

THE CAMBRIDGE  
COMPANION TO  
**ALEXANDER POPE**

EDITED BY  
PAT ROGERS



**CAMBRIDGE**  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo, Delhi

Cambridge University Press  
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)

Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9780521549448](http://www.cambridge.org/9780521549448)

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First published 2007

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library*

ISBN 978-0-521-84013-2 hardback

ISBN 978-0-521-54944-8 paperback

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## ABBREVIATIONS

<i>Anecdotes</i>	Joseph Spence, <i>Observations, Anecdotes, and Characters of Books and Men</i> , ed. J. M. Osborn, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966).
<i>Corr</i>	<i>The Correspondence of Alexander Pope</i> , ed. G. Sherburn, 5 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956).
Johnson, <i>LOP</i>	Samuel Johnson, <i>The Lives of the Poets</i> , ed. G. B. Hill, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1905).
<i>Life</i>	Maynard Mack, <i>Alexander Pope: A Life</i> (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).
<i>Prose</i>	<i>The Prose Works of Alexander Pope</i> , vol. 1, ed. N. Ault (Oxford: Blackwell, 1936); vol. 2, ed. R. Cowler (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1986).
Swift <i>Corr</i>	<i>The Correspondence of Jonathan Swift</i> , ed. D. Woolley, 3 vols. (in progress) (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1999-).
<i>TE</i>	<i>The Twickenham Edition of the Poems of Alexander Pope</i> , ed. J. Butt <i>et al.</i> , 11 vols. (London: Methuen, 1938-68).

In the *Imitations of Horace*, vol. 1v, *Ep* refers to the *Epistles* and *Sat* to the *Satires*. Unless otherwise indicated, *The Dunciad* is quoted from the A text (1729) in *TE*, vol. v.

## ALEXANDER POPE CHRONOLOGY

- 1688 Alexander Pope born in the commercial area of the City of London, 21 May. King James II flees to France, prior to accession of William III and Mary.
- 1692 The Pope family move to Hammersmith, outside London.
- 1698 Alexander Pope's father acquires house at Binfield, Berkshire, in Windsor Forest: the family in residence there by 1700. While living there, Pope meets older men who will serve as literary mentors, including the retired diplomat Sir William Trumbull, the dramatist William Wycherley and the actor Thomas Betterton.
- 1702 Accession of Queen Anne. Start of the War of the Spanish Succession (to 1713), with British forces under the command of the Duke of Marlborough.
- 1703 Isaac Newton becomes President of the Royal Society (to 1727).
- 1704 Jonathan Swift, *A Tale of a Tub* and *The Battle of the Books*. Marlborough and the allies gain a spectacular victory over the French at the battle of Blenheim.
- 1705 Alexander Pope's first surviving letters. Close friendship with Trumbull, a neighbour in the Forest. Has begun work on his *Pastorals*.
- 1707 About this time, Pope meets Martha and Teresa Blount, members of the Catholic gentry; Martha was to become his closest woman friend for the rest of his life.
- 1708 Final stone laid on St Paul's cathedral, designed by Sir Christopher Wren.



- 1709 *Pastorals* and other early work published.
- 1710 In the wake of the divisive Sacheverell affair, the Tories gain power under Robert Harley (later Earl of Oxford) and Henry St John (later Viscount Bolingbroke), who become important supporters of Pope. Swift begins his *Journal to Stella* (to 1713). George Frideric Handel arrives in London and helps to initiate a fashion for Italian opera.
- 1711 *Essay on Criticism*. Addison and Steele begin *The Spectator*, runs until 1713 (Pope is an occasional contributor). South Sea Company launched under the aegis of Oxford. Marlborough dismissed as commander as part of Tory moves to end the war.
- 1712 First version of *The Rape of the Lock* in two cantos. *Messiah* appears in *The Spectator*.
- 1713 Pope publishes *Windsor-Forest*, celebrating end of the War of the Spanish Succession. Addison's *Cato*, with prologue by Pope. By now Pope is familiar with the Scriblerus group, including Swift, John Arbuthnot, Thomas Parnell and John Gay. He also is in contact with the leading ministers, Oxford and Bolingbroke. Contributes to Steele's *Guardian*.
- 1714 The full *Rape of the Lock* appears in five cantos. Death of Queen Anne; succession of George I. The Tories lose power and Whigs dominate national politics for the rest of Pope's life.
- 1715 *The Temple of Fame*. First instalment of the *Iliad* translation, issued by subscription. Bolingbroke flees to France. Jacobite rising led by the Old Pretender, James Francis Edward Stuart. Pope friendly with Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (later a bitter enemy). John Gay, *The What d'ye Call It* (comedy on which Pope and Arbuthnot may have given assistance).
- 1716 Rising put down. Pope family forced to leave Binfield, in the wake of anti-Catholic legislation, and move to Chiswick, outside London. Pope becomes familiar with members of the court of the Prince and Princess of Wales. John Gay, *Trivia*. Some of Pope's earliest brushes with the rascally publisher, Edmund Curll, initiating a lifelong war of words.
- 1717 Death of Pope's father. Collected *Works* published, containing *Eloisa to Abelard*, *Elegy to the Memory of an Unfortunate*

*Lady*, and other new poems. Farcical comedy written by Pope, Gay, and Arbuthnot, *Three Hours after Marriage*, performed to a mixed reception.

- 1718 Pope leases house at Twickenham, his home for the rest of his life. Death of his Scriblerian colleague Parnell.
- 1719 Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*, part 1, admired by Pope.
- 1720 Last instalment of the *Iliad*. South Sea Bubble, a major financial crash which has widespread political and social effects.
- 1721 Pope brings out edition of Parnell's poems. Robert Walpole attains power and serves as prime minister until 1742, frequently incurring the criticism of Pope.
- 1722 Death of Marlborough, unlamented by Pope.
- 1723 Pope's edition of the Duke of Buckinghamshire's works. Jacobite plot involving Pope's friend Atterbury discovered; the bishop exiled to France. Pope's in-laws implicated in Waltham Blacks affair, a politically charged crime spree in Berkshire and surrounding counties. Death of Sir Christopher Wren, admired by Pope.
- 1725 First instalment of the *Odyssey*. Edition of Shakespeare. Bolingbroke returns from exile and settles not far from Pope's home.
- 1726 Translation of the *Odyssey* completed. Swift visits England and stays with Pope. *Gulliver's Travels* published. Voltaire begins three-year exile in England, where he will meet both Pope and Swift.
- 1727 First two volumes of *Miscellanies* published, including work by Pope, Swift and other Scriblerians. Swift's final visit to England. Death of George I. His son George II ascends the throne, with Caroline as consort. *The Craftsman* begins as a weekly journal of the opposition to Walpole. Death of Newton.
- 1728 *The Art of Sinking*, written largely by Pope, published in third volume of *Miscellanies*. *The Beggar's Opera*, by John Gay, performed and scores a major hit. First version of *The Dunciad* in three books.

- 1729 *The Dunciad Variorum* published, with fuller apparatus and annotation. Edmund Curll, *The Curliad*, one of many ripostes. Swift, *A Modest Proposal*.
- 1730 Colley Cibber, a frequent butt of Pope, appointed Poet Laureate. Throughout the coming decade Pope grows more closely involved with the opposition to Walpole's government, enjoying friendship with the "Patriot" leaders who stood against the influence of the court. *The Grub-street Journal* begins its career (to 1737), supporting Pope's stance in literary politics and satirizing his enemies.
- 1731 *Epistle to Burlington*. Death of Defoe.
- 1732 *Miscellanies*, fourth volume. Death of John Gay. Death of Atterbury. Hogarth, *The Harlot's Progress*.
- 1733 First of the *Imitations of Horace* published (to 1738). *Epistle to Bathurst*. *Essay on Man*, epistles I–III published. Death of Pope's mother.
- 1734 *Essay on Man*, epistle IV published. *Epistle to Cobham*.
- 1735 *Epistle to Arbuthnot*, followed by death of Arbuthnot. *Epistle to a Lady*. Second volume of Pope's *Works*. Curll's edition of Pope's *Letters* (publication engineered by Pope).
- 1737 *Epistle to Augustus* published. Authorized edition of *Letters*. Death of Queen Caroline. Theatrical Licensing Act increases government control over new plays. Samuel Johnson, *London*.
- 1738 *Epilogue to the Satires* brings the imitations of Horace to an end. Samuel Johnson, *London*, praised by Pope.
- 1739 Swift's *Verses on the Death of Dr Swift* first published.
- 1740 Pope's health grows worse. Samuel Richardson, *Pamela*, Part I.
- 1741 *Memoirs of Scriblerus* published under Pope's direction.
- 1742 Fourth book of *The Dunciad* published separately. Henry Fielding, *Joseph Andrews*.
- 1743 Pope publishes complete version of *The Dunciad* in four books. Fielding, *Jonathan Wild*.

ALEXANDER POPE CHRONOLOGY

- 1744 Pope working on deathbed edition of his works. Dies, 30 May. Buried at Twickenham. Johnson, *Life* of Richard Savage (a writer well known to Pope).
- 1745 Death of Swift. Death of Robert Walpole. Jacobite rising led by the Young Pretender, Charles Edward Stuart.

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PAT ROGERS

## Introduction

It would not be quite true to say that Pope has proved a poet for all the ages, if only because some late Victorians thought him safely dead and buried in terms of any active presence in the poetry of their day. Even then, however, Pope refused to lie down, and for the past three hundred years he has shown surprising resilience in the face of condescension, assumed indifference, or outright hostility. Recent generations of poets and critics have joined the scholars in helping to recover some of the ground he had lost. A look at his reputation as it stood 100, 200, and 300 years ago may help to make the point.

In the first quarter of the eighteenth century, Pope had seen his career take off with a series of major poems: *An Essay on Criticism*, *Windsor-Forest*, *The Rape of the Lock*, and *Eloisa to Abelard*, which would all be packaged in the sumptuous collection of the poet's *Works* in 1717. Scarcely anyone without a personal grudge then doubted that a poet of the highest excellence had arrived on the scene – in the view of most dispassionate observers, the greatest English writer since Milton and Dryden in the late seventeenth century. A hundred years later, in the first quarter of the nineteenth century, his position had undergone serious challenge, but he remained a potent influence for Wordsworth, and earned the vehement support of Byron:

Neither time, nor distance, nor grief, nor age, can ever diminish my veneration for him, who is the great moral poet of all times, of all climes, of all feelings, and of all stages of existence. The delight of my boyhood, the study of my manhood, perhaps (if allowed to me to attain it), he may be the consolation of my age. His poetry is the Book of Life.<sup>1</sup>

This may seem hyperbolic, with its calculated reworking of a tag from the Roman moralist Cicero in the second sentence. But a similar tribute came from Byron's contemporary, the essayist Charles Lamb, when he remarked that Pope paid the finest compliments ever devised by the wit of man – "Each of them is worth an estate for life – nay an immortality."<sup>2</sup> Pope's reputation



reached its low point in the late 1800s. Then, just a hundred years ago, things began to look up for the poet in the first decades of the twentieth century. His admirers were not critics who set the blood raging today – figures such as Austin Dobson and George Saintsbury, whose learning and love of poetry may be disguised from us by their blimpish personae. But the tide turned between the two world wars, as poets such as Edith Sitwell and W. H. Auden recognized Pope's outstanding technical accomplishments, and scholars such as George Sherburn began to reappraise his legacy. In the heyday of "New Criticism", around the 1940s and 1950s, Pope prospered mightily, enjoying the esteem of writers like Cleanth Brooks and W. K. Wimsatt; and even the ranks of Cambridge could scarce forbear to cheer, as these were represented by influential pioneers of twentieth-century literary analysis such as F. R. Leavis and William Empson. Pope also gained in public recognition through the efforts of modern scholarship, especially the imposing Twickenham edition of his complete poems spearheaded by John Butt from the 1930s to the 1960s, and the massive contributions to Popian study of Maynard Mack right up to the late 1980s.

But that was then and this is now. Against all expectations, Pope has made it into the early twenty-first century with very little, if any, loss of momentum. New approaches in the post-structuralist era have confirmed just how central a place he holds in the narrative of poetic history. Scarcely any critical school has managed to sideline his work: all our new terms and favored concepts turn out to fit Pope's practice with startling precision. It is no accident that so many of the shibboleths of modern criticism repeatedly turn up in the criticism of Pope. Nor, for that matter, that these keywords have come to the fore in this volume. The reason that the *Companion* is organized in part around issues such as identity, gender, the body, the history of the book, crime, and the other, goes back to a simple fact: Pope's work raises these issues in a peculiarly direct and pervasive way. No work of the time adumbrates the concerns of modern feminism more immediately than the *Epistle to a Lady*; no poem dramatizes the march of the literary, journalistic and publishing profession so richly as *The Dunciad*. We should find it hard to name any considerable body of poetry so replete with images of crime and punishment as the *Imitations of Horace*. Few writers have confronted the nature of heroism in the modern world so searchingly as did Pope in his translations of Homer. If there is a single text in the entire canon which brought the topic of consumerism and commodification into the western mind, then it must be *The Rape of the Lock* – as innumerable modern readings serve to confirm. Luxury, politeness, effeminacy, private and public spaces, neuroticism – they all come into question during the course of the *Rape*, in a text that lasts less than 800 lines (you could recite it within the