'Oh mihi, Duncia!'

- or -

A Mob of Metaphors

a service for Officiant,

Barbershop Quartet and Female Chorus
Performance note

This piece was a commission by The 24, University of York, for inclusion in a concert titled, ‘vox populi... vox dei.’ The commission was to suggest two pieces: a new composition to sit alongside a work from before 1650, one of which represented vox populi, the other vox dei. The composer paired ‘Oh mihi, Duncia!’ with Carlo Gesualdo di Venosa’s ‘O vos omnes’ from Sacrae Cantiones I (1603):

O vos omnes qui transitis per viam, attendite et videte:
Si est dolor similis sicut dolor meus.

‘O all you who pass by in the road, attend here and see:
If there is another’s sorrow like my sorrow.’

The first performance of this work was accompanied by an overhead projection (similar to supertitles) displaying a slideshow of images, selected by the composer from the national media, of the August Riots 2011 in England which occurred just before this piece was composed. The contemptuous violence and mindless immorality of that event moved the composer to make much of the present texts, whose ironically heroic and hyperbolic depiction of the all-conquering ‘CHAOS’ and ‘universal Darkness’ over England is representative of the physical and psychological destruction caused by the riots.

These images were accompanied by some of the poem (overleaf). Future performers may choose whether to replicate this exact context in any shape or form, or, to recontextualise the piece if they deem another subject suitably analogous with this text. They may also choose not to present extramusical material in this way.

The theatrical directions, while only illustrative of the narrative and text, are to be adhered to strictly and sensitively. A vivid, intensely ironic performance is desired.

Duration: 9 minutes

COMPLETE TEXTS

BOOK I, INTROIT. A Sentence of Scripture. “Oh mihi bissenos multum vigilata per annos, Duncia!”

[‘Preface’; ‘P’]

RESPONSES. This poem, as it celebrateth the most grave and ancient of things, Chaos, Night, and Dulness; so is it of the most grave and ancient kind.

…

This poem, therefore, celebrating him was properly and absolutely a Dunciad; which, though now unhappily lost… he considereth the causes creative of such authors—namely, Dulness and Poverty;

…

[ARGUMENT] He proceedeth to show the qualities they bestow on these authors, and the effects they produce; then the materials, or stock, with which they furnish them; and (above all) that self-opinion, which causeth it to seem to themselves vastly greater than it is, and is the prime motive of their setting up in this sad and sorry merchandise. The great power of these Goddesses acting in alliance (whereof as the one is the mother of industry, so is the other of plodding) was to be exemplified in some one, great and remarkable Action: and none could be more so than that which our poet hath chosen, viz., the restoration of the reign of Chaos and Night, by the ministry of Dulness their Daughter, in the removal of her imperial seat from the City to the polite World;
In like manner our author hath drawn into this single Action the whole history of Dulness and her children.

A person must next be fixed upon to support this action. This Phantom in the poet's mind must have a Name: He finds it to be ——; and he becomes, of course, the hero of the poem.

[‘Martinus Scriblerus Of the Poem’; ‘P’]

VENITE. In vain, in vain, — the all-composing Hour
Resistless falls: the Muse obeys the Pow'r.
She comes! she comes! the sable Throne behold
Of Night primæval, and of Chaos old!

BOOK II, PSALM. Before her, Fancy's gilded clouds decay,
And all its varying Rain-bows die away.
Wit shoots in vain its momentary fires,
The meteor drops, and in a flash expires.

BOOK III, LESSON. As one by one, at dread Medea's strain,
The sick'ning stars fade off th'ethereal plain;
As Argus' eyes by Hermes' wand opprest,
Clos'd one by one to everlasting rest;
Thus at her felt approach, and secret might,
Art after Art goes out, and all is Night.

BOOK IV, JUBILATE. See skulking Truth to her old cavern fled,
Mountains of Casuistry heap'd o'er her head!
Philosophy, that lean'd on Heav'n before,
Shrinks to her second cause, and is no more.
Physic of Metaphysic begs defence,
And Metaphysic calls for aid on Sense!
See Mystery to Mathematics fly!
In vain! they gaze, turn giddy, rave, and die.
Religion blushing veils her sacred fires,
And unawares Morality expires.
Nor public Flame, nor private, dares to shine;
Nor human Spark is left, nor Glimpse divine!

[epilogue] HYMN
Lo! thy dread Empire, CHAOS! is restor'd;
Light dies before thy uncreating word;
Thy hand, great Anarch! lets the curtain fall;
And universal Darkness buries All.

ff. 627-656, Book IV, The Dunciad
Programme Note

In vain, in vain, — the all-composing Hour
Resistless falls: the Muse obeys the Pow'r.
She comes! she comes! the sable Throne behold
Of Night primæval, and of Chaos old!

A prophecy is accompanied by a lament for our fate: in the post-apocalyptic world governed once more by Night and Chaos, our religious epic voices an isolated populus stranded in a merciless, nonsensical world. Thus, an heroic epic narrates the precipitative Action that is its restoration, as commanded in the cataclysmic yawn of our goddess Dulness: 'MAKE ONE MIGHTY DUNCIAD OF THE LAND!'

[The Dunciad (1722, rev. 1729, 1741): a mock-epic satire in three Books by Alexander Pope (1688-1744) depicting the progress of Dulness and her chosen agents as they bring decay, imbecility, and tastelessness to the kingdom of Great Britain. 'With what apparently sovereign contempt, masterly ease, artistic calm, and judicial gravity, does he set about it!' In 1741 a fourth book was 'found' to have been written: it imparts the obliteration of sense from Britain.]

Hence, also, we learn the true title of the piece; which, we may pronounce, could have been, and can be no other than OH MIHI, DUNCIA! It is styled HEROIC, as being doubly so: not only with respect to its nature, which, according to the best rules of the Ancients, and strictest ideas of the Moderns, is critically such; but also with regard to the heroic disposition of the author, who dared to stir up such a formidable, irritable, and implacable race of mortals.

Thus at her felt approach, and secret might,
Art after Art goes out, and all is Night.

The fable being thus, the structure of our epic replicates exactly that of the great account of our Doom, in its four PARAGRAPHS that take each for themselves a Book from it, also sharing in direct proportion both the duration and amount of text which each doth convey: in their content do they complement in shape and sense.

Lo! thy dread Empire, CHAOS! is restor'd;

Our epic is branched into Episodes, each of which hath its moral apart, though all conducive to the main end. These Episodes follow a SERVICE: our INTROIT doth include our Sentence of Scripture; thereafter we expect our RESPONSES; thereafter our VENITE; our PSALM; our LESSON; our JUBILATE; lastly our HYMN.

Light dies before thy uncreating word;

The machinery of our epic is a continued chain of allegories, as is proper: we are presented first with Martinus Scriblerus, writer of the Prolegomena; he announces the ARGUMENT. Hence, our Hero approaches, unveiling his Chorus filed in close support of him.

Thy hand, great Anarch! lets the curtain fall;

In a word, the whole piece proveth itself to be the work of our author when his faculties were in full vigour and perfection, at that exact time when years have ripened the judgment without diminishing the imagination; which by good critics is held to be punctually at forty. With good reason, therefore, did our composer choose to write his essay on that subject at twenty, and reserve for his maturer years this great and wonderful work of the Dunciad.

And universal Darkness buries All.
for The 24 choir of the University of York,

'Oh mihi, Duncia!'

or,

A Mob of Metaphors - a service

James Whittle (b. 1989)
September/October 2011

Text taken from
the Preface and prolegomena to,
and Book IV of, The Dunciad
by Alexander Pope (1688 - 1744)

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Ecclesiastical chant. Begin at will after a sufficient pause; 
fluctuate freely according to natural speech; never rushed.

sempre $\approx 88$, A melodramatic whisper under breath. 
Always well articulated.

Intense, as before. 
Each singer independently to vary the tempo of, 
and duration of time between, each repetition. 
All exaggerate the tenuto stresses to an extreme degree.

$\text{Oh mi hi bis - se nos mul-tum vi - gi - la - ta per an - nos, Dun-ci - a!}$  
$\text{Oh mi hi}$

$\text{Oh mi hi bis - se nos mul-tum vi - gi - la - ta per an - nos, Dun-ci - a!}$  
$\text{bis - se nos}$

$\text{Oh mi hi bis - se nos mul-tum vi - gi - la - ta per an - nos, Dun-ci - a!}$  
$\text{mul - tum vi - gi - la - ta}$

$\text{Oh mi hi bis - se nos mul-tum vi - gi - la - ta per an - nos, Dun-ci - a!}$  
$\text{per an - nos,}$

things Cha - os, Night, and Dul - ness; so is it of the most grave and an - cient kind.
This poem, therefore, celebrating him was properly and absolutely a
mouthed silently which though now unhappily lost... he considereth

Dun dun duh duh duh

he considereth

Dun ci-ad! Dun ci-ad! dun duh duh

Dun ci-ad! Dun ci-ad! dun duh duh

Dun ci-ad!

Dun ci-ad!

the Causes creative of such authors, namely Dulness and Poverty;

ba da ba da ba da ba ba da ba da ba da da da ba da ba ba da ba da da da ba

the the of such of such authors, namely Dulness Dulness Dulness Dulness Dun Dun Dul

the the Causes of such authors, namely Dulness Dulness Dulness

mf swung scat

Upbeat! extravagant and preposterous

Upbeat! \( q = 124 \)
Formal and boring, but your moment. Accentuate and exaggerate the italicised words laboriously.

He proceedeth to shew the qualities they bestow on these authors, and the effects they produce: then the materials, or stock with which they furnish them; and (above all) that self-opinion which causeth it to seem to themselves vastly greater than it is, and is the prime motive of their setting up this sad and sorry merchandise. The great power of these Goddesses acting in alliance (whereof as the one is mother of Industry, so is the other of Plodding), was to be exemplified in some one, great and remarkable Action:

and none could be more so than that which our poet hath chosen, the restoration of the reign of Chaos and Night, by the ministry of Dulness their Daughter, in the removal of her imperial seat from the City to the polite World.

INTERUPTION: plebian chant \( \dot{z} = 124 \)
sharp and coarse
A person must be fixed upon to support this Action.

Calling to the Quartet.
ecclesiastical chant - deranged  

This Phantom in the Poet's mind must have a Name: he finds it to be -----;

and he becomes of course the Hero of the Poem.

D = 188 plebian chant

Whisper intently to each other

In like manner our author hath drawn into this single Action

Resignedly

Process towards the centre-stage Quartet position, slowly, boldly and heroically.

mf

In position, look around and to each other vacantly.

In vain.
whole his to ry of Dul ness and her children. -

Now gathering in confidence.

vain,

In

p

mf

mp

f

p

mf

f

f

Now gathering in confidence.
VENITE

\( \text{\textit{eclesiastical chant}} \)

the all-composing Hour Resists less falls: 

the Muse obeys the Pow'r.

Sharp and coarse - bell-like

She comes! She comes! She comes!

Rolled 'r

Hour rrr Resists less Muse obeys

VE-NI-TE

SHOUT

SHOUT

SHOUT

SHOUT

SHOUT

SHOUT

She comes! She comes!

She comes!
\[
J = 132 \text{ subito}
\]

M.S.

\[
\text{ff} \quad \text{mp} \quad \text{f} \quad \text{rf} \quad \text{p}
\]

S. 1

\[
\text{old!} \quad \text{old!} \quad \text{old!} \quad \text{Dun-cia}
\]

S. 2

\[
\text{old!} \quad \text{old!} \quad \text{old!} \quad \text{Dun-cia}
\]

A. 1

\[
\text{old!} \quad \text{old!} \quad \text{old!} \quad \text{Dun-cia}
\]

A. 2

\[
\text{old!} \quad \text{old!} \quad \text{old!} \quad \text{Dun-cia}
\]

\[
\text{ff} \quad \text{rf} \quad \text{rf} \quad \text{f} \quad \text{mp}
\]

T.

\[
\text{old!} \quad \text{old!} \quad \text{old!} \quad \text{Dun-cia} \quad \text{Dun-cia}
\]

B.
**F** **PSALM**

\[c. \, \frac{d}{d} = 66\] Sincerely, with rubato [the conductor can continue beating here]

**pp** imitating an organ, pre-empt the Quartet's chordal movement.

Start each phrase after the Chorus sound the chord, lagging behind them as if there is a delay in the acoustic.

*a free plainchant*

**pp** easy-going

Wit shoots in vain its momentary fires.  
'shoots', 'vain' and 'men all right after the Quartet sing; 'fire' just before.  
With the Officiant.

The meteor drops, * and in a * flash expire.
[c. $\frac{d}{d} = 66$] rit.

91

M.S.

S. 1

S. 2

A. 1

A. 2

G LESSON

$\frac{d}{d} = 120$ Ominous

91

S. 1

S. 2

A. 1

A. 2

T.

B.

As one by one,
As Argus' eyes by Hermes' wand opprest

Oh mihi bisse nos multum vi gi

Her mes' wand opp rest, Her mes' wand opp rest, ever lasting rest;

Clos'd one by one to

Oh mihi bisse nos multum vi gi la ta per annos, Dun-ci-a! Oh mihi
la ta per an nos, Dun-ci-a!  Thu-

ever-last-ing rest; ever-last-ing

bis-se-nos mult-tum vi-gi-la-ta per an-

nos, Dun-ci-a!
Thus at her felt approach, and secret might, Art after Art goes out,

Thus at her felt approach, and secret might, Art after Art goes out,

Thus at her felt approach, and secret might, Art after Art goes out,

Thus at her felt approach, and secret might, Art after Art goes out,
and all is Night.
H JUBILATE

\( \text{J = 190 Jauntily, celebratory and carefree} \)

\( \text{a proclamatory shout calling to the audience} \)

\( \text{EVERYBODY!} \)

\( \text{mp} \)

\( \text{sim.} \)

\( \text{Pitched lip tremolo} \)

\( \text{See} \)

\( \text{yawn} \)

\( \text{skulk} \)

\( \text{Truth} \)

\( \text{to her old cavern fled,} \)

\( \text{Mountains of Cast} \)
And Me-ta-phy-sic calls for aid on Sense! fence, And Me-ta-phy-sic calls for aid on Sense! to Math-e-ma-tics fly! In

And Me-ta-phy-sic calls for aid on Sense! See My-ste-ry to Math-e-ma-tics fly!

Re-li-gion blushing veils her sa-

blushing veils her sa-

veils her sa

vain! they gaze, turn gid-dy, rave and die.

Re-li-gion veils

vain! they gaze, turn gid-dy, rave and die.
cred - fires, $q = 170$

And un - a - wares Mor - a - li - ty ex -

ALL HERALD THE apocalypse TRIUMPHANT!

Nor pub - lic Flame, nor pri - vate, dares to shine,

$pp$ poco a poco cresc.
human Spark is left, nor Glimpse
dici---
dici---
dici---

vine!
sub.
diviene!
diviene!
diviene!
diviene!
sub.
diviene!
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diviene!
diviene!
diviene!

molto rit.
HYMN

Triumphant! $\bullet = 100$

Lo! thy dread Empire, CHA-OS! is restor'd; Light dies before thy un-cre-a-ting word;

Triumphant! $\bullet = 100$
Jubilant 'til the last! $\dot{z} = 160$

M.S.

$\begin{array}{c}
180 \quad f \\
\text{T.}
\end{array}$

\begin{align*}
\text{Thy hand, great An - arch! lets the cur - tain fall:}
\end{align*}

S. 1

\begin{align*}
\text{Thy}
\end{align*}

A. 1

\begin{align*}
\text{Thy}
\end{align*}

A. 2

\begin{align*}
\text{Thy}
\end{align*}

B.

\begin{align*}
\text{Thy}
\end{align*}
Hold for as long and loud as absolutely possible.

Dun-cia! And universal Darkness buries All.

Hold for as long and loud as absolutely possible.

Dun-cia! And universal Darkness buries All.