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**“Th’ Estate Which Wits Inherit After Death”:  
Immortality in Pope’s *Temple of Fame* and the “Battle of the Books”**

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**“Th’ Estate Which Wits Inherit After Death”:  
Immortality in Pope’s *Temple of Fame* and the “Battle of the Books”**

**by**

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## **Dedication**

To James Cox and Edna Francis, for opening many unexpected doors.

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## Abstract

### **“Th’ Estate Which Wits Inherit After Death”: Immortality in Pope’s *Temple of Fame* and the “Battle of the Books”**

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2015

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In this report, I examine Alexander Pope’s *Temple of Fame* in terms of its rhetorical structure as well as its “place” in the post-classical canon. I offer three critical assessments: 1) that Pope’s poem frames itself as a response to Swift’s “Battle of the Books” within the historical moment of a Humanist split; 2) that both Swift’s text and Pope’s represent literary immortality as a central problem in the Ancient-Modern controversy; and 3) that Pope’s poem consciously locates itself within a classical and Humanist tradition of literary self-eternization. I suggest that for Pope, the significance of the Ancients was not merely their primacy or objective excellence, but also their status as a foundation on which the very possibility of literary immortality was predicated. Pope’s *Temple*, understood in the context of the “battle,” thus invites a reevaluation of the role of classical eternizing rhetoric both in shaping Pope’s own career and, more broadly, in defining the principles of Humanism.

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## Introduction

In 1711, the year he began work on *The Temple of Fame*, Alexander Pope was just twenty-three. Two more years would pass before his first meeting with Jonathan Swift, but we may reasonably suppose that he had already acquainted himself with some of Swift's writings, among them the irreverent *Tale of a Tub* and its addendum, "A Full and True Account of the Battel Fought last Friday Between the Antient and the Modern Books in St. James's Library." A fifth edition of these texts had been published the previous year, complete with a full apparatus of mock-critical marginalia and footnotes—the same elaborate rhetorical device that would eventually inform Pope's own *Dunciad Variorum*, and indeed the entire Scriblerian project. Pope himself, at twenty-three, was perhaps not yet quite ready to wage such open anti-critical warfare, but he was not standing on the sidelines, either. With regard to the long-standing *querelle des anciens et des modernes*, he had already set up camp on the side of the Ancients with the publication of his *Pastorals* in 1709.<sup>1</sup> His more recent *Essay On Criticism* quite openly confronted the local flare-up of the *querelle* to which Swift's *Tale* and "Battel" were also replies.

According to Joseph M. Levine, the controversy at this stage had less really to do with ancient and modern learning than with the fate of Renaissance Humanism. As it turned out, an inescapable paradox had always lurked at the core of the Humanist movement, in both its methods and its aims. On the one hand, the Christ Church wits and their fellow "Antients" sought a kind of communion with the classical world, a participation in its values and an ongoing conversation with its texts. On the other,

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph M Levine, *The Battle of the Books: History and Literature in the Augustan Age* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 182.



scholars like Wotton and Bentley sought to distance and historicize those same texts by replacing them within the remote—and now largely alien—cultural contexts that they had originally inhabited, and for which they had been written. The two visions turned out to be incompatible, and the result was a struggle over the merits of art and criticism whose echoes continued well into the eighteenth century. We know it today, after Swift’s lively depiction, as the “battle of the books.”

In this paper, I will examine one feature of the English “battle” that seemed to hold a special horror for poets like Swift and Pope: the threat that modern scholarship and criticism, with their disregard for canonicity, authority, and tradition, must overthrow a long-established classical and Humanist rhetoric of literary eternization, and so jeopardize or simply invalidate the cultural afterlives of both the “immortal” Ancients and their contemporary imitators. I will argue that Pope’s *Temple of Fame* engages just this aspect of the controversy, and indeed repeats, in a kind of still-life mirror, the essential rhetorical performance of Swift’s “Battel” itself, rallying classical eternizing tropes to defend the sacred precinct of Parnassus from the perceived encroachments of modern scholars and pedants. To the extent that any hope of poetic immortality was predicated upon “canonization” in the classical literary tradition, the Ancients possessed a real and godlike power over the afterlives of their devotees, but the tribute they required was an intertextual intimacy that had been founded on Humanist principles which were no longer fully tenable. Pope’s *Temple*, like Swift’s “Battel,” unwillingly acknowledges the essential paradox of the Humanist ideal. His architectural argument, more museum than Elysium, calls into question the very promise of classical literary immortality that it aims to enact, and what the *Temple of Fame* ultimately preserves is not the Ancients whose statues populate its galleries, but the inherent problem of the act of preserving.

## I. Petrarch's Intimate Cicero: Classical Afterlives in Humanism

The paradox that Levine identifies at the root of the “battle of the books” was not a new development in Humanist history. To the combatants, it no doubt appeared that the English battle was nothing more than another phase in the unremitting *querelle* over the relative merits of ancient and modern intellectual achievements.<sup>1</sup> But in fact conflicts arising from what I will here call the “Humanist paradox” had been going on far longer than the French *querelle*.<sup>2</sup> Anthony Grafton frames the problem from a Renaissance perspective: “One set of humanists seeks to make the ancient world live again, assuming its undimmed relevance and unproblematic accessibility; another set seeks to put the ancient world back into its own time, admitting that its reconstruction is a difficult enterprise and that success may reveal the irrelevance of ancient experience and precept to modern problems.”<sup>3</sup> In order to resurrect the classics from their long entombment, it seemed necessary to anatomize and dissect them. Thomas Greene has accordingly called the Renaissance a *disinterment*: an exhumation that was also, in theory, a revitalization or a rebirth.<sup>4</sup>

At first, the two aims of Humanism, on the one hand to assimilate and so recontextualize the classics and on the other to restore them to their proper historical context, appeared to go hand in hand. But classical scholarship had an insidious way of

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<sup>1</sup> John F Tinkler, “The Splitting of Humanism: Bentley, Swift, and the English Battle of the Books,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 49, no. 3 (Jul.-Sep., 1988), 453.

<sup>2</sup> Anthony Grafton, “Renaissance Readers and Ancient Texts: Comments on Some Commentaries,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 38, no. 4 (Winter, 1958), 646. Grafton, observing the ubiquity of “contradictory” humanist methods at work throughout Renaissance Europe, and noting analogues outside the Western canon as well, suggests that the paradox may be simply endemic to any movement that aims to recover “a distant, golden past, supposedly incarnate in a canon of classical texts” (646-7).

<sup>3</sup> Grafton, 620.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas M. Greene, “Petrarch and the Humanist Hermeneutic,” In *Petrarch*, edited by Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House Publishers), 108.

undermining the universality and timelessness that Humanism wished to claim for the Ancients. As Philology emerged as a set of professional disciplines<sup>5</sup> distinct from the “amateur” classical studies of gentlemen, wits, and poets, a divide began to open up between what might be termed two separate approaches to Humanism, one literary, the other scientific.<sup>6</sup> To the philologists, the literary approach appeared not merely naïve but often downright mistaken in its assessment of classical texts and artifacts. To the wits, on the other hand, the specialized work of the “Criticks” appeared pedantic and small-minded, and Philology was accused, as the modern sciences were in general, of examining the world through a microscope that augmented insignificant matters and obscured the larger picture. To probe and analyze texts rather than absorbing their moral and aesthetic teaching was, from the point of view of the Ancients, to reject the most sacred values of the Humanist movement. Swift captures the paradox succinctly in “The Battel” with a rebuke for the great philologist Richard Bentley: “Thy *Learning* makes thee more *Barbarous*, thy Study of *Humanity*, more *Inhuman*.”<sup>7</sup> Of course there was, and still is, plenty of room to argue about what exactly the ends and ideals of Humanist practice really were. I will suggest that one important effect of resurrecting the Ancients was the development of a new model of literary immortality, one that presupposed—and also relied upon—the possibility of achieving unmediated intimacy with classical texts.

If the Humanist movement can be traced back to any one particular moment in history, that moment would seem to be Petrarch’s discovery in 1345 of a collection of

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<sup>5</sup> The term “philology” at this time was used to designate the whole field of classical scholarship. See e.g. Michael Werth Gelber, “John Dryden and the Battle of the Books,” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 63, no. 1/2 (2000), 141.

<sup>6</sup> See Tinkler, 453-4.

<sup>7</sup> Jonathan Swift, “The Battle of the Books,” In *A Tale of a Tub: To which is added the Battle of the Books and the Mechanical Operation of the Spirit*, edited by A. C. Guthkelch and D. Nichol Smith (London, Oxford University Press, 1958), 252.

Cicero's personal letters in the Chapter Library at Verona.<sup>8</sup> Both the content and the rhetorical style of these letters would become powerful influences on Petrarch's later work, and whether one views Petrarch as the "first great Humanist" or merely one of the movement's founding fathers, it is certain that his reception of the Veronese manuscript—especially the *Letters to Atticus*—signaled a dramatic paradigm shift.<sup>9</sup> Even before the letters made their appearance, it would seem that Petrarch presented something of an anomaly among the players on the late medieval stage. Most scholars in the Middle Ages took little personal interest in the identity of the authors they read,<sup>10</sup> but for Petrarch identity and personality were primary inducements to the study of literature. He had loved Cicero from his childhood, and as a young man he made a point in all his journeys to visit any monastery he happened to pass, in order to seek out texts by his favorite ancient authors.<sup>11</sup> The collection of *Epistolae ad Atticum* was not indeed the first Ciceronian text Petrarch recovered from the dust of the old libraries; at Liège more than a decade earlier he had discovered the *Pro Archia*,<sup>12</sup> an unconventionally epideictic piece of court oratory in which Cicero expounds the virtues of poetry, especially poetry's ability to grant its subjects a kind of textual immortality. Later in this essay we will consider at some length the rhetorical interconnections between immortality, poems, and monuments, so it is worth noticing that in the *Pro Archia* Cicero explicitly urges the superiority of poetry over objects such as portraits, statues, and tombs as a preservational device, and hopes that the enduring power of text will grant him, too, an "undying

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<sup>8</sup> Martin Eisner, "In the Labyrinth of the Library: Petrarch's Cicero, Dante's Virgil, and the Historiography of the Renaissance," *Renaissance Quarterly* 67, no.3 (Fall 2014), 755. See also Carol Everhart Quillen, *Rereading the Renaissance: Petrarch, Augustine, and the Language of Humanism* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998), 106.

<sup>9</sup> See Ernest H. Wilkins, *Life of Petrarch* (University of Chicago Press, 1961), 51-2.

<sup>10</sup> Tinkler, 458

<sup>11</sup> Jerrold, 35.

<sup>12</sup> Eisner, 759n.

memory throughout the whole world.”<sup>13</sup> Later Humanists would make extensive use of the *Pro Archia* as a defense of poetry, as would Petrarch himself.<sup>14</sup> But it would not be the *Pro Archia*, but rather Petrarch’s later discovery at Verona, that would provide him with a direct model for inscribing his own literary immortality.

In their confessional quality, the letters to Atticus are a remarkable historical artifact. As Cicero’s biographer D. R. Shackleton-Bailey has remarked, “Nothing comparable has survived out of the classical world”: “no other Greek or Roman has projected himself into posterity like Cicero in his extant correspondence.”<sup>15</sup> The letters to Atticus were some of Cicero’s most private, and they reveal a side of the great orator that had been scrupulously concealed from most of his contemporaries.<sup>16</sup> To Atticus, Cicero confesses that

[t]hose brilliant, worldly friendships of mine may make a pretty fair show in public, but at home they are barren things. My house is crammed of a morning, I make my way down to the Forum surrounded by droves of friends, but in all the multitude I cannot find one with whom I can pass an unguarded joke or fetch a private sigh. That is why I am waiting and longing for *you*, why I now fairly summon you home.<sup>17</sup>

Although Petrarch’s happening upon this collection cannot exactly be called an accident, it was certainly fortuitous. Few scholars living in Petrarch’s age—or perhaps, for that matter, any subsequent age—could have responded more warmly than Petrarch did to the

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<sup>13</sup> Cicero, “Pro Archia,” In *Cicero: The Speeches*, translated by N. H. Watts (Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1935), XII.30. See also *Pro Archia* X.23-4. For discussions of the *Pro Archia* itself as a preservational text, see John Dugan, “How to Make (and Break) a Cicero: Epideixis, Textuality, and Self-fashioning in the Pro Archia and In Pisonem,” *Classical Antiquity* 20, no. 1 (April, 2001), 35-77, and also Spyridon Tzounakas, “The Peroration of Cicero’s ‘Pro Milone,’” *The Classical World* 102, no. 2 (Winter, 2009), 129-141.

<sup>14</sup> William Malin Porter, “Cicero’s Pro Archia and the Responsibilities of Reading,” *Rhetorica: A Journal of the History of Rhetoric* 8, no. 2 (Spring 1990), 137. Echoes of the *Pro Archia* may be heard distinctly, for example, in Philip Sidney’s *Apology for Poetry*.

<sup>15</sup> D. R. Shackleton-Bailey, *Cicero* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1971), xii.

<sup>16</sup> On Cicero’s intentions for publishing some of his letters, see Peter White, *Cicero in Letters: Epistolary Relations of the Late Republic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 91.

<sup>17</sup> *Ad Att.* I.18, translation by Shackleton-Bailey, 13.

intimacy the letters communicated. He at once wrote a letter of his own back to Cicero, “forgetting, as it were, the gap of time.”<sup>18</sup> “Now it is your turn,” he told his long-dead correspondent,

wherever you may be, to hearken not to advice but to a lament inspired by true love from one of your descendants who dearly cherishes your name, a lament addressed to you not without tears.<sup>19</sup>

This first letter was in part a rebuke for the fallibility and weakness that Cicero had disclosed to Atticus (and therefore now to Petrarch as well). “Indeed, beside myself, in a fit of anger I wrote to him as if he were a friend living in my time with an intimacy that I consider proper because of my deep and immediate acquaintance with his thought.”<sup>20</sup> Six months later, Petrarch wrote a second letter, this time an apology, as one seeking a reconciliation. He forgave Cicero and hoped to be forgiven in turn.<sup>21</sup>

For Petrarch, Cicero in the letters *Ad Atticum* seemed to have returned vividly to life. He felt that he knew Cicero’s mind “as though I had lived with you,”<sup>22</sup> and bore him “such love that you would think this kind of affection scarcely possible toward living men.”<sup>23</sup> In Kathy Eden’s words, Cicero’s letters demonstrated a power “to mitigate if not entirely erase temporal as well as spatial distance.”<sup>24</sup> The centuries that separate Petrarch from Cicero appear as easily traversed as the space that once separated Cicero from Atticus: the writer’s presence, almost his very self, lives on in his text.

In subsequent years, Petrarch went on to compose a whole collection of “Letters to Ancients,” addressing Virgil, Horace, Livy, and others as familiarly as he had already

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<sup>18</sup> *Fam.* 1.1, 12. Quotations from Petrarch, unless otherwise noted, are taken from the three-volume collection of *Letters on Familiar Matters*, translated by Aldo S. Bernardo (New York: Italica Press, 2005).

<sup>19</sup> *Fam.* 24.3, 317.

<sup>20</sup> *Fam.* 1.1, 13

<sup>21</sup> *Fam.* 24.4, 319-320.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> Tinkler, 458.

<sup>24</sup> Kathy Eden, *The Renaissance Rediscovery of Intimacy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 64.

addressed his beloved Cicero. What is more, he reasoned that if the Ancients had found ways to communicate themselves, their thoughts and feelings, through time and space to reach him in the fourteenth century, then he too could communicate not only with the past, but also with the future. He imitated Cicero's epistolary style in order to frame his own ostensibly candid *Familiar Letters* as a record of his character.<sup>25</sup> Toward the end of his life, he also wrote the remarkable, though incomplete, *Letter to Posterity*,<sup>26</sup> in whose opening paragraph he sets forth his objective of letting future readers come to know him by finding out, from his own pen, "what sort of man I was."<sup>27</sup> Petrarch's other writings, too, whether in poetry or prose, frequently invoke a dramatic sense of their author's presence. He desires his reader, for the duration of the reading, to put all personal thoughts aside and to "consider me alone [...] Even as he reads me, I want him to be with me."<sup>28</sup> Eden cites this passage among others in support of her claim that part of what Petrarch learned from Cicero, and bequeathed to posterity, was a "rhetoric and hermeneutics of intimacy."<sup>29</sup> I urge here a further point: that textual intimacy, as practiced and endorsed by Petrarch, helped to lay the foundations for a Humanist rhetoric of immortality.

Petrarch himself was an advocate of scholarship. The close relationship he had achieved with his favorite Ancients had, he said, been possible only "through lengthy study."<sup>30</sup> The paradox that would eventually split Humanism apart was therefore, as we see, already in play. For the reader to "be with" the writer, both parties must somehow inhabit the same world, yet the ancient world could not be reconstructed but by an

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<sup>25</sup> For a discussion of the dubiously "candid" nature of the letters, see Quillen, 110-11.

<sup>26</sup> Maud F. Jerrold, *Francesco Petrarca: Poet and Humanist* (London: J. M. Dent & Co, 1909), 213.

<sup>27</sup> Petrarch, "Epistle to Posterity" in *Letters from Petrarch*, translated by Morris Bishop (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1966), 5.

<sup>28</sup> *Fam.* 13.5.

<sup>29</sup> Eden, 50.

<sup>30</sup> Tinkler, 458.

architecture of prefaces, footnotes, marginalia, and other critical supports, all anathema to an immediate, ideal Petrarchan intimacy. As the several disciplines of classical scholarship began to come definitely into their own, the question arose: how much study was enough? And was not the pedantry of the philologists finally *too much*? Moreover, if the temporal gap between the present and the past should prove impossible to close—if the worlds inhabited by Ancients and Moderns were untranslatable to one another—then how could the Ancients live on through their texts? Would the new generations of critics finally undo all the labor of their Humanist forebears, and smother under obscure commentaries the very texts whose resuscitation had once been their whole *raison d'être*?

These are questions Swift would take up in his “Battel ... Between the Antient and the Modern Books,” and questions Pope, too, would endeavor to answer in his *Essay On Criticism*. As for the probability that any modern author might achieve immortality in the critical climate of post-Restoration England, Swift, ever the pessimist, expressed his doubts in *A Tale*'s sardonic “Epistle Dedicatory, to His Royal Highness Prince Posterity”—a very different sort of “letter to posterity” from Petrarch's. He believed that the “large and terrible Scythe” of Time would undoubtedly make short work of all the “mortal Ink and Paper of this Generation.”<sup>31</sup> Richard Bentley, with his usual gentility, condemned as “a downright barbarism” Swift's use of the phrase “my *cotemporary* brethren,”<sup>32</sup> but given the context it seems probable that Swift quite intended the pun: his contemporaries would be altogether *temporary*.

The joke, as always, is on the scribbling Moderns. Yet cavil as he might, Swift was no more indifferent than they were to the prospect of a literary afterlife. He would

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<sup>31</sup> Swift, *A Tale of a Tub*, 32.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 38 (emphasis mine).



no doubt be pleased to know that his letter to Posterity, however ironically framed, has after all—at least for the time being—arrived.

## II. A Brief Historical Sketch of the Battle of the Books

The episode of English history that Swift allegorized as a “battle of the books”<sup>1</sup> began in 1690 with the publication of a text that Pope would later identify as one of his favorite works of prose,<sup>2</sup> Sir William Temple’s *Essay upon the Ancient and Modern Learning*. Temple, a retired statesman, believed like most polite gentlemen of his age that the proper study of the classics consisted in acquiring no more scholarship than was necessary to form a just appreciation of their moral and aesthetic qualities. In the terms of the *querelle*, he came down firmly on the Ancient side, remarking in his *Essay* that although modern books “must have their Part too in the leisure of an idle man,” and might even be said to possess certain “Beauties” of their own, they could not compete in “Wit, Learning, or Genius” with the productions of the ancient world.<sup>3</sup> This opinion might in the long run have provoked less controversy had Temple not asserted further that “the oldest Books we have are still in their kind the best,”<sup>4</sup> and proceeded to offer Aesop’s *Fables* and Phalaris’ *Epistles*—“the two most ancient that I know of in Prose”—as evidence for his claim. The authenticity of Phalaris’ *Epistles* had been in doubt among scholars for some two hundred years,<sup>5</sup> and Temple knew it, but he felt sure that they were genuine:

I know several Learned men (or that usually pass for such, under the Name of Criticks) have not esteemed them Genuine, and *Politian* with some others have attributed them to Lucian, But I think he must have little skill in Painting, that

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<sup>1</sup> This chapter is heavily indebted to the work of Joseph M. Levine, who gives a detailed account of the “battle.” See his *Battle of the Books*, 13-180.

<sup>2</sup> J. E. Spingarn, Introductory Note to *Sir William Temple's Essay on Ancient and Modern Learning and on Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1909), iii.

<sup>3</sup> William Temple, “An Essay Upon the Ancient and Modern Learning,” In *Sir William Temple's Essay on Ancient and Modern Learning and on Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1909), 2.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>5</sup> Gelber, 141.

cannot find out this to be an Original; Such diversity of Passions upon such variety of Actions [...] could never be represented but by him that possessed them; and I esteem *Lucian* to have been no more Capable of Writing than of Acting what Phalaris did. <sup>6</sup>

Temple's *Essay* provoked a handful of replies,<sup>7</sup> the most notable of which was certainly William Wotton's 1694 *Reflections upon Ancient and Modern Learning*. Wotton argued contrary to Temple that the Moderns had indeed surpassed the Ancients in their philosophical and scientific achievements, albeit not yet in the arts.<sup>8</sup> But what seemed most to offend him was Temple's evident disdain for those so-called "Learned men," the "Criticks," whom he blamed for challenging the authority and authenticity of ancient texts like the letters of Phalaris. Wotton in reply did not merely defend his fellow critics and "Philologers," but insisted further that advancements in critical methodology had "enabled the Moderns to see the ancient world with a clarity denied to any of the Ancients." Of course it was impossible for a modern scholar to know any particular ancient author better than that author knew himself, but Wotton believed that classical scholarship had already gained a "comprehensive View of Antiquity" to which no individual in the ancient world had ever had access.<sup>9</sup>

For this kind of seemingly backwards argumentation, Temple had no patience. "[H]e must be a Conjuror," Temple writes, "that can make these Moderns, with their Comments and Glossaries, and Annotations, more learned than the Authors themselves."<sup>10</sup> Swift's *Tale of a Tub* would later take a similar view, heaping ironic praise on those Moderns who had "with unwearied Pains made many useful Searches into the weak sides of the *Antients*, and given us a comprehensive List of them," proving

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<sup>6</sup> Temple, 35.

<sup>7</sup> See Levine, 28-30.

<sup>8</sup> Gelber, 141-2.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Quoted in Levine, 42.

“beyond contradiction, that the very finest Things delivered of old, have long since been invented, and brought to Light by much later Pens.”<sup>11</sup> Lest we mistake Swift’s target, a marginal note in the text here reads: “*See Wotton of Antient and Modern Learning.*”

In a short time, a new edition of the *Epistles* of Phalaris appeared under the editorship of Charles Boyle, an undergraduate at Christ Church. Boyle did not insist that the letters were authentic, but he did confess to a rather unscholarly prejudice: “*Phalaris* was always a Favourite-book with me,” he writes; “[...] I had now and then indeed some suspicions that ‘twas not Genuine; but I lov’d him so much more than I suspected him, that I wou’d not suffer my self to dwell long upon em.”<sup>12</sup> Among the Ancients, such willful blindness, precipitated by the reader’s “love,” no doubt appeared a virtue. One detects here a touch of Petrarchan intimacy: to suspect Phalaris was tantamount almost to suspecting a friend. In any case, the question of authenticity seemed of no great importance, so long as the text retained its power of “bringing the Reader”—as a later translator of Phalaris would put it—“acquainted” with the Ancients.<sup>13</sup>

Wotton and Bentley, however, rallied to the philologist cause. In 1697, Bentley published his *Dissertations upon the Epistles of Phalaris [...] and the Fables of Aesop* along with the second edition of Wotton’s *Reflections*.<sup>14</sup> His aim was to show conclusively that Aesop’s and Phalaris’s works, which Temple had praised as the “oldest” and “best” among the classics, were in fact late forgeries.<sup>15</sup> The result was an admirable if rather undiplomatic scholarly essay, but as far as the Ancients were

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<sup>11</sup> Swift, *A Tale of a Tub*, 96-7.

<sup>12</sup> Quoted in Jack Lynch, “Preventing Play: Annotating the Battle of the Books,” *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 40 no. 3 (Fall 1998), 377.

<sup>13</sup> The translator is John Savage. He himself believed the letters were genuine, but added that even if they were not, they nevertheless “carry such an air of Antiquity, and are so built on the Customs, Manners, and History of those times that they might well pass for Originals, inasmuch as they contribute to our common end, of bringing the Reader acquainted with the Antients.” Quoted in Levine, 107n.

<sup>14</sup> Tinkler, 455.

<sup>15</sup> Gelber, 142.

concerned, Bentley had done little more than to confirm the general opinion that the fruits of philological erudition were nothing but contentiousness and pedantry.

It was during this same year that Jonathan Swift composed “The Battel” and *A Tale*, though neither would appear in print until 1704. As a young man, almost a decade earlier, Swift had set up as a secretary for William Temple at his Moor Park estate.<sup>16</sup> No doubt he had been following with both interest and indignation the progress of arguments succeeding Temple’s original *Essay*. Temple made no answer to Bentley (and probably deterred Swift, for the time being, from publishing his<sup>17</sup>), but the controversy went on all the same. Boyle and the Christ Church wits responded in 1698, and in 1699 Bentley returned with a much-expanded *Dissertation*.<sup>18</sup> When at last the anonymous *Tale* and “Battel” did appear in 1704, Wotton assailed these as well, in due “modern” fashion, by furnishing an apparatus of critical “Observations” to explain them.

Six years later, Swift would turn Wotton’s own rhetorical sword back against him by advertising the *Tale*’s latest edition “with explanatory Notes by W. W—tt—n” (and “others”). Many of the notes in the 1710 edition were indeed lifted wholesale from Wotton’s “Observations.” The others, no doubt, Swift himself supplied. Bentley fared still worse than Wotton in the final verdict of *A Tale*: his involved and lengthy commentaries, his marginalia and footnotes, and his prefaces and indexes were all lampooned relentlessly as either trivial or insidious subversions of the authors they pretended to explain. Thanks to the “most useful Labors and Lucubrations of that Worthy *Modern*, Dr. B—tly,” Swift wrote, ancient literature had been at last so

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<sup>16</sup> Levine, 110-11.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Tinkler, 455. See Charles Boyle, *Dr. Bentley’s Dissertations on the Epistles of Phalaris and the Fables of Aesop Examined*, and Richard Bentley, *Dissertations Upon the Epistles of Phalaris, Themistocles, Socrates, Euripides and Upon the Fables of Aesop*.

effectively discredited that it was now a matter of “grave Dispute, whether there have been ever any *Antients* or no.”<sup>19</sup>

Swift here is in jest, but he is not altogether in jest. A driving force behind the *Tale*, and the “Battel” as well, is a very genuine concern that the Moderns might, in their headlong literary course towards “waste Paper and Oblivion,” sweep the Ancients away with them, as Bentley seemed intent upon sweeping away Phalaris. Swift’s metaphor in the “Battel” is especially telling: in Bentley’s library, he fears that the books of the Ancients are on the point of being “buried alive.”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Swift, *A Tale of a Tub*, 124-5.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 225.

### III. Swift's "Battel" and the Immortality of Text

For Swift, as for Petrarch, texts were full of life.<sup>1</sup> "When I am reading a Book, whether wise or silly, it seemeth to me to be alive and talking to me."<sup>2</sup> We are familiar with Swift's story of how, in response to the quarrel over ancient and modern learning, "the BOOKS in St. *James's* Library, looking upon themselves as Parties principally concerned, took up the Controversie, and came to a decisive Battel."<sup>3</sup> This is not the only text in which Swift depicts books as animate or, for that matter, militant. In a satire on the Legion Club, he writes as a rebuke for Marcus Antonius Morgan:

When you walk among your Books,  
They reproach you with their Looks;  
Bind them fast, or from the Shelves  
They'll come down to right themselves:  
*Homer, Plutarch, Virgil, Flaccus,*  
All in Arms prepare to back us:  
Soon repent, or put to Slaughter  
Every *Greek* and *Roman* author.<sup>4</sup>

Unlike Petrarch, Swift represents books not only as living, but also as subject to death. "[L]ike Men their Authors," he says, they "have no more than one Way of coming into the World, but [...] ten Thousand to go out of it, and return no more." Books may be "drowned by Purges or martyred by Pipes,"<sup>5</sup> but most of them, he says, fall prey to ruthless Time:

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<sup>1</sup> Mark McDayter, "The Haunting of St. James's Library: Librarians, Literature, and 'The Battle of the Books,'" *Huntington Library Quarterly* 66.1/2 (2003), 25. Both this paragraph and the discussion below on libraries as "Cemeteries" are substantially indebted to McDayter's article.

<sup>2</sup> Swift, "Thoughts on Various Subjects," quoted in McDayter, 25.

<sup>3</sup> Swift, "The Battle of the Books," 214.

<sup>4</sup> Jonathan Swift, "A Character, Panegyric, and Description of the Legion Club," In *Jonathan Swift: The Complete Poems*, edited by Pat Rogers (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 207-214.

<sup>5</sup> Swift, "The Battle of the Books," 36, 32.

Unhappy Infants, many of them barbarously destroyed, before they have so much as learnt their *Mother-Tongue* to beg for Pity. Some he stifles in their Cradles, others he frights into Convulsions, whereof they suddenly die; Some he flays alive, others he tears Limb from Limb. Great Numbers are offered to *Moloch*, and the rest tainted by his Breath, die of a languishing Consumption.<sup>6</sup>

Modern books indeed seem to do nothing *but* die. Yet the acknowledged “Design” of nearly all “Modern Authors” is that their works should live forever, so that through them the authors themselves may achieve “an everlasting Remembrance, and never-dying Fame.” Again and again, Swift reminds us of the immortality that text seems to promise. He speaks with increasing irony of the many “immortal Productions” and “never-dying Works” of his own generation, none of which Posterity is ever likely to see, since cruel Time has sentenced them “to unavoidable Death.”<sup>7</sup>

The life and death of books is, of course, a recurring theme in “The Battel” as well. In his article “The Haunting of St. James’s Library,” Mark McDayter has observed that although Swift’s books are “alive,” they also function, at the same time, as memorials of the dead.<sup>8</sup> Swift calls libraries “Cemeteries,” and books, according to this allegory, become “Monuments.” But whereas an epitaph proper may be said to preserve merely the representation of an absent subject, Swift’s textual monuments do much more. They are, in fact, actively inhabited and animated by the spirits of their authors. “In these Books, is wonderfully instilled and preserved, the Spirit of each Warriour, while he is alive; and after his Death, his Soul transmigrates there, to inform them.”<sup>9</sup> It would seem that the act of composing a book is an act of translating one’s own “spirit” into text. The soul, which the body could not preserve beyond death, the text can—at least for a while.

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<sup>6</sup> Swift, *A Tale of a Tub*, 33.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 123, 33.

<sup>8</sup> McDayter, 19.

<sup>9</sup> Swift, “The Battle of the Books,” 222.



The concept of the book as a preserver of the spirit was not Swift's own invention. Milton writes in his *Areopagitica* that "books are not absolutely dead things, but do contain a potency of life in them to be as active as that soul whose progeny they are; nay, they do preserve as in a vial the purest efficacy and extraction of that living intellect that bred them," so that "a good book is the precious life-blood of a master spirit, embalmed and treasured up on purpose to a life beyond life."<sup>10</sup> It is easy to imagine that Petrarch, too, might have enjoyed a similar conceit, for he often speaks of his books as if they had a life and consciousness of their own, treating them as his "companions" and "guests."<sup>11</sup> As a matter of fact, the idea of an "inspired" text may date back as far as the classical period itself. Within mere decades of Cicero's death, the question of "whether Cicero's self was to be found in his person or in his texts" became a popular theme for Roman school declamations.<sup>12</sup> Could the "self" outlive the body? Might it, as Swift says, take up a more lasting residence in the "Monument" of a book? If so, then authorship was indeed a means to an earthly afterlife. But in that case, the death of a book must also be regarded in some sense as a genuine death.<sup>13</sup> Even text, according to Swift's mythology, can no longer preserve the instilled essence of an author once "*Dust* or *Worms* have seized upon it."<sup>14</sup>

When Swift writes that his own *Tale of a Tub* has been "calculated to live at least as long as our Language,"<sup>15</sup> we may be tempted to dismiss the prediction as merely

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<sup>10</sup> John Milton, "Areopagitica," In *Milton's Prose Works*, edited by Ernest Rhys (E. P. Dutton & Co. Inc., 1946), 4-5.

<sup>11</sup> In *Fam.* 7.8, Petrarch writes to Jacopo Fiorentino: "I brought with me your Cicero who, astonished by the novelty of the place, confessed that he was never surrounded, to use his words, by icier waters in his Arpino than he was with me at the source of the Sorgue." He describes his library as "countless illustrious and distinguished men" with whom his "guest," Cicero, was "delighted" to be in company (153).

<sup>12</sup> John Dugan, "How to Make (and Break) a Cicero: Epideixis, Textuality, and Self-fashioning in the Pro Archia and In Pisonem," *Classical Antiquity* 20, no. 1 (April, 2001), 74.

<sup>13</sup> Milton indeed asserts that one might "as good almost kill a man as kill a good book" (5).

<sup>14</sup> Swift, "The Battle of the Books," 222-3.

<sup>15</sup> Swift, *A Tale of a Tub*, 3.

another joke. We should however recall that only a year later, Swift would publish quite in earnest his “Proposal for Correcting, Improving and Ascertaining the English Tongue,” a project evidently made necessary by the climbing mortality rate among modern books, which Swift interprets as an effect of the “decay” of the English language. “From *Homer* to *Plutarch* are above a Thousand Years,” he says; “so long at least the Purity of the *Greek* Tongue may be allow’d to last.”<sup>16</sup> If only the English language can be secured likewise against any serious alterations, then England’s great books too, like the works of Homer, “might probably be preserved with Care, and grow into Esteem, and the Authors have a Chance of Immortality.”<sup>17</sup> Thus when, in his *Tale*, Swift confesses “Immortality to be a great and powerful Goddess” and regrets her rejection of all modern tributes,<sup>18</sup> we should not imagine that he speaks altogether in irony. Swift had no love for Grub Street scribblers, commonplace-collectors, or critics, but the immortality of true art he took for a serious matter.

It is interesting, incidentally, to notice that Swift characterizes St. James’s Library as a residence—or rather a *former* residence—of “*Fame*.” She “had a large Apartment formerly assigned her in the *Regal Library*,”<sup>19</sup> he says, but presumably lost her place upon Bentley’s arrival. The point is minor but not insignificant, for here we find Swift hinting that the violence of modern scholarship poses a threat not only to the enduring fame of the Ancients, but to Fame in general. In a library curated by Moderns, there is no *room* for Fame.

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<sup>16</sup> Jonathan Swift, “A Proposal for Correcting, Improving and Ascertaining the English tongue; In A Letter To the Most Honourable Robert Earl of Oxford and Mortimer, Lord High Treasurer of Great Britain,” in *The Works of Jonathan Swift*, edited by Sir Walter Scott, V.9 (Edinburgh, 1814), 349.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* Pope shared Swift’s fears about immortality and language; see his *Essay on Criticism* II.276-83.

<sup>18</sup> Swift, *A Tale of a Tub*, 34.

<sup>19</sup> Swift, “The Battle of the Books,” 239 (emphasis mine).

The problems that troubled Swift troubled Pope as well. His *Essay On Criticism* of 1711 would take up arms on Swift's side of the "battle," echoing *A Tale*'s assessment of the critic as an "Ass"<sup>20</sup> (another joke on Bentley which Swift never wearies of repeating<sup>21</sup>), as well as Swift's disparagement of the modern critic as a type of Zoilus<sup>22</sup> who ought, apart from a just esteem for the Ancients, to learn both morals and manners before he offers to speak.<sup>23</sup> Nor was Pope yet finished with Bentley; his satires still lay well ahead. But for the moment, he was more concerned about redeeming the Ancients than castigating the Moderns. He had set to work accordingly on a new composition, *The Temple of Fame*.

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<sup>20</sup> Alexander Pope, "Essay on Criticism," In *The Poems of Alexander Pope*, edited by John Butt (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), I.39-40.

<sup>21</sup> Bentley had quoted the Greek proverb "*That Leucon carries one thing, and his Ass quite another.*" Boyle took the metaphor as referring to the writer who means something different from "the Ass his Editor," and this mistake led Swift in turn to conclude happily that Bentley conflates editors with asses. He develops the metaphor particularly in Section III of *A Tale of a Tub*, the chapter "Concerning Criticks." See A. C. Guthkelch and D. Nichol Smith, *A Tale of a Tub: To which is added the Battle of the Books and the Mechanical Operation of the Spirit* (London, Oxford University Press, 1958), 233n.

<sup>22</sup> Pope, "An Essay on Criticism, II.264-5; cf. Swift, *A Tale of a Tub*, 94.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, I.124-9, III.1-17.

#### IV. Pope's *Temple*: the Humanist Paradox Performed

In the three hundred years since its publication, *The Temple of Fame* has received remarkably little critical attention. Even in Pope's own time, the poem appears to have made no considerable impression on its readers. A few scattered reviews appeared, and John Dennis, who had been slighted in the *Essay On Criticism*, called the poem "one long Chain of Blunders,"<sup>1</sup> yet Richard Steele "entertained a high opinion of its beauties,"<sup>2</sup> and it was popular enough to merit a second edition within its first year. Later critics of the poem held equally mixed views. Thomas Warton thought Pope had "marred" Chaucer's original vision, but Dr. Johnson considered the poem a masterpiece.<sup>3</sup> Understandably, no one ever bothered to compile a "key" for the *Temple* as Wotton had done for Swift's *Tale* (or as Pope himself, in a characteristically Scriblerian venture, had done for his own "*Lock*"). On a casual reading, the poem appears to require no special interpretive work. Its complexities emerge only when it is understood in the context of its historical moment. I will suggest here that the *Temple* represents Pope's vision of a final answer and definitive conclusion to the battle of the books.

According to Pope, *The Temple of Fame* was initially composed in 1711,<sup>4</sup> though it would not see print until four years later, in 1715. It was probably no accident that the first edition of the poem appeared just a few months prior to the much-anticipated first installment of the *Iliad*. Although Wotton and Bentley had for the most part withdrawn from the field, the battle of the books was not yet over. In France, the *querelle* had erupted anew, and this time it was Homer himself who stood under attack.<sup>5</sup> A translation

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<sup>1</sup> John Barnard, *Pope: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1973), 10.

<sup>2</sup> According to Joseph Warton. See Barnard, 508-9.

<sup>3</sup> Barnard, 465-6, 492.

<sup>4</sup> John Wilson Croker, *The Works of Alexander Pope* (New York: Guardian Press, 1967), 199.

<sup>5</sup> Levine, 83.

of the *Iliad* must have appealed to Pope for several reasons, not least of them his rather personal, if not exactly Petrarchan, affection for Homer. But Levine seems right to suggest that at least in part, Pope's *Iliad* was yet one more valiant attempt to fortify the camp of the Ancients.<sup>6</sup>

The June publication of the first *Iliad* volume was bookended on either hand by the first and second editions of *The Temple of Fame*. The former, a fine slim little volume, appeared in February, and the latter in October, with a new frontispiece illustration and some other embellishments. In a sarcastic "Letter to Mr. Pope," Thomas Burnet and George Duckett wrote in March: "SIR, Your ingenious Description of that *Temple of Fame*, in which you are likely to have so large a Place, has been no unhappy Earnest to the Town, of what they may justly expect from your Muse in a Translation of Homer."<sup>7</sup> Evidently the relationship suggested between the two works by their proximity of publication had not been lost on Pope's readers. In some sense, the *Temple* set the frame for the *Iliad*.

Like Pope's other early works, *The Temple of Fame* probably underwent extensive revision during the years before it was finally published.<sup>8</sup> Those, for Pope, were conflicted years. Among his fellow Scriblerians he was now lambasting the productions of the "Criticks" just as zealously as Swift, yet his *Iliad* demanded that he too learn how to perform a role of critical authority, pile up footnotes and indexes, and deal with the inconsistencies of manuscripts and interpretations. If his notes lacked the scholarship and erudition of professionals like Bentley, they nevertheless partook of the same philological impulse for contextualization. The Humanist paradox had, as it were,

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<sup>6</sup> See Levine, 181-217.

<sup>7</sup> Barnard, 115

<sup>8</sup> Croker, 199.

arrived at Pope's doorstep. We should not be surprised to find it manifestly present in the text of *The Temple of Fame*.

Pope's *Temple* is, on the surface, an imitation of Chaucer's much longer,<sup>9</sup> and seemingly unfinished, *House of Fame*. The poem shares its general plan as well as various poetic conceits with Chaucer's original, but Pope is right to say that Chaucer's "Design" has been "in a manner entirely alter'd" under his hand.<sup>10</sup> The two poems' major similarities may be outlined in a few broad strokes: both describe a fantastical dream in which the narrator-poet is transported to a castle, or temple, suspended high above the earth on a foundation of ice. This temple is home to the goddess Fame, and home also—in one way or another—to all the figures, names, and deeds that human memory has collectively preserved. In both poems, the dreamer takes a brief tour of the premises, and having arrived at the inner shrine, he watches while crowds of supplicants beg favors at the throne of Fame, who capriciously prefers renown to some, infamy to others, and oblivion to the rest. After a further journey to the confused halls of Rumor, the text of Chaucer's poem breaks off without conclusion. Pope's wraps up neatly with a dialogue and a moral.

Whether the abrupt termination of Chaucer's "dream" is the result of faulty manuscripts or of the author's intention, we may never know.<sup>11</sup> We can, however, at least imagine Chaucer reveling in the chaos of such a baldly self-deconstructive gesture. Pope, on the other hand, wields a tenacious authorial control over every aspect of his meticulously-crafted *Temple*, eliminating uncertainties as far as possible and imposing

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<sup>9</sup> Pope contracts Chaucer's sprawling three-book poem to a mere five-hundred lines, less than a quarter of the original length. He cuts out the largely digressive first book entirely, along with most of the second.

<sup>10</sup> Alexander Pope, "The Temple of Fame" in *The Poems of Alexander Pope*, edited by John Butt (New Haven: Yale University Press: 1963), 172.

<sup>11</sup> David M. Bevington, "The Obtuse Narrator in Chaucer's House of Fame," *Speculum* 36, no. 2 (Apr., 1961), 289.

structure, substance, reason, stability, justice, and meaning on the irregular and abstract images he finds in Chaucer's whimsical *House*. It may be tempting to chalk the *Temple*'s relentless formal order up to that well-documented eighteenth-century mania for "correctness" of which Pope was, we must allow, sometimes rather guilty. After all there is something to be said for Warton's complaint that a dream-vision is no place for classical symmetries.<sup>12</sup> But whatever our verdict with respect to Pope's aesthetic prejudices, we should not pass judgment on the plan of his *Temple* before considering whether it was meant, in C. S. Lewis's phrase, for a corkscrew or a cathedral. Pope is adapting Chaucer's outline: he is not writing Chaucer's poem.

For Chaucer, there is nothing stable or secure about the *House of Fame*. The building itself is perched precariously on cliffs of ice, a "feble fundament" that leads the narrator to scoff at whoever should vainly build there.<sup>13</sup> Pope's dreamer, too, finds Fame's temple "high on a Rock of Ice," but for him the scene is one not of feebleness but of sublimity. Supplied by "eternal Snows," the "beauteous Work of Frost" is seen to "prop th' incumbent Sky" like the Titan Atlas. It shines "like Parian Marble" and appears as if made "of solid Stone."<sup>14</sup> Perhaps we should recall Swift's description of that piece of territory over which the eponymous "Battel" first allegedly began: the highest peak of Parnassus, which the Moderns offered to level if the Ancients would not surrender it. The Ancients laughed off this threat as foolhardy, for the Muses' mountain was "an entire Rock, which would break their Tools and Hearts" should they attempt to pull it down.<sup>15</sup> Pope's mountain serves likewise as a stable and unassailable fortress for the Ancients. In fact it even appears that for Pope's dreaming narrator, this visionary summit is more real

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<sup>12</sup> Barnard, 465-6.

<sup>13</sup> Geoffrey Chaucer, "The House of Fame" in *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, edited by F. N. Robinson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1957), 1132-5.

<sup>14</sup> Pope, "The Temple of Fame," 27, 53-60, 29-30.

<sup>15</sup> Swift, "The Battle of the Books," 219-220.

and enduring than the world of mortals he has left behind. From the peaks of Fame, he surveys the “whole Creation” below as a globe suspended in space, and finds it to be a mere “transient Landscape” that at one moment is illuminated by a clear sun, but at the next “in Clouds decays.”<sup>16</sup> The inhabitants of the living world, much like Swift’s “cotemporary brethren,” are destined for oblivion—unless they can secure some lasting niche in the domain of the immortalizing goddess.

Some of them, it seems, have done just so. In Fame’s “fundament” of ice, both Pope and Chaucer discover many names inscribed. Most of them have already been half obliterated by time and hard weather, but others, for the moment, remain clearly distinct. Chaucer circumspectly declines to pronounce any of the inscriptions safe from future corrosion,<sup>17</sup> but Pope takes a more optimistic view, and asserts that a number of them are imperishable. The most ephemeral inscriptions, he finds, are the “fresh ingrav’d” names of modern “Wits”; they appear for a brief moment only, and then vanish. “I look’d again,” says the poet, “nor cou’d their Trace be found.”<sup>18</sup> Such flitting inscriptions are very like the titles Swift had sought to convey to “Prince Posterity” in *A Tale*, for those too had been “posted fresh” but disappeared within a matter of hours. “I enquired after them among Readers and Booksellers, but I enquired in vain, the *Memorial of them was lost among Men, their Place was no more to be found.*”<sup>19</sup>

Again echoing Swift, Pope also finds those most pernicious among Moderns, the “Criticks,” up to their usual mischief:

Critics I saw that other Names deface,  
And fix their own, with Labour, in their place:  
Their own, like others, soon their Place resign’d,

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<sup>16</sup> Pope, “The Temple of Fame,” 11-20.

<sup>17</sup> Chaucer, 1151-60.

<sup>18</sup> Pope, “The Temple of Fame,” 35-6.

<sup>19</sup> Swift, *A Tale of a Tub*, 34-5.



Or disappear'd, and left the first behind.<sup>20</sup>

The names “left” behind, so staunchly resistant to critical over-writing, are of course those of Pope’s darlings, the Ancients. They have “inscrib’d unnumber’d Ages past,” and “like Crystal faithful to the graving Steel” they will endure on the glacial mountainside for as long as “Time it self.”<sup>21</sup> Pope seems rapt with his faith in the possibility of an unfading memorial. He is certainly a long way from uttering, as Chaucer does just here, the dismayed exclamation, “What may ever laste?”<sup>22</sup>

Inside Fame’s halls, the same themes of mutability and permanence reecho. Chaucer’s castle is peopled with phantoms, the animated *imagines* of speech, for he tells us that every utterance that arrives at the House of Fame “wexeth lyk the same wight / Which that the word in erthe spak.” Thus the mazy, hive-like honeycomb of “sondry habitacles,” bustling with jesters, minstrels, pipers, witches, magicians, nobles, and kings, turns out to be a mere illusion, a Babel of noise where each seeming famous figure, like the words that give him form, “in his substaunce ys but air.”<sup>23</sup> Pope’s temple, on the other hand, is a gallery of statues, friezes, and columns, less lively than Chaucer’s phantoms but more solid and durable. We may notice in particular Homer’s pillar of “eternal Adamant.”<sup>24</sup> Unsurprisingly, we also find that in Pope’s temple (but not in Chaucer’s) all the statues are ranged in order, with those at the center holding the “chief Honours” and standing guard “around the Shrine it self of Fame.”<sup>25</sup> Homer naturally ranks highest, followed by Virgil in gold, Pindar in silver, Horace in “a Work outlasting Monumental Brass”—we will return to him shortly—and those two illuminating fonts of

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<sup>20</sup> Pope, “The Temple of Fame,” 37-40.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 46-50.

<sup>22</sup> Chaucer, 1147.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 1076-7, 1194, 768)

<sup>24</sup> Pope, “The Temple of Fame,” 183.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 180-181.

reason, Aristotle and Cicero, whose “equal” shrines both “cast a dazzling Light.”<sup>26</sup> Each of these six figures is arrayed with a godlike majesty, enthroned on a column engraved with images from his most famous works. Thus at Homer’s feet we see the heroes of the *Iliad* locked in combat; at Virgil’s, the Latian wars; at Pindar’s, scenes of athletic competition; and so on. In Chaucer’s vast and confused inner hall, however, the positions of art and artist stand precisely reversed: the *works* are raised up, but the authors themselves are bent and strained with the perpetual labor of supporting them. The glory of Troy is especially wearisome for Chaucer’s Homer to bear up (even though he shares both his pillar and his burden with other poets), “so hevvy thereof was the fame.”<sup>27</sup>

For Chaucer, then, it would seem to be the artist who must toil to support his own work. For Pope, it is the work that, if valuable, will forever sustain the memory of the artist. Pope sees Homer, Virgil, and the rest not as men laboring vainly under a doubtful hope of immortality, but as Fame’s own chosen heroes. They have earned their place, and now rest secure in “modest Majesty” and “sober Triumph.”<sup>28</sup>

There can be little doubt that Pope is fighting here to reclaim authority for the Ancients—and to deny it to the Moderns, most especially those who hold the lasting relevance and preeminence of the Ancients in doubt. It is even quite conceivable that the name Pope gave his “*Temple*” of Fame, rejecting Chaucer’s “*House*,” is not by mere coincidence the same name as that of the author of the very text that began the whole controversy, Sir William Temple. We know that Pope had read Temple’s *Essay*,<sup>29</sup> and its influence seems to be suggested by the architecture in the poem. William Temple had not confined his regard for the Ancients to classical Greece and Rome, though he

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 181-243.

<sup>27</sup> Chaucer, 1473.

<sup>28</sup> Pope, “The Temple of Fame,” 200-203; the lines refer specifically to Virgil.

<sup>29</sup> Spingarn, iii.

obviously preferred them. He believed that Greek learning had probably originated in Egypt and Phoenicia, and had been augmented by commerce with the sages of Ethiopia, Chaldea, and Arabia.<sup>30</sup> Other parts of Greek learning he credited to the influence of the East, to Persia, India, and China,<sup>31</sup> and there was even, he said, some virtue to be found in the ancient productions of the barbaric Goths, Gauls, and other tribes of the North. It is interesting, then, that Pope—quitting for the moment any pretence of conformity with Chaucer—depicts the Temple of Fame as an architectural chimera, with four faces and four gates, North, South, East, and West, all “of equal Grace” and adorned with images of “fabled Chiefs” from their respective quarters.<sup>32</sup> The western face belongs, of course, to the Greeks and the Romans. To the East, Pope identifies the Persians, Assyrians, Chaldeans, Indians, and Chinese; to the south, the Egyptians; and to the North, the Goths, Scythians, and other barbarians.<sup>33</sup> The “Druids [and] Bards,” whom Temple admits as worthy Ancients in the North, appear side by side in Pope’s poem as well.<sup>34</sup>

In his defense of the Ancients, Pope’s rhetoric is even more affirmative than Swift’s. Swift had elected to leave the outcome of “The Battel” unresolved in the prank of a final textual hiatus, but Pope determines the issue unequivocally. The Ancients will prevail. Indeed, secure in the lasting abode of Fame, they have prevailed already, and the critics can do no more than scrawl their vanishing graffiti on the outer walls. The weapons of Time, so menacing to Swift’s narrator in *A Tale*,<sup>35</sup> are vanquished; the enemy’s “Scythe [is] revers’d, and both his Pinions bound.”<sup>36</sup> William Temple had compared the violence of modern criticism to that of “young barbarous Goths or Vandals

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<sup>30</sup> Temple, 8.

<sup>31</sup> Temple 12, 15.

<sup>32</sup> Pope, “The Temple of Fame,” 66-9.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 75-129.

<sup>34</sup> Temple, 15; cf. Pope, “Temple of Fame,” 127-8.

<sup>35</sup> See Swift, *A Tale of a Tub*, 32-3.

<sup>36</sup> Pope, “The Temple of Fame,” 148.

breaking or defacing the admirable statues of those ancient heroes of Greece or Rome.”<sup>37</sup> But in Fame’s otherworldly museum, the statues are conceived as unbreakable, and the barbarous Moderns are denied all admission. The Ancients are safe at last from any harm.

Yet there seems to be something wrong here. Pope’s temple *is*, after all, a museum—nothing more than that. If his Ancients have achieved immortality, as he claims they have done, then why do they not move, speak, or show any sign of life? Why, instead of bustling, chattering, and striving with one another like Chaucer’s phantoms, or Swift’s animated books, do Pope’s immortals stand “fix’d” in epitaphic stone? We will examine this problem at greater length in the concluding chapters of this essay, but let us note from the outset that the Humanist paradox may itself supply at least a partial answer. For Pope, as for Swift, the preservation of the ancient world, with all its complexity and troubling inaccessibility, had turned out to be anything but a simple matter. To establish the Ancients once and for all as immortal and ever-present was inevitably to set them up at a distance, either as subjects for critical analysis or—in Pope’s vision—as semi-divine objects of veneration and awe.

Swift’s “Battel” had acknowledged the paradox by enacting it, burying *itself* alive in footnotes, marginal comments, and prefaces. The text, allegedly derived from a manuscript corrupted by “the Injury of Fortune, or Weather,”<sup>38</sup> and riddled therefore with hiatuses, asserts its own unreliability and seems to deny that any “Full and True Account” of the ancient world is possible at all. Instead of certainty or “truth,” what Swift offers his readers is a colorful but dubious record that not only demands critical interpretation but even performs it, relentlessly deconstructing itself. His Ancients are lively, but as a

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<sup>37</sup> Temple, quoted in Levine, 38.

<sup>38</sup> Swift, “The Battle of the Books,” 214.

consequence, they are also mortal. Aesop has already been mutilated by modern critics; Plato has suffered a violent displacement.<sup>39</sup> In the course of the “Battel,” Wotton and Bentley, who pose the most immediate threat to the classical canon, are vanquished, but the ultimate fate of the Ancients remains uncertain, and the episode is never concluded. No absolute and permanent victory is, or perhaps ever could be, declared. Far more like the phantoms in Chaucer’s castle than like Pope’s fixed statues, Swift’s ancient books are perpetually struggling to retain their immortality, to reach out to one more generation of living readers. Their success is never guaranteed.

If indeed, as Swift says, it is the custom for warring parties among the “Learned” to “set up Trophies on both sides”<sup>40</sup> when they cannot agree on who has taken the victory, *The Temple of Fame* surely qualifies as just such a trophy. Pope’s text, as we have seen, purports to do just what Swift’s implies cannot be done: to establish the Ancients in a secure site forever, where no Moderns can reach them and no harm can ever come to them again. Swift introduces the fiction of a corrupt manuscript, forestalling any hope of an intimate communion between the reader and the recorded past, but Pope does just the reverse: he takes Chaucer’s faulty, unfinished text and makes it whole, unified, and perfect. Neither solution resolves the paradox. Swift’s Ancients are living, and therefore may yet die, but Pope’s are as solid, as stable, and as insensible as monuments to the dead.

It clearly has not escaped Pope that his imagery is problematic. Repeatedly he feints—but only feints—at bringing his statues to life. Virgil’s pillar is said to be overspread with “living sculpture,” and the statue of Homer is inspired throughout with “Motion and Life.”<sup>41</sup> The outer walls of the temple are wrought with “animated Marble”

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 233, 223.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 221.

<sup>41</sup> Pope, “The Temple of Fame,” 192-205.

and with figures who “seem to think in Stone.”<sup>42</sup> But that careful qualifier, *seems*, shows up again and again, a persistent reminder that the liveliness of monuments is never more than an artful illusion. Pindar “*seem’d* to labour with th’ inspiring god,” and his “fiery Steeds *seem* starting from the Stone.” Cicero “*seem’d* to stand / In Act to speak.” Aristotle’s “piercing Eyes” only “*appear* to view / Superior Worlds.”<sup>43</sup> The many statues stand “fix’d” on their lofty pedestals, and the dreamer-poet, passing silently through Fame’s halls, admires them from a distance, but never once moves to reach or communicate with them. His air of reverence is palpable; we might half expect to find him burning incense or making offerings at the shrines of his godlike heroes. But we know we will not see him as we have seen Petrarch, slipping into Cicero’s warm outstretched hand a letter full of tears and rebukes and confessions of an immediate and human love. Pope’s notion of immortality has not brought the Ancients back to life. It has set them up like tombs in a catacomb.

Was Pope aware of the paradox that rendered immortality identical with entombment? Perhaps he was. Monument, after all, has always signified a well-known paradox of its own, the inescapable chiasmus whereby an immortalizing inscription looks both backwards and forwards, to a past moment when the deceased “speaker” was living, and to a future moment when the living reader will be dead. If there is something in both Swift’s “Battel” and Pope’s *Temple* to suggest the air of a cemetery, we should not be surprised; the Humanist paradox, where it touches immortality, is the very same paradox that always haunts the rhetoric of epitaph. Pope, in the preface to his *Works*—the first collection in which *The Temple of Fame* appeared—acknowledges the connection quite clearly: “In this office of collecting my pieces, I am altogether uncertain, whether to look

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 73-4.

<sup>43</sup> Pope, “The Temple of Fame,” 203-241.

upon my self as a man building a monument, or burying the dead?”<sup>44</sup> His unnecessary closing question mark highlights the degree of his ambivalence: he is “*altogether* uncertain” whether his text signifies immortality or death. It is not, however, for the Ancients alone that he is concerned this time. In the cemetery of Fame, the poet has also located *himself*.

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<sup>44</sup> Alexander Pope, “Preface to the Works” in *The Works of Alexander Pope*, edited by John Wilson Croker (New York: Guardian Press, 1967), 295.

## V. Placing Pope's Monument

At the heart of Pope's *Temple of Fame*, six "pompous columns" stand clustered together, towering over all the other statues and ensconcing the inner shrine of the goddess herself. We have given their names already: Homer, Virgil, Pindar, Horace, Aristotle, and Cicero. By the time the *Temple* was published, Pope had already paid literary homage to several of these ancient authors. His *Pastorals* had imitated Virgil; his *Windsor-Forest*, Pindar.<sup>1</sup> His *Iliad of Homer* was immediately forthcoming, and though his Horatian imitations lay yet in the future, we will soon see that the *Temple* itself echoes Horace distinctly—sometimes more so even than Chaucer.

Horace's statue in the *Temple* is said to be raised on a pillar "outlasting monumental brass." The reference is to Horace's "Ode III.30" (also called "*Exegi Monumentum*"), in which the poet claims to have completed a "monument more lasting than bronze." It will be useful here to quote Horace at length:

I have finished a monument more lasting than bronze,  
more lofty than the regal structure of the pyramids,  
one which neither corroding rain nor the ungovernable North Wind  
can ever destroy, nor the countless series  
of the years, nor the flight of time.  
I shall not wholly die, and a large part of me  
will elude the Goddess of Death. I shall continue to grow,  
fresh with the praise of posterity  
[...and shall be spoken of as one who] was the first to bring  
Aeolian verse to the tunes of Italy.  
Take the pride, Melpomene, that you have so well earned,  
and, if you would be so kind,  
surround my hair with Delphic bay.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Ruben Quintero, "Design in *Windsor-Forest*," *Literate Culture: Pope's Rhetorical Art* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1992), 40-64.

<sup>2</sup> Horace, "Ode III.30," in *Horace: Odes and Epodes*, translated by Niall Rudd, (Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004). Rudd's translation is in prose; I have introduced line breaks corresponding approximately to those in the Latin.



The “monument” Horace claimed to have completed was his third book of odes, to which “*Exegi monumentum*” provided the capstone and conclusion. Horace anticipated (correctly, as it has turned out) that the *Odes* would carry his fame forward through succeeding generations, and that long after his death, his Latin adaptations of Archaic Greek verse would live on. He would be remembered for having brought “Aeolian verse to the tunes of Italy”—in Pope’s phrase, having “tuned the Ausonian lyre / to sweeter sounds” by Latinizing the Archaic verse forms of poets like Pindar, Alcaeus, and Sappho.<sup>3</sup> Of the ten lines Pope’s *Temple* devotes to Horace, the first six—and arguably the tenth as well, which places “myrtles and bays” over the poet’s head—all allude to this same ode. Elsewhere in the *Temple* Pope also drops other, less conspicuous clues that his poem may owe more to Horace’s “monument” than at first appears. Among the names Pope’s dreamer finds inscribed outside the temple in the ice, there are some, he says, that “Nor heat could melt, nor beating storm invade.” These inscriptions, like Horace’s self-immortalizing text, easily withstand both harsh weather and the corrosive force of “Time itself.” Horace’s prediction that he will continue to “grow, / fresh with the praise of posterity” likewise finds its analogue in the *Temple*, just three lines further on: “These ever new, nor subject to Decays, / Spread, and grow brighter with the Length of Days.”<sup>4</sup> Later on we will see that the conclusion of Pope’s poem also imitates, by a pointed reversal, Horace’s reception of Melpomene’s garland.

That Pope should invoke classical eternizing imagery in his construction of a temple for Fame is by no means surprising in itself,<sup>5</sup> but it is significant that he has

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<sup>3</sup> Pope, “The Temple of Fame,” 222-25.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 48-52.

<sup>5</sup> Chaucer took the idea for his own poem from a description of the same “house” in Book XII of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* (albeit a quite brief one: the passage describing the “house of Fame” in Ovid is only twenty-five lines long, but Chaucer expands it to fill three books). Ovid concludes the *Metamorphoses* in self-immortalizing terms that mimic Horace unmistakably: “I have now completed a work that neither Jove’s wrath nor fire nor sword nor hungry eld shall ever be able to annihilate. Let that day which has

fixated so particularly on the Horatian conceit of the text as “monument.” He has altered Chaucer’s model considerably in order to introduce monumental imagery throughout the poem. Of course, Pope was hardly the first to borrow liberally from Horace in order to build a monumental text of his own. Shakespeare, Herrick, and Milton, among others, had already set the precedent.<sup>6</sup> Even Swift’s characterization of his books as monuments in a cemetery probably owes something to Horace. As a rhetorical trope, the metaphor had indeed proven remarkably durable.

Part of its durability, I will argue, depended upon its recognition of intertextuality as a form of *location*. “*Exegi monumentum*” was itself intertextually located relative to an established literary canon, for it was an imitation of a much older work. The model for Horace’s poem was Pindar’s *Pythian 6*, a victory song for the winner of a chariot race won in the year 490 B.C., nearly half a millennium before Horace’s time. Much as Horace would call his own book of odes a “monument,” Pindar calls his victory songs a “treasure house of hymns”—a structure that

neither winter rain, coming from abroad  
as a relentless army  
from a loudly rumbling cloud, nor wind shall buffet  
and with their deluge of silt carry into the depths  
of the sea.<sup>7</sup>

The metaphor here is architectural rather than sculptural, but its operation is familiar. Both Pindar and Horace proclaim that poetry is superior to physical structures because

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jurisdiction only over this body of mine come when it will and bring to an end the span of my uncertain life; yet with my better part I shall fly through the years unending above the stars, and my name can never be erased.” (Ovid, *Metamorphoses* XV.871-876 quoted in O. J. Todd, “Poets and Philosophers,” *The Classical Journal* 41, no. 2 (Nov. 1945), 69.) Similar declarations of the all-enduring power of text appear frequently in later Roman literature. O. J. Todd has compiled an impressive list of Roman poets whose poems announce the immortality of themselves or their authors, including Virgil, Lucan, Catullus, Statius, Vitruvius, and Quintilian Todd. See Todd, 49-71.

<sup>6</sup> See Shakespeare’s “Sonnet 55,” Milton’s “On Shakespeare,” and the monument in “concrete poetry” that concludes Robert Herrick’s *Hesperides*.

<sup>7</sup> Pindar, *Pythian* 6.7-14. All quotations from Pindar’s odes are from the two-volume Loeb Classical Library collection *Pindar*, translated by William H. Race (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997).

poetry is impervious to the ravages of time and to erosion by the elements. The particular image of the poem *as* monument may also derive from Pindar, who in several other odes compares his art to that of sculptors and stone-workers. In *Nemean 4* Pindar speaks of his song as “a stele whiter than Parian marble,”<sup>8</sup> and in *Nemean 5*, he explicitly rejects the sculptor’s art in favor of the more lively art of poetry:

I am not a sculptor, so as to fashion stationary statues that  
stand on their same base.  
Rather, on board every ship and in every boat, sweet song,  
go forth from Aegina and spread the news [...]<sup>9</sup>

Poetry, Pindar claims, has several advantages over material objects, which are static and inanimate, as well as subject to decay. Poetry is lively, mobile, and long-lasting. Therefore, reasons Pindar, a sensible person should entrust his fame to poetry alone, for “mortals forget / what does not attain poetic wisdom’s choice pinnacle, / yoked to glorious streams of verses.”<sup>10</sup> Only poetry offers the promise of immortality through art.

For the Ancient Greeks, this kind of immortality had a special name: *kléos* (κλέος), a word meaning “glory” or “fame” as bestowed specifically by poetry (literally “that which is *heard*,” from the Greek verb *klúo*, “to hear”).<sup>11</sup> To establish an athletic victor’s *kléos* seems to have been the foremost purpose of epinician verse, and for many athletes, *kléos* may in turn have been the primary allure of competition in the four crown games (the Olympian, Pythian, Isthmian, and Nemean), which offered no other physical prize than a garland of laurel leaves. This garland itself represented the immortal *kléos* that victory was supposed to confer upon an athlete: an unbroken circle, it was a symbol

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<sup>8</sup> Pindar, *Nemean* 4.81-85. We might recall here Pope’s description of the ice on which Fame’s temple stands, whose “wond’rous Rock like *Parian Marble* shone” (“Temple of Fame,” 29).

<sup>9</sup> Pindar, *Nemean* 5.1-3.

<sup>10</sup> Pindar, *Isthmian* 7.17-19.

<sup>11</sup> Gregory Nagy, *The Best of the Achaeans: Concepts of the Hero in Archaic Greek Poetry* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979). The importance of *kléos* to Greek culture dates back at least as far as the *Iliad*.

of infinity.<sup>12</sup> Although victors might expect to receive other rewards from their home towns upon returning from the games, the true “crown” for success was fame itself. Pindar in *Pythian I* calls the combined achievement of success and fame “the highest crown,”<sup>13</sup> and he often refers to his own odes as garlands, as in *Olympian I*, where he says that his duty is to “crown” the victor “with Aeolic song.”<sup>14</sup> The symbol of the garland appears in Horace’s “*Exegi monumentum*” as well: in the final lines of the ode, Horace asks the muse Melpomene to crown him, like an athletic victor, with a wreath of bays. He thus invokes a Pindaric rhetorical tradition even while seeming to proclaim his poetic autonomy and individuality. It is specifically within the context of a prior literary canon that he appears as the self-immortalizing hero of his own poem, garlanded with his own *kléos*.

Although Pindar and Horace both insist upon poetry’s superior eternizing power, both poets nevertheless fall back upon the irresistible symbol of the monument—whether as statue, stele, stone,<sup>15</sup> or architectural space—as a site of preservation. The very possibility of fame and memory seems predicated upon some representation of objective materiality and location. And indeed, the perceived connection between *remembering* and *locating* was important not only for poets and statue-makers. It supplied the theory for the whole ancient rhetorical tradition of the *ars memorativa* (the “art of memory”). The *ad Herennium*, the only extant ancient treatise on the *ars memorativa*, describes the still-familiar “memory palace” technique, which relies explicitly on this connection between memory and location. According to this system, all those things, persons, and

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<sup>12</sup> Gregory Nagy, *The Ancient Greek Hero in 24 Hours* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 410.

<sup>13</sup> Pindar, *Pythian* 1.99-100.

<sup>14</sup> Pindar, *Olympian* 1.100-102.

<sup>15</sup> Pindar, *Nemean* 8.44-48 speaks of the poem as a “loud-sounding stone of the Muses,” suggesting a connection with epitaph (the “speaking stone,” which addresses passers-by and asks them to pause and “remember” the deceased).

ideas that one wishes to remember should be “placed” in an orderly fashion in the mind, each one disposed at some unique *locus* within the structure of an imaginary architectural space, and accompanied by symbols which will serve as reminders of its significance.<sup>16</sup> Even the earliest known Greek source on memory, the *Dialexeis*, instructs the reader to facilitate his memory by means of location and object: he is to “place” or “set down” what he wishes to recall upon some image, such as that of a mythic figure or a god. Some examples offered by the author include the placing of ideas of courage on images of Achilles or Ares, or of ideas of metal-working on Hephaestus.<sup>17</sup>

Pope’s *Temple* itself cannot rightly be called a memory palace, except perhaps insofar as any house of everlasting Fame is necessarily a “memory” house. But it is noteworthy that whereas Chaucer seems deliberately to avoid many of the mnemonic techniques associated with the *ars memorativa*, Pope embraces them, effectively using space, order, sequence, and symbolic imagery to “place” the Ancients within the framework of a stable and coherent site of memory. We have seen how Chaucer’s phantoms seem to mill confusedly about in his *House*, but in Pope’s *Temple* the journey to the shrine is direct and linear, and we find the Ancients all carefully arranged like museum exhibits. The historians’ statues stand just at the gates, and the heroes’ stand within,<sup>18</sup> each one fixed at its appropriate *locus*. Ambitious military leaders like Caesar and Alexander are accorded less honor—and therefore stand further from the inner shrine—than virtuous heroes who fought “not for Empire” but for “their People’s Safety.” These, in turn, are surpassed by “much-suff’ring Heroes” like Cato, Brutus, and Socrates.<sup>19</sup> For Chaucer, it had seemed impossible to tell which heroes were most

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<sup>16</sup> Frances A. Yates, *The Art of Memory* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1974), 5.

<sup>17</sup> Jocelyn Penny Small, *Wax Tablets of the Mind: Cognitive Studies of Memory and Literacy in Classical Antiquity* (London: Routledge, 1997), 100-101.

<sup>18</sup> Pope, “The Temple of Fame,” 145-9.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 151-77.

important, or to choose which of them to name; the multitude was overwhelming.<sup>20</sup> Pope, however, has no trouble discerning the “chief” figures in every group. Among the virtuous heroes, Epaminondas stands “high o’er the rest,” and among the suffering heroes, Socrates is unquestionably “Supreme.”<sup>21</sup> Each hero, moreover, like a memory image, is fixed motionless in a characteristic posture and marked by various identifying signs. Pope’s Pindar, for instance, appears as a charioteer playing a harp and driving a team of swans, supported by a silver column engraved with images of athletic games and their patron deities.<sup>22</sup> Such an image falls very much in line with the description given in the *ad Herennium*, and also by Cicero, for developing memorable *imagines agentes* to “place” within a memory palace.<sup>23</sup> Of course, Pope’s statues are also quite literally “placed” within the architecture of the temple, on pillars depicting their great works.

Yet it would be absurd, certainly, to suggest that one needed Pope’s poem in order to remember the names, the figures, or the merits of all the heroes he depicts. On the contrary, what his poem asserts is precisely that these heroes’ names have already been indelibly inscribed in the cultural memory of the Western world. No mnemonic device is necessary for recalling whether Homer’s fame exceeds Horace’s, or whether Socrates’ virtue exceeds Caesar’s. If Pope’s *Temple* is in any sense a memory palace, it is one in which the engraved pillars are not mere ornaments but rather part of the very structure and foundation of the site. To pull them down—if it were possible—would be to

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<sup>20</sup> Chaucer begins, at first, to list some of the figures, but cuts himself short:

What shulde y more telle of this?  
The halle was al ful, ywys,  
Of hem that writen olde gestes,  
As ben on treës rokes nestes;  
But hit a ful confus matere  
Were alle the gestes for to here,  
That they of write, or how they highte. (1513-19)

<sup>21</sup> Pope, “The Temple of Fame,” 161-171.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 209-220.

<sup>23</sup> Yates, 10-11.

destabilize the whole monolithic institution of Fame itself. We have already seen in Swift's "Battel" that this is exactly what the Moderns were perceived as threatening to do: to level the "entire Rock" of Parnassus, home to the Muses, who are after all the nine daughters of Memory.

## VI. Sites of Memory and the Classical Canon

Before pursuing this line of thought any further, it will be instructive to consider an anecdote about the poet Simonides of Ceos, an older contemporary and rival of Pindar's. Simonides was a composer of epitaph inscriptions as well as victory odes,<sup>1</sup> and he was also said to have invented the very first mnemonic system, from which the more complex mnemonics of later Greek and Roman rhetoric, including the device of the memory palace, were allegedly derived.

The traditional story that associates Simonides' poetic career with the burgeoning art of memory is referenced in several sources,<sup>2</sup> but the best-known version appears in Cicero's *De Oratore*. Simonides, as Cicero records the tale, was dining in Thessaly at the house of Scopas, a nobleman. He there performed a poem (some sources identify it as a work of epinician that Simonides had composed to honor Scopas' victory in a boxing match<sup>3</sup>) including an extended passage on the myth of Castor and Pollux. Scopas was not pleased, and responded to the poem by telling Simonides that he would pay him only half of the fee they had agreed upon, and that if Simonides liked, "he could ask for the rest from his friends the Tyndarides [i.e. the Dioscuri, Castor and Pollux], who had received half the praise."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, his views on the relative merits of poetry and statuary seem to have accorded with Pindar's, for he notes that "even mortal hands break stone": "What man," he asks, "trusting his wits, would approve of Cleobulus, dweller in Lindus, who against ever-lasting rivers, spring flowers, the light of the sun or of the golden moon or the whirling eddies of the sea pitted the strength of a statue?" (Quoted in Patrick O'Sullivan, "Victory statue, victory song: Pindar's agonistic poetics and its legacy," *Sport and Festival in the Ancient Greek World*, edited by David J. Phillips and David Pritchard (Swansea: The Classical Press of Wales, 2003), 77.)

<sup>2</sup> Sources include Quintilian, Theocritus, and Callimachus. See John H. Molyneux, *Simonides: A Historical Study* (Bolchazy-Carducci Publishers, 1992), 33, 118, 124.

<sup>3</sup> See e.g. Molyneux, 33.

<sup>4</sup> Cicero, *De Oratore*, 2.352-3. All quotations from *De Oratore* are taken from *On the Ideal Orator*, translated by James May and Jacob Wisse (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).



The story goes on to say that a while later, Simonides received a message that two young men were asking for him outside. Simonides went to meet these visitors, but did not find them (they are usually supposed to have been Castor and Pollux themselves), and while he was gone, the banquet hall collapsed, killing both Scopas and the rest of his dinner companions. The bodies were so crushed and mangled that the families could not identify which was which, but Simonides himself was able to identify them because he remembered the *place* where each guest had been sitting at the table. Thanks to this experience, says Cicero, Simonides discovered that

...order is what most brings light to our memory. And he concluded that those who would like to employ this part of their abilities should choose localities, then form mental images of the things they wanted to store in their memory, and place these in the localities. In this way, the order of the localities would preserve the order of the things, while the images would represent the things themselves; and we would use the localities like a wax tablet, and the representations like the letters written on it.<sup>5</sup>

What is perhaps most interesting here, and what has so far received little scholarly notice, is the particularly poetic justice of the punishment we see inflicted on the patron who disparages Simonides' art: he and his companions are *forgotten*. Their physical bodies are destroyed, and nothing identifiable remains to be honored or remembered. In other words, precisely that function which epinician is designed to perform—the preservation of the victor's name and memory—is subverted when Scopas rejects the half of the ode dedicated to Castor and Pollux. It is therefore possible to read the anecdote not only as a comment upon memory systems as such, but also as a comment upon the technique of mnemonic location as integral to the art of epinician poetry. In the context of epinician, myths themselves serve as a sort of *loci* upon which the achievements of athletic victors are strategically “placed,” allowing them to live on through an artificially established

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<sup>5</sup> Cicero, *De Oratore*, 2.353-4.

association with gods and tales that, unlike the victors themselves, are destined to last. As Pindar notes in *Nemean 6*, mortal men, regardless of their accomplishments, are ultimately “nothing,” whereas “the bronze heaven remains a secure abode forever.”<sup>6</sup> To place a victor within the framework of a myth such as that of Castor and Pollux is precisely to situate him in the ἀσφαλὲς αἰὲν ἔδος, the “ever-secure seat” of the gods, by affixing his memory to their already-famous deeds.

There are, we may say, two parts to the tale. The first part is concerned with punishing Scopas for refusing to pay Simonides his due. His error is twofold, for he makes not only the mistake of slighting the poet—the one by whose authority *kléos* is established—but also the mistake of slighting the gods. There is a religious message here, no doubt, but it is also apparent that what Scopas has rejected is precisely the mechanism in the ode that would have effected his preservation—that mechanism which connects his name with a stable rhetorical *locus*, in this case the *locus* of the Castor and Pollux myth. In Simonides’ poem, this myth appears to serve a purpose analogous to that of the seats at the banquet table which allowed Simonides, in the end, to restore the names and identities of the mangled guests. By “setting down” the name and identity of an athletic victor within a framework of cultural mnemonics such as gods, heroes, histories, gnomes, and other literary devices, a poem acquires a cultural relevance that will allow it both to endure and to carry its laudandus along with it to a receptive posterity. But an epinician ode composed according to Scopas’ program, praising only the victor and eschewing the framework of myths and gnomes by which the fragile identity of a laudandus is traditionally supported, would indeed collapse upon itself and undo its own labor. Neither the name nor the athletic achievement of Scopas is sufficient

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<sup>6</sup> Pindar, *Nemean* 6.3.

to preserve itself, but the apotheosis of Castor and Pollux, now seated in the enduring “bronze heaven,” may offer a suitable foundation.<sup>7</sup>

The warning against Scopas’ hubristic rejection of the necessary structure of epinician, as I have said, forms the first part of the tale. His punishment, fittingly, is a death after which he is impossible to identify or even really to remember. His family will not be able properly to conduct his funeral or to set up his epitaph, for without knowing which body belongs to him, the traditional epitaphic claim that the deceased “lies here” cannot be asserted. The second part of the anecdote, however, describes Simonides’ marvelous act of restoration. Even after Scopas’ death, Simonides the poet has the power to restore his name and to give his family the comfort of memorializing him properly. The role of Simonides here becomes that of a kind of living epitaph. It is he who, like the “speaking stones” that lined the highways of the ancient Mediterranean, is able to name the buried bodies and to mark them as lying “here” and “here.” As stones and monuments were raised in order to establish a site of memory and connect it with the person buried on the site, so Simonides—combining his roles of poet, epitaph writer, and mnemonic innovator—retains and restores the memory of each of the otherwise nameless, unrememberable bodies.

Simonides was not alone in recognizing that what poetry and monument had in common, besides their aim of invoking the seeming “presence” of an absent subject, was their method of creating a kind of immortality by affixing the temporary to the enduring, providing a fixed “place” for recalling names, deeds, events, and identities. Pindar, too, associates memory with acts of visualization and with order and place. We even find him describing his own odes as “palaces” and other architectural structures. We have

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<sup>7</sup> Pindar, for one, seems to think so, for he too makes use of their myth in *Nemean 10*, a victory ode for Theaeus of Argos. Interestingly, his retelling of the myth runs through forty of the ode’s ninety lines (50-90), thus filling nearly half of the poem, just as the myth in the Simonides anecdote is said to have done.

mentioned already Pindar's "treasure house of hymns,"<sup>8</sup> and *Olympian 6*, too, refers to itself as a *thalamos* ("room," "abode") and as a *megaron* ("hall," "house," or "palace"):

Let us set up golden columns to support  
the strong-walled porch of our abode  
and construct, as it were, a splendid  
palace; for when a work is begun, it is necessary to make  
its front shine from afar.<sup>9</sup>

In some sense, then, the victor, or his *kléos*, is envisioned as residing within the structure of the text, a highly durable "house" that offers a secure site of memory.<sup>10</sup> Scopas, failing to understand the necessity of "placing this on that" and rejecting the support of a prior mythological canon, has foolishly commissioned from his architect-poet only the most precarious of mnemonic structures, with the natural consequence that the house that should have preserved him instead buries him in anonymity.

Although poets like Simonides and Pindar aimed ultimately to transcend the limitations of spatially located objects like statues and stones, we have seen that they nevertheless recognized and relied upon the rhetorical efficacy of such objects. Horace, in his "*Exegi monumentum*," does so too. Yet by imitating and alluding to Pindar throughout his ode, Horace was also building his "monument" on the foundation of a prior literary canon, just as Simonides sought to build Scopas' ode on the foundation of the Castor and Pollux myth—and just as Horace's various imitators would come, in later centuries, to rely on the foundation of his long-established monument as a support for their own. Pope's *Temple*, in an almost literal sense, is also built on the foundation of an underlying canon: that monolithic rock of Parnassus that Swift insisted must prove

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<sup>8</sup> Pindar, *Pythian* 6.8.

<sup>9</sup> Pindar, *Olympian* 6.1-4.

<sup>10</sup> The conceit of the habitable poem is not confined to the classical world. John Donne, too, would come to identify "canonization" with taking up a residence in the architecture of poetry, declaring his own intention to "build in sonnets pretty rooms." John Donne, "The Canonization," In *John Donne: The Major Works*, edited by John Carey (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 32.

unbreakable. Pope's allusions to the works of Homer, Horace, Pindar, and the rest, and his many references to other famous Ancients, serve as supports for *his* poem. If he has placed anything *new* in the memory palace of Fame, it is only himself.

There is, indeed, an argument to be made for regarding the whole poem as Pope's announcement of his own Horatian, self-immortalizing monument. Both Pope's poem and Chaucer's feature a scene in which a mysterious interlocutor asks the poet what he is doing in Fame's house, and whether he has come seeking renown for himself. Chaucer's dreamer dismisses the question as if the possibility of a personal canonization had never once occurred to him,<sup>11</sup> and his questioner at once drops the subject. He proceeds on his dream-journey for several hundred more lines before the poem breaks off, without ever according either the question or the answer any special importance. For Pope, however, the same question informs the central argument of the work. The gravity of the episode for him is such that he cannot forbear placing it, as his notes explain, "more naturally" at the conclusion and climax of the poem, "with the addition of a moral to the whole."<sup>12</sup>

Pope's dreamer does not appear shocked by the question, nor is he embarrassed to answer candidly that fame does hold some allure for him: "'Tis true, said I, not void of Hopes I came, / For who so fond as youthful Bards of fame?"<sup>13</sup> Having made the confession, however, he carefully qualifies it, acknowledging the vanity and foolishness of any such hope. He gives his final answer in the poem's concluding lines:

Nor Fame I slight, nor for her Favours call;  
She comes unlook'd for, if she comes at all:  
But if the Purchase cost so dear a Price,  
As soothing Folly, or exalting Vice:  
Oh! if the Muse must flatter lawless Sway,  
And follow still where Fortune leads the way;

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<sup>11</sup> Chaucer, 1873-7.

<sup>12</sup> Pope, "Temple of Fame," 187n.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 501-2.

Or if no Basis bear my rising Name,  
But the fall'n Ruins of Another's Fame;  
Then teach me, Heaven! to scorn the guilty Bays,  
Drive from my Breast that wretched Lust of Praise;  
Unblemish'd let me live, or die unknown,  
Oh, grant an honest Fame, or grant me none!<sup>14</sup>

The rhetoric is elegant. Neither arrogantly scorning fame, nor miserably groveling, Pope assumes a virtuously deferential posture, as it were with palms upturned to accept—at the goddess's discretion—a reward justly earned. What the concluding stanza proclaims is not the poet's *fame*, but his *desert*. He displays his humility, his good sense, his justice, his generosity, and of course his literary artfulness, and leaves the verdict to posterity.

By placing this scene, the only scene in which the dreamer speaks, at the end of his poem, Pope effectively recalls the closing lines of Horace's "*Exegi Monumentum*," in which the poet turns at last to address his Muse: "Take the pride, Melpomene, that you have so well earned, and, if you would be so kind, surround my hair with Delphic bay."<sup>15</sup> Pope does not, like Horace, ask his Muse to crown him; on the contrary, he makes a show of rejecting the crown—"teach me, Heaven! to scorn the guilty Bays"—if fame and virtue should turn out to be incompatible. But we have seen already that virtue is for the most part rewarded highly in Pope's *Temple*, where men like Socrates and Cato take higher stations than men like Alexander and Caesar.<sup>16</sup> By rejecting the crown, Pope claims the very merits that would—or should—secure it. Thus in his own way he too has set up a monument. And he has made Horace, among others, his foundation.

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 513-524.

<sup>15</sup> Horace, III.30, 14-16.

<sup>16</sup> Even the allegedly "fickle" dispensations of "blind Fortune" turn out noticeably to favor the good, the humble, and the sincere; see lines 298-417.

## VII. Conclusion

What I wish to suggest is that by the time of the battle of the books, the Ancients themselves had to a large extent replaced gods and heroes as the foundation or “secure abode” of memory and fame. Apotheosized and made “immortal” in their turn, they had become for Pope what Castor and Pollux had once been to Simonides: a source of myths, histories, heroic tales, and gnomic truths that did not need to be defended or further memorialized, because they were already the foundation, the memory palace itself. The monuments in Pope’s temple thus did not merely signify their own self-established immortality; they also offered a means to immortality for those who followed after them. The poet who could successfully affix himself to the undying memory of Homer, Virgil, or Horace might thereby secure his own “place” in the universal memory palace of Fame, which is to say, in the collective cultural memory of the Western world.

What was at stake in the battle of the books, then, was not only the longevity of the “immortal” Ancients, but the myth of literary immortality itself. The Humanist resurrection of the classical past had entailed a faith in the timelessness of art as well as in the epitaphic power of text to preserve the “essence” of the dead, such that the spirit in the tome might be revived at any moment by a libation—the breath and blood of the reader, calling the author back to life. This was the miracle Petrarch believed could be performed for Cicero, and the one Petrarch hoped would be performed for him in turn by his own future readers. It was a miracle that Pope and Swift feared the Moderns, with their ever-expanding libraries of annotations and trivia, would render at last impossible. If voices from the past could still speak and be understood, then there was hope of projecting new voices into the future as well. But if the past was nothing more than a

heap of relics to be tagged, catalogued, and filed away, then the future was an abyss of unbeing, a dismal prospect indeed.

By defending the Ancients from the seeming onslaught of the “barbarous” Moderns, men like Pope and Swift sought to preserve the whole elaborate architecture of eternizing rhetoric for which the Ancients served indispensably as pillars and supports. Were the works of Phalaris and Aesop now forgeries, their places no longer fixed, their identities uncertain, their significance doubtful? If so, and if the trend continued, then the long-familiar Humanist infrastructure of canonicity and immortality seemed liable to collapse like Scopas’ hall, burying Ancients and Moderns alike. As it turned out, neither Swift’s library nor Pope’s temple could preserve the past in the way Petrarch had hoped; both texts, wittingly or otherwise, subvert their own eternizing tropes and raise serious questions about the “immortality” of their immortals. Both enact and embody—even as they endeavor to escape it—the central problem of the myth of preservation. What Pope calls the “Estate which Wits inherit after Death”<sup>1</sup> is at last no more than a castle in the air, a “place” that is no place.

Echoes of the preservation problem would linger on through the Romantic period, in the airy dome of Coleridge’s “Kubla Khan” and the broken monument of Shelley’s “Ozymandias,” but a *Temple of Fame* on Pope’s model would by then have been inconceivable. Jack Lynch observes that the literary productions of the “battle of the books” constitute a kind of “emblematic last stand for the humanists.”<sup>2</sup> Perhaps it is not too much to say that they constitute a last stand of sorts—and a rather ambivalent one—for the promise of poetic immortality as well.

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<sup>1</sup> Pope, “Temple of Fame,” 505-6.

<sup>2</sup> Lynch, 382.



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