy to it. The neoclassicists who complained about particularity were objecting to it on the ground that it was unrealistic. They believed that a whole is not necessarily vivid because its parts are vivid.\textsuperscript{6} Two of the most famous specimens of neoclassic criticism are not exceptions to this devotion to truth. "By regarding minute particularities and accidental discrimination," runs a famous dictum of Sir Joshua Reynolds, a painter will "pollute his canvas with deformity." Johnson is supposed to have suggested the last five words.\textsuperscript{7} Johnson's own even more famous injunction that the poet should not number the streaks of the tulip is motivated by a like concern that universal truth not be falsified.

No doubt there were both critics and poets of the earlier period who thought particulars violated truth to "nature," whichever sense of the much-abused word they adopted. Ian Watt points to Shaftesbury as a representative of the neo-Platonic school, which had a great distaste for particularity in literature and art. According to

\textsuperscript{5}Francis Gallaway, \textit{Reason, Rule, and Revolt in English Classicism}, p. 73.


\textsuperscript{7}R. G. Davis, in H. Levin's \textit{Symposium on Realism, CL, III} (1952), 211.
Shaftesbury, writing in 1709, the good poet hates minuteness and is afraid of singularity.\(^8\)

The most important practical application of the bias in favor of generality was the remodeling of Shakespeare's plays. Cibber and other adapters changed many lines in order to eliminate particulars.\(^9\) But the effect we see—the loss of realism—was not the result of an effort to remove the plays farther from life. The design, the universality, the stimulating effect of large concepts—these meant "truth to nature." Shakespeare's freedom of imagination, as Branam explains, meant restraint to the adapters, because it insisted on particular and individual things.

Though we may be shocked at the mutilating of Shakespeare, the danger of overparticularization is not imaginary. Courthope regards the "exaggeration of the individual element" as a symptom of poetical decadence.\(^10\) As Theodore Spencer points out in his stricture on modern American poetry, a list of objects from the actual world does not necessarily result in a vision of the actual world.\(^11\) There is evidence that the very real dangers of overemphasis on the particular were appreciated by poets in the early eighteenth century.

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\(^8\) Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel*, p. 16.


The undesirability of too many details was recognized by Prior. In his imaginary dialogue with the French poet Boileau, he asks:

What Poet would essay
To count the Streamers of my Lord Mayor's Day?
To number all the several Dishes drest
By honest Lamb, last Coronation Feast? (222, lines 73-76)

What poet in his senses, he implies, would want "a Commissary's List in Verse?" Mere catalogues are rare in all three of the poets covered in this study. When catalogues do occur, they are justified (like Swift's "Tobacco, Censure, Coffee, Pride, and Port," I, 194) by the context and the poet's skillful handling. Here Swift is particularizing the "vices of a graver sort" indulged in at the taverns, mixing abstract and concrete for humorous effect. In another satire, Prometheus (I, 345), Swift says, "All Parties and Religions joyn," then particularizes by a brief and clever list (see page 80, above).

I have noticed no examples of particulars adding up to a false picture, though someone has criticized Gay's Black-Eyed Susan in this respect.

The famous "Augustan instinct for generality," as Douglas Bush calls it, left plenty of room for the use of particulars, provided they were properly selected. The selective principle was at work in Prior, Swift, and Gay, as well as in Pope, whom Dr. Johnson praises for his "Judgement, which selects from life or nature what the present purpose requires." When Pope in the Art of Sinking advises a bad

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13 Life of Pope.
poet to use many images and to draw them from the lowest things, he is referring ironically to the principle of decorum, which held that details from everyday life were not acceptable in elevated verse. According to Pope, the method of propriety "gives a beauty even to the minute and particular thoughts, which receive an additional advantage from those which precede or follow in their due place." The "disposition of these minute circumstantial parts" was important in Reynolds' criticism, too. If the poet lacked judgment, he thought, details could become "injurious to grandeur," whereas they should be "useful to truth."

So obvious is it that actual, individual, sense-perceived things exist as subject matter for the poet, that seldom was the fact pointed out. Therefore the exhortation to be particular is scarce in criticism. On the other hand, by the time Johnson and Reynolds were warning against the dangers of the particular, there was real cause to be found in the dispersive nature poetry that depicted rural sights and occupations without letting the universal significance appear. Sir Joshua does not say particularity is bad:

I am very ready to allow that some circumstances of minuteness and particularity frequently tend to give an air of truth to a piece, and to interest the spectator [he is speaking of painting, of

14 Jack, Augustan Satire, p. 151.
course] in an extraordinary manner. Such circum-
stances therefore cannot wholly be rejected. . . .

As Deane says (p. 66), Reynolds' Discourses show "that idealized form in landscape was not held to exclude either detailed description or first-hand observation of nature; it was the necessity for an expressive design that was salutarily kept uppermost in such theories."

Like Reynolds' emphasis on universality in painting, Johnson's concern with universality in poetry has been misinterpreted sometimes as absolute condemnation of particularity. But an important part of the tulip passage follows the injunction about not numbering the streaks—the poet, says Johnson, is "to exhibit in his portrait of nature such prominent and striking features as recall the original to every mind." Minuteness of description does not enter into the argument at all. The famous passage is a caution against taxing the reader's associative power by mentioning details that may have escaped him and by depending on such details to give him the picture of the object.

If Johnson had been really objecting to particularity in Prior, Swift, Gay, or Pope, he had good opportunities to say so, since he wrote Lives of all of them.

According to Bush (English Poetry, p. 94), the demands of satire made the "Augustan instinct for generality" less pervasive. This may be true. Certainly satire accounts for a wealth of everyday material

17Quoted by Cowl, idem.
and probably worked against the habit of using general terms. But 
generality is not synonymous with universality; the use of general 
terms was merely one means of trying to make poetry true to human 
experience. On the whole, general terms are used less often in the 
early part of the century than a pervasive instinct for generality 
would lead one to suspect.

Attempts have been made to explain the presence of particularity 
on the basis of philosophical theory current in the eighteenth century. 
I think these attempts are interesting, but misleading and unnecessary. Moreover, Ian Watt's explanation of the rise of realism is of no help 
in accounting for the particular realism of the 1700-1725 period.18 
What he calls "philosophical realism"—the modern kind as distinguished 
from the scholastic, which (according to his explanation) held that 
true "realities" were the universals, classes, or abstractions, rather 
than particular, concrete objects of sense-perception—began with 
Descartes and Locke "and received its first full formulation by Thomas 
Reid in the middle of the eighteenth century." The critical tradition 
in the early part of the century, according to Watt, was "still 
governed by the strong classical preference for the general and uni-
versal."19

18 The Rise of the Novel, pp. 12, 16. See also Scott Elladge, 
"The Background and Development in English Criticism of the Theories 

19 The Rise of the Novel, p. 16. See also pp. 19-20, above.
The place of realism in poetry of the so-called neoclassical period has been misunderstood for several reasons. One is failure to distinguish between early eighteenth-century poetry and that of later decades; another is the tendency to equate "neoclassical" and "sublime" as descriptive of certain kinds of poems. A third confusion may result from not noticing how convention and decorum can sometimes work in the direction of realism. Another problem has arisen from the overemphasis on critical dicta which seem to preclude realism as we know it.

Many critical estimates of eighteenth-century poetry do not hold good for that of the first quarter of the century, which was nearer to the realistic than poetry written after 1725. Realism—much of it concrete, particular, detailed—was at least as strong as convention in the three second-rank poets of the first quarter of the century whose work has been the subject of this study. For Prior, Swift, and Gay, convention was a means of methodizing nature, of reducing the actual world to order. Convention, it is true, has an aura of the artificial, at least once-removed from everyday life. But, though it may often be opposed to the realistic, and though the realistic is usually particular, it is not accurate to think of convention as a "generalizing" factor.

Even theorists who placed most emphasis on the importance of the general and who seemed to belittle or ignore the particular were not anti-realistic. The neoclassicists, theorists and poets alike, knew well enough that the world was made up of particular material
things as well as ideas in the minds of men. Poets had always used particular details, and the best of them kept on using them in spite of restraint and fashion. If some critics seem to overemphasize the universal element, their overemphasis may be an indication that excessive particularity existed in inferior poetry; or it may be merely a sign of their concern that poetry be as true as possible to human experience. In either instance, the criticism is a pull toward balance.

Perhaps those more modern critics are right who suggest that pointing out opposing trends in literary history has gone too far, leading to artificial classifications of poetry and poets. I do not want to add to the confusion. But it seems to me that the presence of a good deal of particular realism in a classical period should not be a matter for surprise. Classicism is a balance of realistic and non-realistic elements, a balance of particular realism and the kind of blurring of actuality that results from the romantic haze of fancy diction.

As suggested in Chapter III, the best poetry of the quarter century when "neoclassicism" was most flourishing, is a blend of everyday realism and conventional "heightening"; it is also, I think, a happy blend of the concrete and the abstract, of the particular and the general, of the unique and the universal.
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