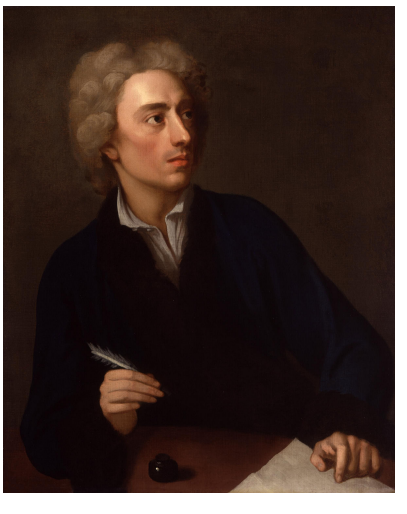
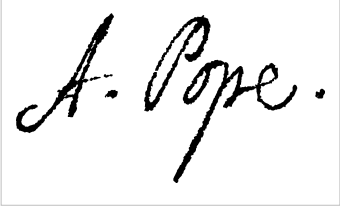


Alexander Pope

Alexander Pope	
	
Alexander Pope (c. 1727), an English poet best known for his <i>Essay on Criticism</i> , <i>The Rape of the Lock</i> and <i>The Dunciad</i>	
Born	21 May 1688 London
Died	30 May 1744 (aged 56) Twickenham (today an incorporated area of London)
Occupation	Poet
Signature	

Alexander Pope (21 May 1688 – 30 May 1744) was an 18th-century English poet, best known for his satirical verse and for his translation of Homer. Famous for his use of the heroic couplet, he is the third-most frequently quoted writer in *The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations*, after Shakespeare and Tennyson.^[1]

Life

Early life

Pope was born to Alexander Pope (1646–1717), a linen merchant of Plough Court, Lombard Street, London, and his wife Edith (née Turner) (1643–1733), who were both Catholics.^[3] Edith's sister Christiana was the wife of the famous miniature painter Samuel Cooper. Pope's education was affected by the recently enacted Test Acts, which upheld the status of the established Church of England and banned Catholics from teaching, attending a university, voting, or holding public office on pain of perpetual imprisonment. Pope was taught to read by his aunt, and went to Twyford School in about 1698/99.^[3] He then went to two Catholic schools in London.^[3] Such schools, while illegal, were tolerated in some areas.^[4]

In 1700, his family moved to a small estate at Popeswood in Binfield, Berkshire, close to the royal Windsor Forest.^[3] This was due to strong anti-Catholic sentiment and a statute preventing Catholics from living within 10 miles (16 km) of either London or Westminster.^[5] Pope would later describe the countryside around the house in his poem *Windsor Forest*. Pope's formal education ended at this time, and from then on he mostly educated himself by reading the works of classical writers such as the satirists Horace and Juvenal, the epic poets Homer and Virgil, as well as English authors such as Geoffrey Chaucer, William Shakespeare and John Dryden.^[3] He also studied many languages and read works by English, French, Italian, Latin, and Greek poets. After five years of study, Pope came into contact with figures from the London literary society such as William Wycherley, William Congreve, Samuel Garth, William Trumbull, and William Walsh.^{[3][4]}

At Binfield, he also began to make many important friends. One of them, John Caryl (the future dedicatee of *The Rape of the Lock*), was twenty years older than the poet and had made many acquaintances in the London literary world. He introduced the young Pope to the ageing playwright William Wycherley and to William Walsh, a minor poet, who helped Pope revise his first major work, *The Pastorals*. He also met the Blount sisters, Teresa and (his alleged future lover) Martha, both of whom would remain lifelong friends.^[4]

From the age of 12, he suffered numerous health problems, such as Pott's disease (a form of tuberculosis that affects the bone), which deformed his body and stunted his growth, leaving him with a severe hunchback. His tuberculosis infection caused other health problems including respiratory difficulties, high fevers, inflamed eyes, and abdominal pain.^[3] He grew to a height of only 1.37 m (4 ft 6 in) tall. Pope was already removed from society because he was Catholic; his poor health only alienated him further. Although he never married, he had many female friends to whom he wrote witty letters. Allegedly, his lifelong friend, Martha Blount, was his lover.^{[4][6][7][8]}



A likeness of Pope derived from a portrait by William Hoare^[2]

Early career

In May, 1709, Pope's *Pastorals* was published in the sixth part of Tonson's *Poetical Miscellanies*. This brought Pope instant fame, and was followed by *An Essay on Criticism*, published in May 1711, which was equally well received.

Around 1711, Pope made friends with Tory writers John Gay, Jonathan Swift, Thomas Parnell and John Arbuthnot, who together formed the satirical Scriblerus Club. The aim of the club was to satirise ignorance and pedantry in the form of the fictional scholar Martinus Scriblerus. He also made friends with Whig writers Joseph Addison and Richard Steele. In March 1713, *Windsor Forest* was published to great acclaim.^[4]

During Pope's friendship with Joseph Addison, he contributed to Addison's play *Cato*, as well as writing for *The Guardian* and *The Spectator*. Around this time he began the work of translating the *Iliad*, which was a painstaking process — publication began in 1715 and did not end until 1720.^[4]

In 1714, the political situation worsened with the death of Queen Anne and the disputed succession between the Hanoverians and the Jacobites, leading to the attempted Jacobite Rebellion of 1715. Though Pope as a Catholic might have been expected to have supported the Jacobites because of his religious and political affiliations, according to Maynard Mack, "where Pope himself stood on these matters can probably never be confidently known". These events led to an immediate downturn in the fortunes of the Tories, and Pope's friend, Henry St John, 1st Viscount Bolingbroke, fled to France.

Pope lived in his parents' house in Mawson Row, Chiswick, between 1716 and 1719; the red brick building is now the Mawson Arms, commemorating him with a blue plaque.^[1]

The money made from his translation of Homer allowed Pope to move to a villa at Twickenham in 1719, where he created his now famous grotto and gardens. Pope decorated the grotto with alabaster, marbles, and ores such as mundic and crystals. He also used Cornish diamonds, stalactites, spars, snakestones and spongestone. Here and there in the grotto he placed mirrors, expensive embellishments for the time. A camera obscura was installed to delight his visitors, of whom there were many. The serendipitous discovery of a spring during the subterranean retreat's excavations enabled it to be filled with the relaxing sound of trickling water, which would quietly echo around the chambers. Pope was said to have remarked that: "Were it to have nymphs as well – it would be complete in everything." Although the house and gardens have long since been demolished, much of this grotto still survives. The grotto now lies beneath Radnor House Independent Co-ed School, and is occasionally opened to the public.^{[6][9]}

Poetry

Essay on Criticism

An Essay on Criticism was first published anonymously on 15 May 1711. Pope began writing the poem early in his career and took about three years to finish it.

At the time the poem was published, the heroic couplet style in which it was written was a moderately new genre of poetry, and Pope's most ambitious work. *An Essay on Criticism* was an attempt to identify and refine his own positions as a poet and critic. The poem was said to be a response to an ongoing debate on the question of whether poetry should be natural, or written according to predetermined artificial rules inherited from the classical past.^[10]



Pope's house at Twickenham, showing the grotto.
From a watercolour produced soon after his death.



Plaque above Pope's grotto at Twickenham

The poem begins with a discussion of the standard rules that govern poetry by which a critic passes judgment. Pope comments on the classical authors who dealt with such standards, and the authority that he believed should be accredited to them. He discusses the laws to which a critic should adhere while critiquing poetry, and points out that critics serve an important function in aiding poets with their works, as opposed to the practice of attacking them.^[11]

The final section of *An Essay on Criticism* discusses the moral qualities and virtues inherent in the ideal critic, who, Pope claims, is also the ideal man.

Rape of the Lock

Pope's most famous poem is *The Rape of the Lock*, first published in 1712, with a revised version published in 1714. A mock-epic, it satirises a high-society quarrel between Arabella Fermor (the "Belinda" of the poem) and Lord Petre, who had snipped a lock of hair from her head without her permission. The satirical style is tempered, however, by a genuine and almost voyeuristic interest in the "beau-monde" (fashionable world) of 18th-century English society.^[12]

Dunciad and Moral Essays

Though the *Dunciad* was first published anonymously in Dublin, its authorship was not in doubt. As well as Theobald, it pilloried a host of other "hacks", "scribblers" and "dunces". Mack called its publication "in many ways the greatest act of folly in Pope's life". Though a masterpiece, "it bore bitter fruit. It brought the poet in his own time the hostility of its victims and their sympathizers, who pursued him implacably from then on with a few damaging truths and a host of slanders and lies...". The threats were physical too. According to his sister, Pope would never go for a walk without the company of his Great Dane, Bounce, and a pair of loaded pistols in his pocket.

In 1731, Pope published his "Epistle to Burlington", on the subject of architecture, the first of four poems which would later be grouped under the title *Moral Essays* (1731–35). In the epistle, Pope ridiculed the bad taste of the aristocrat "Timon". Pope's enemies claimed he was attacking the Duke of Chandos and his estate, Cannons. Though the charge was untrue, it did Pope a great deal of damage.



Alexander Pope, painting attributed to English painter Jonathan Richardson, c. 1736 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Essay on Man

The *Essay on Man* is a philosophical poem, written in heroic couplets and published between 1732 and 1734. Pope intended this poem to be the centrepiece of a proposed system of ethics that was to be put forth in poetic form. It was a piece of work that Pope intended to make into a larger work; however, he did not live to complete it.^[13]

The poem is an attempt to "vindicate the ways of God to Man," a variation on Milton's attempt in *Paradise Lost* to "justify the ways of God to Man" (1.26). It challenges as prideful an anthropocentric world-view. The poem is not solely Christian; however, it makes an assumption that man has fallen and must seek his own salvation.^[13]

It consists of four epistles that are addressed to Lord Bolingbroke. Pope presents an idea on his view on the Universe; he says that no matter how imperfect, complex, inscrutable and disturbing the Universe appears to be, it functions in a rational fashion according to the natural laws. The natural laws consider the Universe as a whole a perfect work of God. To humans it appears to be evil and imperfect in many ways; however, Pope points out that this is due to our limited mindset and limited intellectual capacity. Pope gets the message across that humans must accept

their position in the "Great Chain of Being" which is at a middle stage between the angels and the beasts of the world. If we are able to accomplish this then we potentially could lead happy and virtuous lives.^[13]

The poem is an affirmative poem of faith: life seems to be chaotic and confusing to man when he is in the center of it, but according to Pope it is really divinely ordered. In Pope's world, God exists and is what he centres the Universe around in order to have an ordered structure. The limited intelligence of man can only take in tiny portions of this order and can experience only partial truths, hence man must rely on hope which then leads into faith. Man must be aware of his existence in the Universe and what he brings to it, in terms of riches, power and fame. It is man's duty to strive to be good regardless of other situations: this is the message Pope is trying to get across to the reader.^[14]

Later life and works

The *Imitations of Horace* followed (1733–38). These were written in the popular Augustan form of the "imitation" of a classical poet, not so much a translation of his works as an updating with contemporary references. Pope used the model of Horace to satirise life under George II, especially what he regarded as the widespread corruption tainting the country under Walpole's influence and the poor quality of the court's artistic taste.

Pope also added a wholly original poem, *An Epistle to Doctor Arbuthnot*, as an introduction to the "Imitations". It reviews his own literary career and includes the famous portraits of Lord Hervey ("Sporus") and Addison ("Atticus"). In 1738 he wrote the *Universal Prayer*.^[15]

After 1738, Pope wrote little. He toyed with the idea of composing a patriotic epic in blank verse called *Brutus*, but only the opening lines survive. His major work in these years was revising and expanding his masterpiece *The Dunciad*. Book Four appeared in 1742, and a complete revision of the whole poem in the following year. In this version, Pope replaced the "hero", Lewis Theobald, with the poet laureate Colley Cibber as "king of dunces". By now Pope's health, which had never been good, was failing. When told by his physician, on the morning of his death, that he was better, Pope replied: "Here am I, dying of a hundred good symptoms."^{[16][17]} He died in his villa surrounded by friends on 30 May 1744, about eleven o'clock at night. On the previous day, 29 May 1744, Pope had called for a priest and received the Last Rites of the Roman Catholic Church. He was buried in the nave of the Church of England Church of St Mary the Virgin in Twickenham.

Translations and Editions

Translation of the Iliad

Pope had been fascinated by Homer since childhood. In 1713, he announced his plans to publish a translation of the *Iliad*. The work would be available by subscription, with one volume appearing every year over the course of six years. Pope secured a revolutionary deal with the publisher Bernard Lintot, which brought him two hundred guineas (£210) a volume, equivalent to about £26,500 as of 2013,^[18] a vast sum at the time.

His translation of the *Iliad* appeared between 1715 and 1720. It was acclaimed by Samuel Johnson as "a performance which no age or nation could hope to equal" (although the classical scholar Richard Bentley wrote: "It is a pretty poem, Mr. Pope, but you must not call it Homer.").

Translation of the Odyssey

Encouraged by the success of the *Iliad*, Pope translated the *Odyssey*. The translation appeared in 1726, but this time, confronted with the arduousness of the task, he enlisted the help of William Broome and Elijah Fenton. Pope attempted to conceal the extent of the collaboration (he himself translated only twelve books, Broome eight and Fenton four),^[19] but the secret leaked out. It did some damage to Pope's reputation for a time, but not to his profits.^[20]

Edition of Shakespeare's works

In this period, Pope was also employed by the publisher Jacob Tonson to produce an opulent new edition of Shakespeare. When it finally appeared, in 1725, this edition silently "regularised" Shakespeare's metre and rewrote his verse in a number of places.

Pope also demoted about 1560 lines of Shakespearean material to footnotes, arguing that they were so "excessively bad" that Shakespeare could never have written them. (Other lines were excluded from the edition altogether.) In 1726, the lawyer, poet and pantomime deviser Lewis Theobald published a scathing pamphlet called *Shakespeare Restored*, which catalogued the errors in Pope's work and suggested a number of revisions to the text.

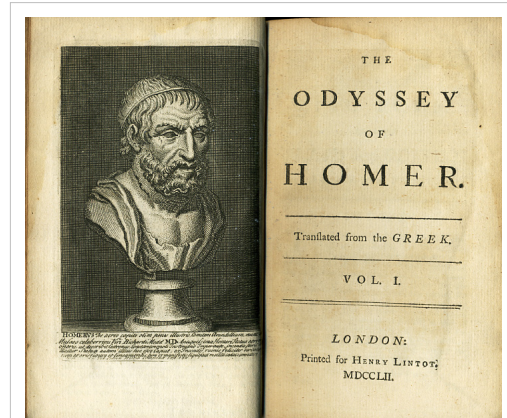
A second edition of Pope's *Shakespeare* appeared in 1728, but aside from making some minor revisions to the preface, it seems that Pope had little to do with it. Most later 18th-century editors of Shakespeare dismissed Pope's creatively motivated approach to textual criticism. Pope's preface, however, continued to be highly rated. It was suggested that Shakespeare's texts were thoroughly contaminated by actors' interpolations and they would influence editors for most of the 18th century.

Reception

Historic

By the mid-18th century new fashions in poetry emerged. A decade after Pope's death, Joseph Warton claimed that Pope's style of poetry was not the most excellent form of the art. The Romantic movement that rose to prominence in early 19th-century England was more ambivalent towards his work. Though Lord Byron identified Pope as one of his chief influences (believing his scathing satire of contemporary English literature *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* to be a continuance of Pope's tradition), William Wordsworth found Pope's style fundamentally too decadent a representation of the human condition.^[4] George Gilfillan in his study of 1856 described Pope's talent as 'a rose peering into the summer air, fine, rather than powerful,^[21]

In the 20th century Pope's reputation was revived. Pope's work was found to be full of references to the people and places of his time, and these aided people's understanding of the past. The postwar period stressed the power of Pope's poetry, recognising that Pope's immersion in Christian and Biblical



Frontispiece and titlepage of a 1752 edition of Alexander Pope's extensively annotated translation of Homer's *The Odyssey*.



The death of Alexander Pope from *Museus*, a threnody by William Mason. Diana holds the dying Pope, and John Milton, Edmund Spenser, and Geoffrey Chaucer prepare to welcome him to heaven.

culture lent depth to his poetry. Maynard Mack thought highly of Pope's poetry, arguing that Pope's moral vision demanded as much respect as his technical excellence. In the years 1953–1967 the production of the definitive Twickenham edition of Pope's poems was published in ten volumes.^[4]

Contemporary

Modern criticism of Pope focuses on the man, his circumstances and motivations, prompted by theoretical perspectives such as Marxism, feminism and other forms of post-structuralism. Brean Hammond focuses on Pope's singular achievement in making an independent living solely from his writing. Laura Brown (1985) adopts a Marxist approach and accuses Pope of being an apologist for the oppressive upper classes. Hammond (1986) has studied Pope's work from the perspectives of cultural materialism and new historicism. Along Hammond's lines, Raymond Williams explains art as a set of practices influenced by broad cultural factors rather than simply the vague ideas of genius alone.^[4]

In *Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (1985) Peter Stallybrass and Allon White charge that Pope drew upon the low culture which he despised in order to produce his own "high art". They assert Pope was implicated in the very material he was attempting to exclude, not dissimilar to observations made in Pope's time.^[4]

Feminists have also criticised Pope's works. Ellen Pollak's *The Poetics of Sexual Myth* (1985) argues that Pope followed an anti-feminist tradition, that regarded women as inferior to men both intellectually and physically. Carolyn Williams contends that a crisis in the male role during the 18th century in Britain impacted Pope and his writing.^[4]

Works

Major works

- 1709: *Pastorals*
- 1711: *An Essay on Criticism*^[22]
- 1712: *Messiah*
- 1712: *The Rape of the Lock* (enlarged in 1714)^[22]
- 1713: *Windsor Forest*^[22]
- 1715–1720: Translation of the *Iliad*^[22]
- 1717: *Eloisa to Abelard*^[22]
- 1717: *Three Hours After Marriage*, with others
- 1717: *Elegy to the Memory of an Unfortunate Lady*^[22]
- 1723–1725: *The Works of Shakespear, in Six Volumes*
- 1725–1726: Translation of the *Odyssey*^[22]
- 1727: *Peri Bathous, Or the Art of Sinking in Poetry*
- 1728: *The Dunciad*^[22]
- 1733–1734: *Essay on Man*^[22]
- 1735: *The Prologue to the Satires* (see the *Epistle to Dr Arbuthnot* and *Who breaks a butterfly upon a wheel?*)

Other works

- 1700: *Ode on Solitude*

Editions

- *The Works of Alexander Pope* vol 3 ^[23] vol 3 ^[24] v 9 of 10 ^[25] v 6 of 8 ^[26]

Footnotes


- [1] *Dictionary of Quotations* (1999)
- [2] NPG 299; Alexander Pope (<http://www.npg.org.uk/live/search/portrait.asp?search=ss&sText=Alexander+Pope&LinkID=mp03609&rNo=6&role=sit>)
- [3] Erskine-Hill, *DNB*
- [4] 'Alexander Pope', *Literature Online biography* (2000)
- [5] "An Act to prevent and avoid dangers which may grow by Popish Recusants" (3. Jac. 1, v). For details, see *Catholic Encyclopedia*, "Penal Laws" (<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11611c.htm>).
- [6] Gordon (2002)
- [7] 'Mount', *Britannica* (2009)
- [8] *The Life of Alexander Pope*, by Robert Carruthers, 1857, with a corrupted and badly scanned version available from Google Books (<http://books.google.com.ar/books?id=UgRLAAAAMAAJ>), or as an even worse 23MB PDF (http://books.google.com.ar/books/download/The_life_of_Alexander_Pope.pdf?id=UgRLAAAAMAAJ&hl=en&output=pdf&sig=ACfU3U1xx8C1GHcfKCibyC9_bPpW2YKyoA&source=gbs_summary_r&cad=0). For reference to his relationship with Martha Blount and her sister, see pp.64–68 (89th and following pages of the PDF). In particular, discussion of the controversy over whether the relationship was sexual is described in some detail on pp.76–78.
- [9] London Evening Standard 2 Nov 2010
- [10] Rogers (2006)
- [11] Baines (2001)
- [12] http://web.archive.org/web/20080531103412re_/www.english-literature.org/essays/alexander-pope.html
- [13] Nuttal (1984)
- [14] Cassirer (1944)
- [15] The Universal Prayer (http://freemasonry.bcy.ca/biography/pope_a/prayer.html)
- [18] UK CPI inflation numbers based on data available from Gregory Clark (2013), "What Were the British Earnings and Prices Then? (New Series)" (<http://www.measuringworth.org/ukearnncpi/>)" MeasuringWorth.
- [21] Gilfillan, George. *The Genius and Poetry of Pope*, The Poetical Works of Alexander Pope, Vol 11, 1856
- [22] Cox, Michael, editor, *The Concise Oxford Chronology of English Literature*, Oxford University Press, 2004, ISBN 0-19-860634-6
- [23] <http://books.google.com/books?id=W24VAAAAAYAAJ>
- [24] <http://books.google.com/books?id=vscIAAAAQAAJ>
- [25] <http://books.google.com/books?id=LCIJA AAAQAAJ>
- [26] <http://books.google.com/books?id=DKYDAAAQAAJ>

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External links

- Works by Alexander Pope (http://www.gutenberg.org/author/Pope,_Alexander) at Project Gutenberg
-  Lennox, Patrick Joseph (1911). "Alexander Pope". *Catholic Encyclopedia* **12**.
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- University of Toronto "Representative Poetry Online" page on Pope (<http://rpo.library.utoronto.ca/poet/263.html>)
- Pope's Grave (<http://www.poetsgraves.co.uk/pope.htm>)
- The Twickenham Museum (<http://www.twickenham-museum.org.uk/detail.asp?ContentID=19>)
- Pope's Grotto Preservation Trust (<http://www.popesgrotto.org.uk/>)
- Richmond Libraries' Local Studies Collection. Local History (http://www.richmond.gov.uk/local_history_a_pope.pdf). Accessed 2010-10-19
- Archival material relating to Alexander Pope (<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/nra/searches/subjectView.asp?ID=P23191>) listed at the UK National Archives
- Portraits of Alexander Pope (<http://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/person.php?LinkID=mp03609>) at the National Portrait Gallery, London
- Images relating to Alexander Pope ([http://viewfinder.english-heritage.org.uk/search/results.aspx?index=0&mainQuery=Alexander Pope&searchType=all&form=basic&theme=&county=&district=&placeName=](http://viewfinder.english-heritage.org.uk/search/results.aspx?index=0&mainQuery=Alexander+Pope&searchType=all&form=basic&theme=&county=&district=&placeName=)) at the English Heritage Archive
- Blue Plaque (<http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/discover/blue-plaques/search/pope-alexander-1688-1744>) at 110 Chiswick Lane South, Chiswick, London W4 2LR

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