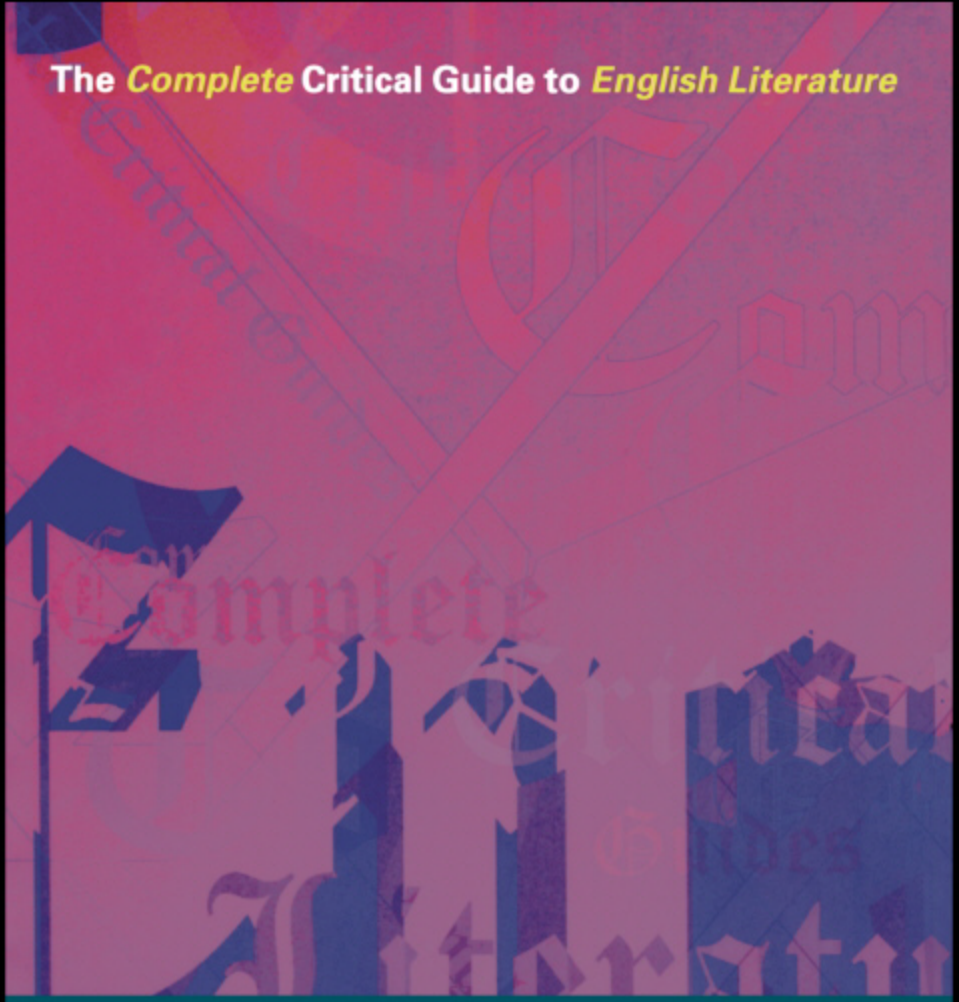

The Complete Critical Guide to Alexander Pope

Paul Baines

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Paul Baines is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of English Language and Literature at the University of Liverpool. He is the author of *The House of Forgery in Eighteenth-Century Britain* and co-editor of *Five Romantic Plays, 1768–1821.*

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ALEXANDER POPE

Paul Baines

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For Jenny and Gwen

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SERIES EDITORS' PREFACE

The Complete Critical Guide to English Literature is a ground-breaking collection of one-volume introductions to the work of the major writers in the English literary canon. Each volume in the series offers the reader a comprehensive account of the featured author's life, of his or her writing and of the ways in which his or her works have been interpreted by literary critics. The series is both explanatory and stimulating; it reflects the achievements of state-of-the-art literary-historical research and yet manages to be intellectually accessible for the reader who may be encountering a canonical author's work for the first time. It will be useful for students and teachers of literature at all levels, as well as for the general reader; each book can be read through, or consulted in a companion-style fashion.

The aim of *The Complete Critical Guide to English Literature* is to adopt an approach that is as factual, objective and non-partisan as possible, in order to provide the 'full picture' for readers and allow them to form their own judgements. At the same time, however, the books engage the reader in a discussion of the most demanding questions involved in each author's life and work. Did Pope's physical condition affect his treatment of matters of gender and sexuality¿ Does a feminist reading of *Middlemarch* enlighten us regarding the book's presentation of nineteenth-century British society¿ Do we deconstruct Beckett's work, or does he do so himself¿ Contributors to this series address such crucial questions, offer potential solutions and recommend further reading for independent study. In doing so, they equip the reader for an informed and confident examination of the life and work of key canonical figures and of the critical controversies surrounding them.

The aims of the series are reflected in the structure of the books. Part I, 'Life and Contexts', offers a compact biography of the featured author against the background of his or her epoch. In Part II, 'Work', the focus is on the author's most important works, discussed from a non-partisan, literary-historical perspective; the section provides an account of the works, reflecting a consensus of critical opinion on them, and indicating, where appropriate, areas of controversy. These and other issues are taken up again in Part III, 'Criticism', which offers an account of the critical responses generated by the author's work. Contemporaneous reviews and debates are considered, along with opinions inspired by more recent

theoretical approaches, such as New Criticism, feminism, Marxism, psychoanalytic criticism, deconstruction and New Historicism.

The volumes in this series will together constitute a comprehensive reference work offering an up-to-date, user-friendly and reliable account of the heritage of English literature from the Middle Ages to the twentieth century. We hope that *The Complete Critical Guide to English Literature* will become for its readers, academic and non-academic alike, an indispensable source of information and inspiration.

RICHARD BRADFORD
JAN JEDRZEJEWSKI

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ABBREVIATIONS AND REFERENCING

Throughout the text, references to Pope's poems are from *The Twickenham Edition of the Poems of Alexander Pope,* general editor John Butt, 11 volumes (London: Methuen, 1939–69), abbreviated as *TE.* Specific volumes are used as follows::

I	*Pastoral Poetry and an Essay on Criticism,* eds E. Audra and Aubrey Williams (1961)
II	*The Rape of the Lock and Other Poems,* ed. Geoffrey Tillotson, third edition (1962)
III.i	*An Essay on Man,* ed. Maynard Mack (1950)
III.ii	*Epistles to Several Persons (Moral Essays)*, ed. F.W. Bateson (1951)
IV	*Imitations of Horace, with An Epistle to Dr Arbuthnot and the Epilogue to the Satires,* ed. John Butt (1939)
V	*The Dunciad,* ed. James Sutherland, second edition (1953)
VI	*Minor Poems,* eds Norman Ault and John Butt (1964)

All references are to page numbers

Individual poems within these volumes are referenced as follows:

Arb	*An Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot*
Bathurst	*Epistle to Bathurst*
Burl	*Epistle to Burlington*
Cob	*Epistle to Cobham*
D	*The Duncaid*
EA	*Eloisa to Abelard*
EC	*An Essay on Criticism*
EM	*An Essay on Man*
Ep. 2.i	*The First Epistle of the Second Book of Horace, Imitated*
Ep. 2.ii	*The Second Epistle of the Second Book of Horace, Imitated*
Epil. i	*Epilogue to the Satires, Dialogue I*
Epil. ii	*Epilogue to the Satires, Dialogue II*
Lady	*Epistle to a Lady*
RL	*The Rape of the Lock*
Sat. 2.i	*The First Satire of the Second Book of Horace, Imitated*
Sat. 2.ii	*The Second Satire of the Second Book of Horace Paraphrased*
WF	*Windsor-Forest*

Other abbreviations are:

Letters	*The Correspondence of Alexander Pope,* ed. George Sherburn, 5 volumes (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956)
PW i	*The Prose Works of Alexander Pope: The Earlier Works 1711–1720,* ed. Norman Ault (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1938)
PW ii	*The Prose Works of Alexander Pope: Volume II: The Major Works 1725–1744,* ed. Rosemary Cowler (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986)

For all other references, the Harvard system is used; full details of items cited can be found in the bibliography.

Cross-referencing between sections is one of the features of this series. Cross-references to relevant page numbers appear in bold type and square brackets **[28]**.

INTRODUCTION

This book examines the literary career of the poet Alexander Pope (1688–1744). The son of a merchant, Pope became the dominant poet of his generation despite considerable ill-health and deformity. As a Catholic, he was a politically suspect outsider, but turned his internal exile into a platform from which to comment on the social and political events of his time. Once regarded as too elegant, or too vicious, to be a true poet, Pope is now celebrated for the richness of his imaginative transfiguration of the world around him.

In Part I of this book, Life and Contexts, the main events of Pope's life are narrated in detail: his childhood in Windsor Forest, his early literary career, the success of his translation of Homer, his creation of a place of principled independence at his villa at Twickenham, his relations with women, the scandalous warfare of *The Dunciad,* the major satires of the 1730s, his political position, and the final darkening poetry. In Part II, Works, extensive readings of nine poems or sets of poems are given: *Essays on Criticism, Windsor-Forest, Rape of the Lock, Eloisa to Abelard, Essay on Man, Epistles to Several Persons, Epistle to Dr Arbuthnot, Imitations of Horace,* and *The Dunciad.* In Part III, Criticism, clear guidance to the main trends in criticism of Pope's work are given, with special attention to current areas of particular controversy: Pope and Politics; Pope, Gender and Body; Pope in Print and Manuscript.

The Complete Critical Guide to Alexander Pope presents a synthesis of the latest research on Pope while offering a fresh reading of the poems. Readers who need a clear account of Pope's life and background, or who need a reliable guide to particular poems, or who are interested in special aspects of the works, can begin in any section and follow the cross-references to other relevant sections; or the whole book can be read through as a handbook of Pope studies.

PART I

LIFE AND CONTEXTS

(a) A CATHOLIC CHILDHOOD

Because Pope was not primarily a lyric poet like Donne, or an explorer of private mental experience like Wordsworth, we tend to think of him as essentially a public voice, the satirist of civil follies rather than the analyst of personal emotions. Many of the vices Pope attacked are forms of egotism: avarice, power-seeking, narcissism. The lack of a real or implied partner to address poems to also suggests a reticence about private life which disappoints a voyeuristic age. Nonetheless personal character remained for Pope a fundamental element of poetic voice. Satire has to have a position from which to criticise the world; and since Pope could not acquire the kind of state position which validated the work of his closest model, John Dryden (1631–1700), he developed a position of moral authority derived from his own status as a private, right-thinking citizen, living in principled independence of state patronage, willing to implicate the personal experience on which his voice as a social critic was based. While one could read through the complete poems of Dryden without learning much about his life, Pope insistently manages a particular kind of self-involvement even in his most public, apocalyptic works. Much criticism of him – plenty of it more venomous and scurrilous than anything he produced himself in criticizing others – was based on his own life, character, and body. A competent artist, he controlled the dissemination of portraits and other images of himself, and bestowed extraordinary care on the presentation and publication of his work, mastering book trade processes as no writer had ever done before to produce a meticulous version of his 'corpus' in print **[189–99]**. In these ways, he seems a very modern figure. This first section will give an account of the main features of what we know of Pope's biography, and of how he turned his personal experience into public poetry.

Pope had, and has continued to have, several biographers. During his lifetime he befriended Joseph Spence, a minor poet and critic who compiled a large body of 'anecdotes' from Pope's conversation, indicating his views on various critical matters but also recording such facts as Pope could remember, or wished to be remembered, about his own life. 'Mr. Pope was born on the twenty-first of May, 1688', Spence ascertained (Spence 1966: 3); the time was 6: 45 p.m. and the place is thought to have been no. 2 Plough Court, just off Lombard Street, London, in what was fast becoming the financial centre of England. His father (also Alexander, 1646–1717) 'was an honest merchant and dealt in Hollands wholesale' (Spence 1966: 7): that is, he dealt in linens, exporting them as far afield as

Virginia. The poet's mother, Edith (née Turner, d.1733), was just short of forty-five when he was born; the poet was her only child, though there was a surviving half-sister, Magdalen, from his father's earlier marriage (a half-brother, Alexander again, had died in infancy).

Though Pope's father was the son of an Anglican vicar, he converted to Catholicism, perhaps during European travels; his mother was from a family which divided along Catholic and Protestant lines. Catholicism caused the family many problems. Though the Civil War itself ended with the restoration of Charles II in 1660, the issues which had caused it continued to divide the nation for another century. Rumours of a Catholic plot to assassinate Charles in 1679 (the 'Popish Plot') had been used to foment some bitter anti-Catholic sentiment during the first half of the 1680s, and the accession of the Catholic James II in 1685 brought the threat of a renewed Civil War much closer. Three weeks after Pope's birth, James II's wife gave birth to a son, providing a Catholic heir to the kingdom. Shortly afterwards James was forced to abandon the throne in favour of his daughter Mary and her Protestant husband William of Orange, a 'Glorious Revolution' as it was known to its supporters, which paved the way for the Protestant succession, though a number of attempts to restore the Catholic line would be made, the last and most serious occurring a year after Pope's death.

In London especially, heavily punitive measures against Catholics were enforced immediately on the arrival of William and Mary. Pope's father had amassed about £10,000 from his business, a fortune large enough to enable him to retire from business in the face of this on-slaught, thus greatly diminishing the effects of the legislation on Pope's boyhood: Pope's family vacated Plough Court for Hammersmith some time around 1692, and the main danger to his early life seems to have come from a wild cow which attacked him while he was, rather picturesquely, 'filling a little cart with stones' (Spence 1966: 3). He retained great affection for the women of his close and protective household: his nurse, Mary Beach, his aunt Elizabeth Turner, and especially his mother, who lived with him until her death in 1733. A priest who knew him told Spence that Pope 'was a child of a particularly sweet temper and had a great deal of sweetness in his look when he was a boy' (Spence 1966: 5–6). Johnson reports that 'His voice, when he was young, was so pleasing that he was called in fondness the "little Nightingale"' (Johnson 1905: 83).

As a Catholic Pope could not attend mainstream schools and could not attend university. He was taught to read by his aunt, and had developed a very precise calligraphy by imitating the typography of printed books, a talent which he often used in designing his books in later life (Spence 1966:

12). At the age of about eight Pope began to learn Latin and Greek from a priest. He subsequently attended clandestine Catholic schools, one in Twyford, from where he was removed after being punished for writing a satire on his master (his earliest satiric venture), and one near Hyde Park Corner, from which he is supposed to have on occasion visited the theatre; he also saw his hero, John Dryden, once (Spence 1966: 25). Pope was dismissive of his formal schooling: 'God knows, it extended a very little way' (Spence 1966: 8). Indeed, he seems to have valued his independent exploration of literature as a positive escape from the prison-house of grammar-based education, a formal trap which he would later denounce more publicly (Spence 1966: 21–2). At the age of eight he had 'discovered' Homer through translation (much as Keats was to do more than a century later): John Ogilby's *Iliad* (1660) and *Odyssey* (1665) were huge volumes 'Adorn'd with Sculptures' (engravings), and Pope always 'spoke of the pleasure it then gave him, with a sort of rapture only on reflecting on it' (Spence 1966: 14). With George Sandys's illustrated *Ovid's Metamorphosis Englished* (1626), and Statius's *Thebaid,* the Homer texts formed a rich repository of Greek and Latin mythology and narrative which stimulated Pope's imagination through his early career and beyond.

(b) FOREST RETREATS

In 1698 Pope's father bought a house at Binfield, Berkshire, from his son in law, Charles Rackett, who had married Pope's half-sister Magdalen. This residence on an estate of some nineteen acres of land, close to Windsor with the forest, castle and river Thames to explore, had a determining influence on Pope, turning enforced removal from the capital into the very model of principled retreat, an idyll never entirely besmirched by later events. Though Pope's early works such as the *Pastorals* (1709) and *Windsor-Forest* (1713) derive much from literary models, they derive something from an acute observation of the heraldic colouring within the castle and the exercise of agriculture and rural sports in the forest.

Here Pope was free to educate himself: his father's library was well-stocked, and he began to purchase books on his own account, acquiring early editions of Chaucer, Herbert and Milton. His half-sister told Spence that he 'did nothing but write and read', and his own image of himself spending whole days reading under trees, nicely suggests the twin influences of reading and nature: 'I followed everywhere as my fancy led me, and was like a boy gathering flowers in the woods and fields just as

they fall in his way' (Spence 1966: 12, 13, 20). Having already developed a taste for English poets such as Waller, Spenser and Dryden, courtly and fantastic by turns, he described his years from the age of thirteen to twenty as 'all poetical', a voracious if sporadic 'ramble' through Greek, Latin, Italian and French poetry and criticism (Spence 1966: 19–20). At some point around 1703–04 he studied French and Italian in London, against the wishes of his family, concerned for his already insecure health (Spence 1966: 12–13).

The prelapsarian freedom which Pope remembered so fondly began to be eroded by two potent forces: illness, and a growing political sense **[163–71]**. About the time of the move to Binfield, Pope had the first major attack of the disease which was eventually to cripple him. Thought to be spinal tuberculosis, contracted through infected milk, 'Pott's disease' restricted his height to about four foot six, caused progressive curvature of the spine, and left him subject to severe headaches, fits, eye inflammations and respiratory problems. Though he surmounted these difficulties with exercise and fresh air, and experimented with various comic versions of his illness in private letters and in public poems, his sense of himself was deeply affected by his physical appearance. At the same time, the family's Catholicism (low-key and quietistic as it was) became a second marker of internal exile. His father's library contained much literature from the religious controversies of the seventeenth century, which Pope read, finding himself 'a Papist and a Protestant by turns, according to the last book I read' (*Letters* I: 453). The humanistic tolerance, self-knowledge and irony of Erasmus and Montaigne, both Catholics but men of principled independence of thought, offered an attractive route out of the morass of sectarian debate.

Pope's adolescence was also nurtured by a number of much older men with whom Pope became friendly and whom he impressed with his precocious reading and 'maddish way' (Spence 1966: 13). John Caryll, a local Catholic who was to play an important role in the genesis of *The Rape of the Lock* **[65–77]**, had a wide circle of literary acquaintance and it was probably he who introduced Pope to the most brilliant actor of the Restoration stage, Thomas Betterton (1635–1710), as well as that stage's most uncompromising dramatist, William Wycherley (1640–1716). Pope resisted the blandishments of both to write for the stage, but assisted both men in 'correcting' their verses, a troublesome task but one which testifies to the closeness of the literary friendships and Pope's rapid rise to esteem. His earliest surviving correspondence is with Wycherley, in whose company he roamed London (he was mocked as 'Wycherley's Crutch' by unsympathetic observers: Spence 1966: 35). Pope also knew Dr Samuel

Garth (1661–1719), patron of Dryden, physician, and wit, whose mock-heroic *The Dispensary* (1699) is one of the best models for comparison with Pope's own work in the genre, and Sir William Trumbull, a diplomat who had served with distinction under kings of violently different persuasions and who was now one of the twelve verderers of Windsor Forest. Benign, well-read and generous, Trumbull was an active nurturing force in Pope's development; they rode in the forest and talked literature 'almost every day' (Spence 1966: 31). William Walsh (1663–1708), similarly, showed Pope that it was possible to maintain a well-bred moderation in literature and politics, acting as a Whig M.P. under both William III and Anne, and being hailed by the Tory Dryden as the best critic of the age (Spence 1966: 32).

It was this circle of men to whom Pope submitted his early publishable literary efforts, for 'correction'; there is considerable surviving evidence of the close practical and technical attention Walsh in particular exercised over the *Pastorals,* the *Essay on Criticism* and *Sapho to Phaon.* Walsh had told Pope: 'that there was one way left of excelling, for though we had several great poets, we never had any one great poet that was correct – and he desired me to make that my study and aim' (Spence 1966: 32). Pope's one criticism of his master Dryden was that he wrote too quickly (Spence 1966: 24). Not that Pope spurned spontaneity: he claimed 'I began writing verses of my own invention farther back than I can remember'. But he had always been used to revising; his father set him verse exercises and was 'pretty difficult in being pleased and used often to send him back to new turn them' (Spence 1966: 7, 15). While still at school Pope wrote a play based on speeches from the *Iliad* for his schoolfellows to act, and completed another based on 'a very moving story in the legend of St Genevieve', as well as an epic poem, *Alcander,* in which, he smilingly recalled, he attempted 'to collect all the beauties of the great epic writers into one piece'. This four-book epic he later burned, 'not without some regret'; some lines were salvaged for other work (Spence 1966: 15–18).

Pope practised the craft of writing by imitating that which pleased him most in his reading. His earliest surviving poem is a verse paraphrase of a prayer from the Christian mystic Thomas a Kempis, not published in his lifetime and a rare indication of his religious background. Most of his early translations are from pre-Christian writers, notably Ovid, from whose *Metamorphoses* he produced some tales of monstrous or misdirected sexual activities when he was about fourteen (the most interesting of these, the story of the cyclops Polyphemus's love for Galatea, remained unpublished in his lifetime). It was also from Ovid that he translated, about 1707, *Sapho to Phaon* **[172, 194]**, an intriguingly expressive poem in