'WIT'S WILD DANCING LIGHT'
READING THE POEMS OF ALEXANDER POPE

WILLIAM HUTCHINGS

Cover image: Michael Dahl, 'Alexander Pope' (ca. 1727), https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Alexander_Pope_by_Michael_Dahl.jpg
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Introduction

Reading Pope

In her treatise on aesthetics, *Feeling and Form*, the twentieth-century philosopher Susanne K. Langer wrote that Wordsworth's 'Ode: Intimations of Immortality' conveys above all the joyous experience of having such a great idea as that which informs the poem—the 'excitement of it' (Langer 1963, p. 219). Wordsworth's 'Ode' is not so much an explication of the idea itself as an expression of the powerful feelings engendered by encountering the idea. As a student, my initial feelings on reading Alexander Pope were like that: I felt the excitement of meeting a poet whose writing expressed sheer verbal vitality. Gradually, as I gained more experience of reading and re-reading him, I came to see that his diversity of both subject-matter and genres was held together by this essential power. The world in which he lived supplied the material out of which he shaped his poetry. No poet was more a part of that world; no poet was more dynamically able to generate from it such exhilaration. I slowly realized that whatever attitude elicited the poem (be it satirical, laudatory, forensic, adulatory) was transformed by the intensity of his intellectual and artistic accomplishment. For example, the deterioration of his friendship with Joseph Addison into something close to enmity—however justified or unjustified, however rightful or shameful—was transfigured by what he made of it through his utter command of the materials of poetic language into the portrait of Atticus in his *Epistle to Dr Arbuthnot* (1735). That immense power was what I initially experienced, the excitement of verbal energy: what Pope defines in book 1 of *The Dunciad* (1728–29 and 1743) as 'wit's wild dancing light'. Chapter 26 will examine how this phrase's ironic context further dramatizes its vibrant significance. For the moment, let us consider

the phrase for itself. The adjective 'wild' is guided by its position between the two nouns 'wit' and 'light' towards its positive sense of natural creativity (as in 'wild flowers'), rather than any tempestuous associations. 'Wit' carries, as it often did in eighteenth-century usage deriving from its Old English etymological root, the serious meaning of 'knowledge' or 'intellect', rather than superficial facetiousness. Like John Milton before him, Pope is ever conscious of language's vulnerability to the shifting sands of time. Language reflects the human condition of living with partial, not absolute, knowledge. The phrase's second adjective, 'dancing', brings in a feeling of movement as rendered by a present participle, and also an additional element of meaning. A couplet from Pope's earlier *An Essay on Criticism* defines one quality of good poetry: 'True ease in writing comes from art, not chance, / As those move easiest who have learned to dance' (lines 362–63). Nature and art both manifest beauty; and both lie at the heart of Pope's phrase, as definitions of the 'light' of knowledge. The phrase as an entity is held together by euphony of consonants (/w/,/d/, and /l/) and vowels (long and short /i/), and consists of parts set in an order which reflects and expresses its meaning: that enlightenment is achieved by a dynamic combination of natural and artistic vitality. The phrase is a compact cell, active within the body of the whole poem.

This book is an attempt to set out how, and how consistently, Pope so constructed the substantial edifice of his poetry. How could this best be done? Because 'the source, and end, and test of art' (*An Essay on Criticism*, line 73) is the nature of the poetic expression, I felt that my method had to be, at heart, a close reading of his work. So, I decided that I would take each of his major poems in chronological order (or approximately so) and examine in detail a number of extracts. I hope the result is that, to some degree, 'Parts answering parts' might 'slide into a whole' (*An Epistle to Burlington* (1731), line 66) as regards both the poem and the *oeuvre*. We have to learn how to read Pope before we can articulate with confidence an overall vision. Each chapter begins with a brief contextual explanation, and lists the passages selected for discussion. I hope that, by following Pope through individual poems and a whole career, a picture will emerge of a great artist at work.

The remainder of this Introduction will attempt to lay the foundations of the book by addressing the essential building blocks of Pope's poetry:

his use of the couplet, his forging of couplets into sustained verse-paragraphs, and the key forms of his writing in his final full decade, the 1730s. En route, some of the literary devices—figures, syntactic structures, and genres—he uses most often are defined and exemplified.

The Couplet

Nearly all Pope's poems are written in rhyming couplets of ten-syllable lines. These lines take the form of, or present variations upon, iambic pentameters: that is, five measures of alternating an unstressed and a stressed syllable. Pope begins his *Prologue* to Joseph Addison's play *Cato* (1713) with a regular example. The aim of tragedy, he says, is 'To wake the soul by tender strokes of art'. The line invites being read with stresses on 'wake', 'soul', 'ten-', 'strokes', 'art'. These are the important words: one verb, three nouns, and one adjective naturally stressed on its first syllable. The line appropriately sets the fundamental metrical pattern for the play it introduces. *Cato* is, like so much English drama, written in blank verse: unrhymed five-stress lines. Pope tells the audience what to expect from the play, and shows how it will sound.

But no play really consists of the unbroken sequence of such lines; nor does *Cato*'s *Prologue*. Here is Pope's full opening couplet:

> To wake the soul by tender strokes of art,
> To raise the genius, and to mend the heart.

The important words in the second line are 'raise', 'genius', 'mend', 'heart': two verbs and two nouns, the first of which ('genius') is naturally stressed on its first syllable. 'Genius' is here pronounced as two syllables rather than three in order to preserve the regularity of the metre. This practice of running adjacent sounds into one another, common among eighteenth-century poets, is called 'elision'. This line therefore has four stressed and six unstressed syllables. Pope gathers the stressed syllables in two matching compact structures: 'raise the genius' and 'mend the heart'. These are placed on either side of the line's caesura, its pause or break ('caesura' is Latin for 'cut'), indicated on the page by a comma and extended by the three successive weaker, unstressed syllables. The couplet's first line, in contrast, has no punctuation, thus inviting a smoother reading. An actor speaking the line might well pause very

briefly after the word 'soul' but will mark the next line's caesura with a more extended pause.

This couplet, then, exemplifies a principle of variation within regularity that lies at the heart of the couplet form; as we shall see, this is further elaborated when couplets join together to make longer stretches of writing and, ultimately, complete poems. One further observation should be made at this stage. The creative poet—and Pope is the supreme artist of the pentameter couplet—will use variation for expressive purposes. Pope diversifies the opening couplet of this *Prologue* to *Cato* not only for aesthetic and aurally pleasing purposes, important though such aims are. Addison's play depicts in the figure of Cato a man of supreme principle who, through his commitment to virtue, embodies resistance to tyranny. *Cato* is not concerned to move an audience by appeals to human sympathy; it demonstrates an ideal of statesmanship in the face of despotism and brute force. The hero represents a state's proper 'genius' in the sense of its prevalent and distinctive spirit or character. Samuel Johnson appropriately described the play as 'unquestionably the noblest production of Addison's genius'. Its magnificence lies in its depiction of intellectual and ethical splendour in the face of adversity. *Cato* is, Johnson writes, 'a succession of just sentiments in elegant language' (Johnson, I, 1925, p. 354).

Pope therefore adapts his language to match these qualities and to prepare an audience for what will be required of them: a commitment to virtue and principled idealism commensurate with that shown by the play's hero. *Cato* is about abstract values, and Pope's couplet also focusses on abstracts. The first line sets 'soul' within the elegance noted by Johnson ('tender strokes of art'); the second raises its rhetoric, in the original senses of eloquence and persuasion, through its stronger, more marked structure, while retaining abstract locution. A trio of infinitive verbs ('To wake', 'To raise', 'to mend') holds together the syntax of both lines. The rhyming nouns connect manner of writing ('art') to its object ('heart' in multiple senses, particularly courage). The full *Prologue* continues to define such idealism, both in individual lines, such as 'A brave man struggling in the storms of fate', and in vocabulary. The word 'virtue', for example, appears four times in its forty-six lines.

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The dual form of the couplet constantly prompts the reader to ask what, precisely, the relationship is between the individual lines and their constituent parts. Do they complement one another, or do they—to some degree—present contrast? In the former case, the rhyme that locks the two lines together serves as an auditory sign of congruence, a satisfying resolution of stages of the argument. Such a balanced structure is a civilized, thoughtful procedure: argument by concurrence, by reflective harmony. The mind, like the poetry, is at ease with itself. In the case of a contrast, the same structure becomes an antithesis, a sharpening of ideas by means of differing meanings. These may range from subtle shifts of emphasis, to fuller qualifications, to outright denial and contradiction.

The following couplet, from the fourth epistle of *An Essay on Man* (1733–34, lines 323–24), occurs within a passage seeking to define how virtue demonstrates itself in human actions:

> Never elated, while one man's oppressed;
> Never dejected, while another's blessed.

Some individual words in the two lines express difference: 'Elated'/'dejected'; 'one man's'/'another's'; 'oppressed'/'blessed'. Others are repetitions: 'Never', 'while'. The syntax and metre are exactly parallel in all four half-lines, with the slight exception of 'one man's' nearly equal stresses against 'another's' stress on the middle syllable alone. The full lines are yoked together at their beginning and end. The repetition of 'Never' is an example of a device commonly employed in Pope's poetry, known technically as *anaphora*: repetition of a word or set of words in successive clauses. Here, inversion of normal iambic rhythm, so that the first syllable receives strong emphasis, adds force to the parallel, driving the two lines along. Then the rhyming words bring the couplet together. The joint result of how the couplet is written is a resolution of potential differences. In our lives, we meet or hear of instances when people are weighed down by adversity or distress; on the other hand, more happily, fortune can smile on people. In either case, we should temper our responses accordingly. Each line sets a limit, with a resultant concord that we may define as moderation or due proportion.

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When Sir Isaac Newton died in 1727, Pope wrote an epitaph intended for his tomb in Westminster Abbey. It is in two parts. Firstly, a Latin portion has time, nature, and heaven bearing witness to his immortality, followed by the stone itself acknowledging his mortality. Secondly, Pope appends an English couplet:

> Nature and Nature's Laws lay hid in Night.
> GOD said, *Let Newton be!* And all was Light.

The elemental rhyme here is a perfect manifestation of the creative power to harmonize opposites. Given Newton's work on optics, in addition to his mathematical analysis of the structure of the known universe, the resultant enlightenment is doubly appropriate. 'Nature' and '*Newton*' are the only disyllables in the couplet, and also happily match each other phonetically and metrically. The exclamation itself alludes to the divine fiat of Genesis 1.3 ('Let there be light'), perhaps a step too far for the intended ecclesiastical setting. Nonetheless, the couplet reads clearly as a supreme panegyric: an elevated testimony of praise.

And yet, as Pope was of course fully aware, he had earlier, in *The Rape of the Lock*, written a daringly comic paraphrase of the same biblical verse in his account of a game of cards: 'Let spades be trumps! She said, and trumps they were' (canto 3, line 46). There is no reason to believe that the Newton epitaph is anything other than sincere; but it is also true that Pope's muse repeatedly draws his poetry towards the comic, sometimes even in the darkest of contexts. Would it be going too far to suggest that the sheer ease of the couplet—exemplified in the simple conjunction 'and' and the sense of inevitability it smoothly enacts—risks dallying with glibness? God the great magician, plucking a Newton like a white rabbit out of a hat?

That it is possible to raise such questions should help to counter a charge sometimes made about Pope's poetry: that it is always *didactic*, teaching lessons and providing instructions for living. A couplet may take on the quality of an *aphorism*: that is, a concise generalization. But aphorisms themselves are more open to further questioning and scrutiny than is commonly assumed. Chapter 11 will examine the term further. The main point is that the process of condensing ideas into a brief single statement inevitably excludes possible qualifications, complications or consequences. It should therefore initiate, not foreclose, further thought.

A full reading of Pope's poetry actually necessitates a reader's inquiry: it is a challenge, as properly intellectual writing should always be.

The Verse-Paragraph

Pope's couplets are rarely literary items by themselves. His epitaph on Newton is one of a relatively small number. His regular procedure is to build couplets into larger units: the equivalents of prose sentences taking their place in the development of a paragraph. We shall begin with an example of his inclination to find the comic in his world: the opening paragraph of canto 3 of *The Rape of the* Lock (1714).

> Close by those meads, for ever crowned with flowers,
> Where Thames with pride surveys his rising towers,
> There stands a structure of majestic frame,
> Which from the neighbouring Hampton takes its name.
> Here Britain's statesmen oft the fall foredoom
> Of foreign tyrants, and of nymphs at home;
> Here thou, great ANNA! Whom three realms obey,
> Dost sometimes counsel take—and sometimes tea.

The paragraph is divided into two halves by the full-stop. In his first four lines, Pope adopts the roles of pastoral and topographical poet, and of cultural tourist guide. All good pastoral poetry has its fair share of 'meads' (an alternative form of 'meadow' from its earliest appearances in medieval writing, handy for poets needing a monosyllable); and flowers as crowning the ground is a nice elevation and ornamentation. For example: 'The turf with rural dainties shall be crowned'. Author? Pope himself. It is line 99 of 'Spring' from his Pastorals, the group of four poems whose appearance in Jacob Tonson's *Miscellanies* (1709) marked Pope's entrance into the field of poetry. The verb is very neat in the paragraph above because it is building up to a royal palace—'a structure of majestic frame'—in a phrase matching the grandeur implicit in the root meaning of 'majestic'. Hampton Court is a source of 'pride', indeed, as a personified Father Thames recognizes.

Pope is, self-consciously and deliciously, leading us up the primrose path to his second *quartet* (that is, group of four lines), linked by the anaphora of 'Here' and taking up from 'Where' and 'There'. Each couplet sustains an elevated level until its final half line, where metrically

matching phrases ('nymphs at home'; 'sometimes tea'—tea was then pronounced 'tay') act as limp afterthoughts, demeaning, questioning and belittling the assumed dignity that precedes them. The two phrases together reflect equivocal social attitudes inhabiting the world of Hampton Court, apparently in thrall to brittle sentiments: that value lies in 'cups and spoons' (canto 3, line 105), and that young women may legitimately be called 'nymphs'. This word, liberally scattered through the poem, originally derived from a classical term for female spirits positively animating the natural world. In some English poetry from the Elizabethan period onwards, however, it began to acquire dubious associations, often in order to prettify, and so patronize. Such language sits uneasily alongside the statesmanlike tasks of opposing tyranny and offering the monarch mature advice. It is notably absent from *The Rape of the Lock*'s principal ethical voice, that of Clarissa, who delivers her speech at the start of canto 5, although it is ironically used by the narrator to introduce her. This is the last passage Pope wrote, adding it to the 1717 version 'to open more clearly the MORAL of the poem', as a note from its editor, William Warburton, says (see Chapter 5).

These are examples of *bathos*. Pope's mock-serious *Peri Bathous: or, Martinus Scriblerus, His Treatise of the Art of Sinking in Poetry*) was one of the principal products of the Scriblerus Club. He invents the term *bathous* as a parody of *Peri Hypsous*, a guide to the sublime style usually attributed to the third-century critic Longinus. Bathos signifies a sudden descent from dignified language to the banal or commonplace. This, Martinus Scriblerus/Pope informs us, is 'the natural Taste of Man, and in particular, of the present Age' (Cowler 1986, p. 188). The Scriblerus Club, formed in 1713, was a group of like-minded writers: Pope, Dr John Arbuthnot, John Gay, Thomas Parnell, Jonathan Swift, and the politician Robert Harley. Their aim was to subvert the pretensions and pedantry of contemporary writing and bring it down to—preferably beneath—earth. The chief target of *Peri Bathous* is bad writers who cannot tell the difference between registers of language. In *The Rape of the Lock*, the issue is more than linguistic: Pope is using humour to raise questions about current social and ethical attitudes of those in positions of power.

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The comic is an essential component of satire, the genre of writing with which Pope has become most commonly associated. This, I hope the chapters constituting the main body of this book will show, is both true—up to a point—and misleading, if by satire we understand a consistently hostile and demeaning approach to the people and ideas with which his poetry engages. But, yes, Pope is a master of the satirical mode as properly understood. Here is a paragraph from his *Epistle to Burlington* (lines 133–40), a witty and excoriating analysis of the grotesque lengths to which the ignorant rich will pursue their misplaced idea of taste: more money than sense, let us say. The second half of the poem describes the villa and gardens of one such man, 'Timon', including his library:

> His study! with what authors is it stored?
> In books, not authors, curious is my lord;
> To all their dated backs he turns you round:
> These Aldus printed, those Du Suëil has bound.
> Lo some are vellum, and the rest as good
> For all his Lordship knows, but they are wood.
> For Locke or Milton 'tis in vain to look,
> These shelves admit not any modern book.

Pope's couplets are an ideal form for satire because their dual or antithetical structure echoes, and often expresses, satire's conceptual core: that exposure of vice and folly is predicated on belief in their opposites, virtue and wisdom. The first couplet of this paragraph sets that principle out in clear terms. Its first line poses the kind of question any visitor might ask, Pope's voice adopting that of general enquiry. The second line then comes in with a reply which gets directly to the heart of the issue, and of the satirical judgement, through a distinction between 'books' and 'authors'. Authors are the writers, the people who are seeking to inform, present ideas or entertain. By 'books' Pope means books as objects. The second couplet explains: their value for Timon lies in the quality and monetary value of their production. Aldo Manutio ('Aldus') was a highly respected and historically significant Venetian printer of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. Augustin Deseuil ('Du Suëil') was a French bookbinder of the early eighteenth century and, so, a well-regarded contemporary. Books are Timon's equivalent of the exotic and rich objects which crowd Belinda's dressing-table in *The Rape of the Lock* ('the various offerings of the world'; canto 1,

line 130). They are the accoutrements of (in Belinda's case) fashionable living and (in Timon's) ostentatious wealth. Books are commodities, of value for their material presence and not for their contents.

The third couplet adds a joke about the habit some such collectors acquired of filling shelves with painted 'books' of wood in order to give the impression of a well-stocked library. All they achieve is to demonstrate the superficiality and stupidity of their owners' minds and taste: wooden 'books' for wooden heads. The final couplet further exemplifies the problematic matter of value: John Locke and Milton represent high points in recent (late seventeenth-century) philosophical writing and epic poetry. They are voices of considerable force within modern culture but of no consequence as objects of historical significance. They lack 'dated backs', elegant printing and fine binding. Throughout the lines Pope's satirical observation is that, in every way, Timon's taste manifests the opposite of a proper value system. Books are, or should be, conveyors of a vibrant intellectual world. A fundamental irony underlies the satire. The truth is the opposite of Timon's display: books are sources of ideas, stimulators of thought, products of the human mind.

A concern with the nature of good writing and useful books runs through Pope's work from his early *An Essay on Criticism* (1711) to *The Dunciad* (1728–29 and 1743). This is a natural enough subject for a critical poet such as Pope, for whom the purpose and quality of writing are to a large extent that of which his life consists. The particular force of his engagement is conveyed by a constantly vigorous display of his own artistry: he shows in his work what poetry should be—a free play of the committed mind—within both satire and panegyric. He does more than expose and comment on cultural contests: he takes part in them. So, in this paragraph, the sheer vivacity and lucidity of his writing represent the true values denied by Timon's perversion of them. We can point to the lines' rhythmic variety, where an opening couplet marked by 'irregularity' (syllabic structures of 3/7 and 2/3/5) suitable to an exclamatory and questioning tone gradually gives way to a very smooth and elegant fourth couplet. We can see how repetition and echo provide connections: the reiteration of 'authors' in lines one and two; the 'books'/ 'backs' internal pararhyme (that is, chiming of consonants accompanied by variation in vowels), followed up by a similar pattern in the seventh line's 'Locke'/ 'look'; the singular form of 'books' with

which the paragraph ends. We can note the satisfying balance of syntax in the fourth line ('These Aldus printed, those Du Suëil has bound'), whose five/five syllabic structure is followed in the very next line ('Lo some are vellum, and the rest as good'), so providing harmony at the heart of the paragraph and as the peak of the comedy is reached. This is virtuoso, alert, writing.

Genres: Epistle, Imitation

The *Epistle to Burlington* is one of a whole series making up a significant proportion of Pope's *oeuvre*. The genre dominates his work in the 1730s. For Pope, verse epistles are organized, civilized communications which bind together key figures in his circle: Henry St John, Viscount Bolingbroke, his 'guide, philosopher, and friend' (epistle 4, line 390), to whom the large-scale *An Essay on Man* is addressed, aristocrats such as Richard Boyle, Earl of Burlington and Allen, Lord Bathurst, long-term friends such as Martha Blount, and professionals such as Dr Arbuthnot. Friendship is the principal connection and the central theme. The epistles as an ensemble represent a valued group of (mainly) like-minded enlightened people. They form an antidote to the nation's Timons.

These epistles allow Pope to pursue arguments and ideas in a relatively relaxed, but still intellectually structured, way.

> On human actions reason though you can,
> It may be reason, but it is not man.

An Epistle to Cobham, lines 25–26

Pope is here responding to Richard Temple, Lord Cobham's hostile stance towards those who spend too long 'to books confined' (line 1). He agrees, but also proposes a qualification, that it is possible to go to an opposite extreme by relying wholly on observation of people's actual behaviour: 'Men may be read, as well as books, too much' (line 10). Why is this the case?

The couplet provides a compact, forceful answer: you can apply reason to a study of people's actions, but this is to assume that reason can explain human behaviour. If you think it can, you've got your wires crossed, confusing reason with human nature. To express this, Pope deploys one of his favourite literary devices, a *chiasmus*. Chiasmus is

the Greek for 'crossing', and signifies a pattern in which the word-order of the first part of a statement (or sentence, or clause, or line of verse) is reversed in the second. Here, 'human actions' correspond to 'man' ('man' is, indeed, part of 'human'), the word 'reason' is repeated within the lines, and two simple auxiliary constructions connect the two parts of the statement ('you can', 'It may be'). We can represent the full structure algebraically: a b c b a ('human'/'reason'/'you can'/'It may be'/'reason'/'man'). The chiasmus does not just describe getting one's wires crossed: it enacts it verbally.

Chiasmus can be short and clear, as in the Cobham example, or complex, as in this example from the fourth epistle of *An Essay on Man*, where Pope is examining the limited and ephemeral nature of celebrity:

> What's fame? a fancied life in others' breath,
> A thing beyond us, even before our death.
> Just what you hear, you have, and what's unknown
> The same (my Lord) if Tully's, or your own.
> All that we feel of it begins and ends
> In the small circle of our foes or friends;
> To all beside as much an empty shade,
> An Eugene living, as a Caesar dead,
> Alike or when, or where, they shone, or shine,
> Or on the Rubicon, or on the Rhine.

<div align="right">lines 237–46</div>

The two examples of fame are Prince Eugene of Savoy, who commanded the Imperial Forces in alliance with the Duke of Marlborough during the War of Spanish Succession, and Julius Caesar. The latter, of course, is dead, whereas Prince Eugene was still living when the *Essay* was written and published. Pope's point is that fame is, and always has been, limited in range and in time, whichever way you look at it. If you do not agree, you are just confused. To express this, he gives us two overlapping examples of chiasmus, one representing time ('when'), the other place ('where'). Eugene's martial exploits were around the river Rhine; Caesar's famous action was crossing the Rubicon. Eugene is living and so should be represented by a present tense ('shine'); Caesar, as a figure from ancient history, needs a past tense ('shone'). So we have the following patterns: 'Eugene'/'Caesar'/'Rubicon'/'Rhine' (a b a), and 'living'/'dead'/'shone'/'shine' (c d c). Pope then integrates the

two, resulting in the pattern Eugene (a), living (c), Caesar (b), dead (d), shone (d), shine (c), Rubicon (b), Rhine (a). By expanding chiastic style into a quartet, Pope slows the pace of the poem, adding weight to it. In comparison, the couplet in *An Epistle to Cobham* flows more rapidly. The internal rhyme of 'shone'/'shine', 'Rubicon', 'Rhine' is, we may additionally note, not a chiasmus: the past tense and present tense ('when') succeed each other in the same order as the places ('where') do: Caesar shone on the Rubicon, Eugene shine[s] on the Rhine. So, a further variety is included within the whole structure. *An Essay on Man* is, as its title indicates, a more formally intellectual poem than the more relaxed *Epistle to Cobham*. Pope chooses a relatively straightforward single chiasmus for the verse letter, and an intensely intricate structure for the essay. The styles of writing reflect the nature of the poems. *An Essay on Man* addresses hard questions seriously. The poetry challenges us to think seriously about them, here by expressing a form of controlled confusion.

<p style="text-align:center">***</p>

Some of the epistles Pope wrote in the 1730s take their cue from satires and epistles by the first-century BCE Roman poet Horace. The result was a series of *Imitations of Horace* (1733–38), which constitute a group of their own, with particular aesthetic qualities. They differ from translations by being much freer, adaptations with contemporary addressees, references, and topical material. Pope's *Imitations* were published with the Latin originals on the verso (left) pages and the English version on the recto (right) pages. Horace referred to both his satires and epistles—he wrote two books of each—as 'sermones': that is, dialogues or chats. Pope adopts a similarly conversational, relaxed style and picks up Horace's themes of the state of society and personal identity. Crucially, Pope allows his poems to form a fluid relationship with the original, following and altering it as he sees fit.

For example, Pope's epistle to his young friend William Murray, a member of the political opposition to Robert Walpole's government, and a barrister who would go on to enjoy a highly successful career as Solicitor-General and Lord Chief Justice, takes the form of an imitation of the sixth epistle of Horace's first book. Horace's poem opens with

the oft-quoted tag 'Nil admirari', which Pope—openly using the current standard translation by Thomas Creech—renders literally: 'Not to admire, is all the art I know, / To make men happy, and to keep them so.' Horace and Pope both recommend that we should not get carried away by any of the slick temptations to 'happiness' life offers—such as pursuit of wealth or (again) fame—all of which will ultimately prove to be vacuous. But Horace's economical 68 lines expand in Pope's version to 133, as is visually apparent in their original juxtaposed printing format, reproduced in the *Twickenham Edition* (Butt, ed., IV, 1939, pp. 236–46). Why? One reason is that Pope takes time to expose more fully and satirically the excesses of social corruption caused by selfish pursuit of gratification. Pope is more politically engaged than Horace.

Similarity to and diversion from the Latin poem invite readers who look across the pages as well as down them (or read Pope's poem alongside any of the easily available modern prose translations of Horace) to think about the relevance and effectiveness of more contemporary and precise social commentary. Pope's imitation brings ancient and modern together in their finales:

> If, after all, we must with Wilmot own,
> The cordial drop of life is love alone,
> And SWIFT cry wisely, 'Vive la bagatelle!'
> The man that loves and laughs, must sure do well.
> Adieu—if this advice appear the worst,
> Even take the counsel which I gave you first:
> Or better precepts if you can impart,
> Why do, I'll follow them with all my heart.

Pope's eight lines double Horace's four, each quartet representing two of Horace's lines. In accordance with this expansion of the original, Pope supplies two sources of advice. Wilmot is the Restoration poet John Wilmot, the Earl of Rochester, notorious for his amatory verses, discreetly glossed as recommending 'love' as the heart of good living. Jonathan Swift had told another Scriblerian, John Gay, that 'Long live trifles' was his maxim (Sherburn 1956, III, p. 298). The letter is dated July 1732. These are Pope's modern versions of Horace's single source (a certain Mimnermus) who proposed that nothing can be pleasurable without love and fun ('amore, iocisque'). Both poets then conclude by inviting their addressee to take their advice, unless he can come up with anything

better. Horace and Pope come together in a convivial, nonchalant tone consistent with that advice ('Nil admirari'): 'let's not take things too seriously'. When all is said and done, they suggest, we should be relaxed in our attitude to life. Pope explores some pretty troubling areas and engages in serious ethical discussion, but, ultimately, his stance tends towards the comic. Even in—what may seem to us—dark political and cultural conditions, loving and laughing are our best resource. That is what friends are for—in ancient Rome and modern Britain.

A Map of Pope's Poems

(Numbers in brackets refer to chapters in the present book; some poems appear under more than one heading.)

Genres

Pastoral/Georgic: *Pastorals* (1); *Windsor Forest* (4)

Ovidian Epistles: *Sappho to Phaon* (2); *Eloisa to Abelard* (7)

Essays: *An Essay on Criticism* (3); *An Essay on Man* (11)

Epic/Mock-Epic (or Mock-Heroic): *The Rape of the Lock* (5); *Homer's Iliad* (9); *The Dunciad* (26)

Epistles: *To Miss Blount, with the Works of Voiture* (15); *To Mr Jervas* (6); *To Miss Blount, on her Leaving the Town after the Coronation* (15); *To Mr Addison* (10); *To Robert, Earl of Oxford* (10); *To Richard Boyle, Earl of Burlington* (12); *To Allen, Lord Bathurst* (13); *To Sir Richard Temple, Lord Cobham* (14); *To a Lady* (15); *To Dr Arbuthnot* (19); *The Second Epistle of the Second Book of Horace Imitated*(21); *The First Epistle of the Second Book of Horace Imitated. To Augustus* (22); *The Sixth Epistle of the First Book of Horace Imitated. To Mr Murray* (23); *The First Epistle of the First Book of Horace Imitated. To Lord Bolingbroke* (24)

Elegies/Epitaphs: *To the Memory of an Unfortunate Lady* (8); *Epitaph on James Craggs* (10); *Epitaph Intended for Sir Isaac Newton* (Introduction)

Satires: *Epistle to Dr Arbuthnot* (19); *The First Satire of the Second Book of Horace Imitated* (16); *The Second Satire of the Second Book of Horace Imitated*

(17); *The Second Satire of the First Book of Horace Imitated* (18); *Epilogue to the Satires: Dialogues I and II* (25); *The Dunciad* (26)

Imitations of Horace: *The First Satire of the Second Book of Horace Imitated* (16); *The Second Satire of the Second Book of Horace Imitated* (17); *The Second Satire of the First Book of Horace Imitated* (18); *The First Ode of the Fourth Book of Horace* (20); *The Second Epistle of the Second Book of Horace Imitated* (21); *The First Epistle of the Second Book of Horace Imitated. To Augustus* (22); *The Sixth Epistle of the First Book of Horace Imitated. To Mr Murray* (23); *The First Epistle of the First Book of Horace Imitated. To Lord Bolingbroke* (24)

Themes

Art, Language and Writing: *Prologue to Mr Addison's Tragedy of Cato* (Introduction); An *Essay on Criticism* (3); *Epistle to Mr Jervas* (6); *An Epistle to Richard Boyle, Earl of Burlington* (12); *The Dunciad* (26)

Friendship: *An Essay on Criticism* (3); *To Mr Jervas* (6); *To Robert Earl of Oxford* (10); *An Essay on Man* (11); *Epistle to Dr Arbuthnot* (19); *The First Ode of the Fourth Book of Horace* (20); *The First Epistle of the First Book of Horace Imitated. To Lord Bolingbroke* (24)

Nature and State of Humankind: *An Essay on Man* (11); *To Richard Boyle, Earl of Burlington* (12); *To Allen Lord Bathurst* (13); *To Sir Richard Temple, Lord Cobham* (14); *To a Lady* (15); *The First Satire of the Second Book of Horace Imitated* (16); *The Second Satire of the Second Book of Horace Imitated* (17); *The Second Satire of the First Book of Horace Imitated* (18); *The Second Epistle of the Second Book of Horace Imitated* (21); *The First Epistle of the Second Book of Horace Imitated. To Augustus*(22); *The Sixth Epistle of the First Book of Horace Imitated. To Mr Murray* (23); *The First Epistle of the First Book of Horace Imitated. To Lord Bolingbroke* (24); *Epilogue to the Satires: Dialogues I and II* (25); *The Dunciad* (26)

Women in Society: *To Miss Blount, with the Works of Voiture* (15); *The Rape of the Lock* (5); *To a Lady* (15)