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THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SPENCE'S *ANECDOTES* IN DETERMINING POPE'S CRITICAL THEORIES

by

James Ronald Tate

Approved by

Chairman, Thesis Committee

Professor of English

Associate Professor of English

Chairman, Department of English

Dean of the Graduate School

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JAMES RONALD TATE. The Significance of Spence's *Anecdotes* in Determining Pope's Critical Theories. (Under the direction of MAYNARD JOHN HIGBY.)

This study examines the relationship between the critical observations of Alexander Pope as they appear in Joseph Spence's *Anecdotes* and the critical theory Pope advanced in his own published works. A relationship established, the study concludes that the *Anecdotes* merits consideration as a scholarly tool for any research into Pope's critical theories. The *Anecdotes* contains Pope's remarks on practically every area of critical consideration. Often the material is an expansion of observations to be found in the poems, essays, prefaces, and letters. The comments from the *Anecdotes* have the added value of representing spontaneous thought delivered with candor.

After reviewing the literary history which surrounds the composition and subsequent obscurity of the *Anecdotes*, the study proceeds with an analysis of Spence's reliability and a description of the contents of his book. The corpus of Pope's critical observations from the *Anecdotes* is then organized to produce a synthesis of his critical theory as revealed in that source. Chapter three collects Pope's published sources or critical theory, foremost among which is the *Essay on Criticism* (1711), and offers a description of their major tenets. The final chapter measures the two bodies of critical thought against one another and concludes that an essential unity of critical theory exists in all of Pope's productions, including the conversational remarks from

the *Anecdotes*. The key to this unity is Pope's firm adherence to the concept of Nature as the enduring standard for artistic composition and interpretative criticism. Pope's "Nature" constitutes an unchanging order that prevails throughout the physical universe as well as in mankind's heritage of social and cultural institutions. The critical method also involves assimilation of the best that has been advanced by ancient and modern critics. The result is a critical theory remarkable for its breadth of application and unity of principle.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: SPENCE'S ANECDOTES AND THE POPE PROBLEM

One of the more ambitious projects of twentieth-century literary criticism has been an attempt to redefine the essential nature of English letters of the Augustan Age. A revived interest in the Neo-Classical tradition has led to a massive effort on the part of scholars and general readers to retrieve Augustan literature from the doldrums to which it was assigned by the Victorians. No small part of this restoration has concerned itself with the literary reputation of that often maligned genius of Augustan letters, Alexander Pope. Though considered, along with Dryden, the presiding master of poetry in his own century, Pope's reputation suffered successive stages of decline in the nineteenth. The poet came to be regarded as an ill-tempered recluse, a childish literary tyrant who directed scurrilous attacks at his contemporaries but could abide no criticism himself. His poetic gifts were slighted accordingly, his versification considered more akin to prose, and his technical abilities limited to a single monotonous form -- the heroic couplet. It was at this low ebb that Pope's reputation stood when twentieth century interpreters began the task of restoring the Wasp of Twickenham to his proper place among English poets.

In 1934 George Sherburn published his excellent study entitled The Early Career of Alexander Pope. In that pioneering work, Sherburn's

investigations led to three revealing conclusions: no satisfactory biography of Pope existed, previous examinations of certain details in Pope's life had led to misinterpretations and false ideas concerning the poet's character and achievement, and "circumstances and personal traits" drove Pope "from an early career of varied poetic composition into his true career . . . which was that of perhaps the greatest of all formal satirists."[1] Subsequent scholars have followed Sherburn's lead in contributing substantially to a more responsible body of Pope criticism. In 1962 John Butt and others completed the standard edition of the poems,[2] superseding the bulky Elwin-Courthope edition (10 vols., 1871-89). The thorough bibliography by R. H. Griffith[3] (2 vols, 1922-27) effectively established the canon of Pope's writings. Perceptive book-length studies and articles appearing in the last forty years are too numerous to mention here,[4] but Austin Warren's _Alexander Pope as Critic and Humanist_[5] is typical of the wealth of scholarship now available on the individual facets of Pope's varied career. The study of Pope's critical attitudes, as well as other avenues of Pope scholarship, is certain to be enriched by the publication of J. M. Osborn's definitive edition of Joseph Spence's _Observations, Anecodotes, and Characters of Books and Men: Collected from Conversation_, 2 vols., (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966).

The brief review of Pope materials above contains little indication of the extent to which modern scholars have relied upon Spence's _Anecdotes_, but an examination of the book will reveal the debt owed to the transcripts of conversation compiled by the kindly Anglican prelate.

Since Warburton and Warton, every scholar who has attempted a major project on Pope has depended significantly on the materials in the Anecdotes. Now that a highly usable modern edition exists, scholars should recognize the increased value of the Spence materials in attempting any critical assessment of Pope. It is the purpose of this paper to illustrate the critical importance of Spence's Anecdotes by measuring Pope's critical theory as revealed in the pages of the Anecdotes against the critical dicta contained in the poet's published works, especially the Essay on Criticism. No attempt will be made to offer a definitive study of Pope's critical beliefs; however, a synthesis of Pope's scattered critical comments from the Anecdotes should offer a new insight into the criticism contained in Pope's poems, essays, letters, and prefaces. Before embarking upon this comparative study, one must first establish what the Anecdotes is and briefly review the literary history surrounding the book's composition and use during the past two centuries.

Joseph Spence became known to Pope in 1726 when the poet's bookseller directed his attention to a small volume just published at Oxford entitled An Essay on Pope's Odyssey; in which some Particular Beauties and Blemishes of that work are considered. The criticism was written in the form of a dialogue, with one speaker praising Pope's translation while the other pointed out occasional faults. Pope was delighted with the fairness of the criticism and a close acquaintance with Spence soon developed, the two remaining on intimate terms until Pope's death. Pope's influence and the reputation of the essay were probably responsible for Spence's appointment as Professor of Poetry at

Oxford in 1728. At about the same time, he was presented through his alma mater with a living at Birchanger, Essex. He began here his lifelong hobby of gardening, an interest deeply shared with Pope and his circle. In 1730 Spence was asked to accompany the young Charles Sackville, Earl of Middlesex, on a grand tour of the continent. Amiable and high-principled, Spence was in demand as a tutor and companion to young men of quality on their tours. He made three such journeys between 1730 and 1742, accompanying successively Lord Middlesex (later second Duke of Dorset), a Mr. Trevor, and Henry Clinton, ninth Earl of Lincoln (afterwards Duke of Newcastle). On these expeditions he contracted friendships with many of the foremost literary and political figures of England, France, and Italy. Spence's careful notes of conversations reflect the details of his three trips and embellish the pages of the *Anecdotes* with valuable information from Pope's contemporaries.

Spence's literary credits extend well beyond his evaluation of Pope's *Odyssey*. In 1747 he published a work that earned him a considerable reputation, *Polymetis: or an Enquiry concerning the agreement between the Works of the Roman Poets and the Remains of the Ancient Artists*. Though no longer read, the cumbersome classical dialogue comparing the Romans and Greeks was considered an indispensable item in every Augustan library. His *Crito: or a Dialogue on Beauty* (1752) enjoyed a similar reputation in its day and is still admired by eighteenth-century scholars.[6] Among the many lesser literary projects of Spence are accounts of Stephen Duck, the Thresher Poet, and Thomas Blacklock, a blind poet. He also edited a printing of *Gorboduc* (1736), probably intended as a compliment to young Sackville, his former

charge and a descendant of one of the authors of that play. Other pursuits involved editing a periodical, engaging in the pamphlet wars of the times, authoring a mock-epic, and editing the "Remarks and Dissertations on Virgil" for his friend Edward Holdsworth in 1768.[7]

But Spence's ultimate literary reputation must rest on his compilation of recorded conversations as preserved in the Anecdotes. There is no evidence to indicate how early Spence began to record the conversations of his associates. Certainly by 1728 he was in the habit of keeping a regular journal, for his early discussions with Pope are preserved. Unlike Boswell, he apparently jotted down notes in the presence of the speakers, utilizing the backs of playing cards or whatever else was available. The cryptic notes were later transcribed into a journal in a more complete form. The journal, consisting of loose memorandum papers, served as the first step in a series of revisions. At Spence's death, a bound vellum manuscript contained what was apparently the final draft of many of the anecdotes, but hundreds of others existed in various states of revision on loose memorandum papers.

There is little doubt that Spence intended the materials of the Anecdotes to be published after his death. On March 24, 1767, he had contracted with James Dodsley for the publication, upon his death, of ". . . all the Copies which he the Said Mr Spence hath not yet published, and which the Executors of the Said Mr Spence shall judge proper to be published . . . ."[8] an arrangement for which Dodsley agreed to pay £100. Dodsley surely considered the Anecdotes the choice part of Spence's papers, for he requested delivery of the manuscript several days after Spence died. But Spence's will armed his executors with discretionary

powers, and they decided against publication. Their own objections were strengthened by the reservations of Lord Lincoln (by now Duke of Newcastle), whose reluctance was motivated by the personal nature and too recent dates of many of the entries.

Although Spence showed reservations in his will and in his agreement with Dodsley, it was the executors and not Spence who forbade publication of the Anecdotes. The careful arrangement and editing by the author furnish definite evidence of his intentions to publish the manuscript. In addition, "Spence had written on the cover of one manuscript the following significant note: 'All the people well acquainted with Mr. Pope, looked on him as a most friendly, open, charitable, and generous-hearted man;--all the world almost, that did not know him, were got into a mode of having very different ideas of him: how proper this makes it to publish these Anecdotes after my death.'"[9] It can only be surmised that this note was written after Spence had abandoned his earlier plan for a formal biography of Pope. Returning from Twickenham shortly after Pope's death, Spence and Warburton rode in the same carriage. Warburton voiced his intention to write a life of Pope, and Spence indicated that he himself had made some notes toward that design. Characteristically, Spence readily offered to put all his papers at the disposal of Warburton and defer the project to him.

The history of Spence's manuscript since their author's death provides ample evidence of their value to literary historians. Warburton procrastinated in writing his biography of Pope, and the materials borrowed from Spence appear to have been used in the sadly inadequate Life of Pope published by Owen Ruffhead in 1769. The appearance of the biog-

raphy just after Spence's death may have been more than coincidental, for the edition contained no mention of its indebtedness to Spence's manuscript. Spence had also lent his materials to Joseph Warton for use in the latter's _Essay on the Genius and Writings of Pope_ (1756). Warton drew upon the same information for his edition of Pope's works in 1797.

When Dr. Johnson was working on his _Lives of the English Poets_ (1779, 1781), he obtained permission to borrow the vellum manuscript copy of the _Anecdotes_ from the Duke of Newcastle. Johnson gained considerable information from it concerning Pope, Addison, and Dryden. He probably benefitted somewhat from details pertaining to other poets. A study of Johnson's use of the Spence papers would prove valuable to students of his biographical technique. Some years later Edmund Malone was able to secure Newcastle's manuscript briefly for use in preparing his essay on Dryden. He made a hasty copy of the papers before returning them, probably intending an edition at some time in the future.

Malone died without publishing the _Anecdotes_, but his materials passed to William Beloe, who announced an edition in two large volumes. When Beloe died before completion of his design, the printer John Murray acquired Malone's manuscript. He announced publication, but hesitated to provoke the Newcastle family, who refused to sanction the piracy of their manuscript. Matters were brought to a head when it was learned that a hitherto unknown manuscript of the _Anecdotes_ was about to be published by William H. Carpenter, a rival bookseller. Carpenter had acquired an earlier draft of the materials from a descendant of one of Spence's executors. Samuel W. Singer was commissioned to edit the papers, a task for which he would obtain ownership of the papers in lieu

of payment. Murray then hurried Malone's copy through the press, and rival editions appeared on the same day in 1820.

Of the two, Singer's version is the more complete, containing over a thousand separate anecdotes arranged in eight sections, or "centuries," as Spence had left them. A number of additional entries existing on loose papers of Spence are attached as "Supplemental Anecdotes," and an appendix of letters written to Spence is also included. The Malone edition contains less total material and is based on a less reliable manuscript source. The anecdotes are rearranged into three sections, the first designated as "Popiana," the second containing materials relating to English and foreign writers, and the last classed simply as "Miscellaneous Articles." No features of the Malone version render it superior to Singer's which was accepted as the standard edition for a century and a half.

In 1858 John Russell Smith issued an exact reprint of the Singer text in the Library of Old Authors Series. Then in 1890 John Underhill edited a selection of the anecdotes for the Camelot Series. The latter adopted Malone's idea of grouping the entries under subject headings. These reprints were the only editions of the Anecdotes to appear between 1820 and 1964. Wright's biography of Spence in 1950 emphasized the need for a modern edition of the Anecdotes, produced from a collation of all existing Spence materials, properly arranged with thorough critical notes and an introduction.[10] Bonamy Dobree supplied a modern edition with a new introduction in 1964, but the work is only a careful reprint of Singer's text. Finally, in 1966 J. M. Osborn edited an enviable standard edition in two volumes. Utilizing all the Spence materials,

Osborn's edition contains the most authentic version of each recorded anecdote. These are topically arranged and numbered consecutively for easy reference. The extensive introduction is highly informative, and the edition should prove a valuable tool for future literary scholarship.

The interesting details of the history of Spence's manuscripts must give way to the importance of the contents of the Anecdotes itself. The conversations contained in the book constitute a wealth of information about the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. From its pages speak many of the greatest literary and political figures of the Augustan Age, including Pope, Lord Bolingbroke, Thomson, Cribber, Lady Montagu, and the critic Dennis. The speakers cover a wide range of topics, touching eventually upon most literary figures of their own day and previous ages. Details concerning dates, places, events, and critical estimates are presented in abundance through the medium of refined conversation. Taken as a whole, the anecdotes comprise a showcase of the dominant literary and critical tendencies of the early eighteenth century. The value of the work of literary historians is inestimable. Austin Wright comments that had the manuscripts "lain forgotten for a century and a half, if neither Warburton nor Johnson nor anyone else had been granted a look at them, if not one of the anecdotes had ever found its way into print, and if a twentieth-century discoverer should then have published his find--then only would the sensation produced and the knowledge contributed have brought a realization of the true importance of Spence's labors . . . ."[11]

To make full use of this literary treasure, the researcher must be assured that the material contained in the Anecdotes is reliable.

George Sherburn was the first to question Spence's reliability, remarking that though "Spence was honest . . . his methods of recording, and revising what pretends to be Pope's exact language would not make for perfect accuracy."[12] Sherburn's reservations, however, were premature and must yield to the critical opinions of Wright and Osborn, who have enjoyed greater access to Spence's papers and devoted far more research to his methods of compilation. Wright concludes that "Spence's character and reputation, his method of procedure in the preparation of the Anecdotes and other works, his eagerness to seek confirmation of his materials, and the corraboration of many of his entries by testimony . . . all point to the conclusion that Spence's Anecdotes may be accepted on the whole as a veracious record of what the compiler actually heard."[13] J. M. Osborn fully concurs with Wright's argument, adding that "all in all, he [Spence] swallowed few false or improbable tales, and in most cases he was recording matters of opinion or comments on events that are quite different from stories reported at second or third hand about persons of great fame."[14] At any rate, it is assuring to know that if Pope is reported as having made some comment, one can be fairly certain that his words are faithfully reproduced.

The vibrant personality dominating the Anecdotes is, of course, Pope himself. Almost half of the total contents of the collection consists of anecdotes by or about the poet. A fairly complete biographical sketch of Pope can be gleaned from the pages. Having met Pope relatively late in the poet's life, Spence often pressed his friend for details of his youth and early career, much in the same manner that Boswell questioned Johnson. Pope is always ready with a constant flow

of information, and comments by acquaintances such as Mrs. Rackett (Pope's sister) and Martha Blount aid in filling out the canvas. Without Spence's information, biographers of Pope would be at a loss to handle their subject.

Fortunately, more than biographical information on Pope can be found in the Anecdotes. The spontaneous remarks of Pope the refined conversationalist and private individual abound in the collection. Through Pope we hear "unwritten histories" of literary squabbles, the opinions he held of his literary contemporaries, and his tastes in writings ancient and modern. The resulting profile of a literary monarch widens considerably as one reads. Pope's desire to be remembered more as a moralist than a pungent satirist becomes evident. The fervid desire to defend his literary allies is matched by his willingness to forgive those who injured him. But perhaps no other view is more impressive than that of Pope the critic and arbiter of taste. His reflections on his own writings and those of his contemporaries and predecessors are valuable, the more so because they are spontaneous and unrehearsed. Through the medium of Spence exists a record of Pope's critical evaluations to supplement the dicta found in his published works and correspondence. Pope's essays, poems, and prefaces are prepared with an eye to the literary public. The poet's correspondence was personally edited with the consideration of public reaction always before him. His conversations in the Anecdotes, however, are examples of fresh, unguarded thought on a variety of subjects. A critical consideration of this unique source should result in a more complete appraisal of Alexander Pope as critic.

CHAPTER II

THE *ANECDOTES*: POPE AS INFORMAL CRITIC

The corpus of Pope's critical judgments in the *Anecdotes* presents a bewildering maze for the scholar attempting to use Spence's book for the first time. Pope's comments on his own literary productions and the writings of a host of others are intermingled with general critical statements, the whole scattered haphazardly across the pages of the *Anecdotes*. The usefulness of the collection has traditionally been limited because of Spence's chronological arrangement of the material into "centuries" (eight sections, covering two or three years each, consisting of approximately one hundred anecdotes per section). The situation has been improved by Osborn's rearrangement of the Pope materials under one head in the standard edition, but a proper introductory digest of Pope's critical pronouncements is still lacking. To my knowledge, no one has attempted to isolate and impose a form upon Pope's critical statements in the *Anecdotes*. The material has obviously been treated by other commentators on Pope's criticism, but the method employed has been one of assimilation rather than isolation.[15] In other words, no one has studied Pope's critical comments in the *Anecdotes* apart from his criticism as found in the poems, essays, letters, and editions of Shakespeare and Homer.

In order to assess Pope's critical stance in his conversations before Spence, one must attempt an outline of the material. The nature

and character of the comments render classification by genre almost impossible, especially since Pope offers few specific comments on dramatic and prose literature. The majority of the pronouncements are directed either at poetry specifically or polite letters in general. Therefore, the natural procedure is to classify Pope's random judgments in a manner that approximates the way in which the poet approached the critical method himself. In an early conversation before Spence, Pope proposed his own system for examining poetry: "'There are three distinct tours in poetry: the design, the language, and the versification' (to which he afterwards seemed to add a fourth--the expression, or manner of painting the humours, characters, and things that fall in with your design)."[16] Throughout the Anecdotes, Pope employs these same terms when making literary judgments.

By design, Pope meant the plan of a work, the consideration of the boundaries within which a writer intended to operate. The design included the creation of plot and characters, plus any variations the author chose to employ (such as including sub-plots or beginning *in medias res*). Pope declares that "most little poems should be written by a plan . . ." (537), citing Tibullus, Ovid's *Elegies*, and Horace's *Art of Poetry* as examples. Horace's poem, he proposes, was only a fragment of a larger plan which may have gone unfinished (538). Pope implies that since the ancients followed the practice of first constructing a plan, modern writers should do likewise. Of his own *Dunciad*, Pope conjectures that "a poem on a slight subject requires the greater care to make it considerable enough to be read" (383). This judgment is reinforced later: "*The Dunciad* was his favorite among his

own writings and the most difficult to produce.

Pope illustrates the importance of the design again in his answer to those critics who wondered why he omitted the Fall in his Essay on Man or why the immortality of the soul was not considered. He replied, "The reason is plain. They both lay out of my subject, which was only to consider man as he is, in his present state, not in his past or future" (306). Pope employed a close adherence to design in all his major works, particularly the longer poems. Of such works as the Moral Essays, the Imitations of Horace, and The Dunciad, he observed that "the first epistle is to be to the whole work what a scale is to a book of maps, and in this, I reckon, lies my greatest difficulty . . . that of settling and ranging the parts of it aright . . ." (294). This reflection is of particular value, for it reveals Pope to be a craftsman who spent as much pains in envisioning his work as he later did in revising it.

Being ever conscious of the framework in his own writings, Pope did not hesitate to criticize others when they departed from their proper design. Three examples of this aspect of his criticism will suffice to illustrate the point. In speaking of Butler's Hudibras, Pope charges that the author "set out on too narrow a plan, and even that design is not kept up. He sinks into little, true particulars about the widow, etc. -- The enthusiastic knight and the ignorant squire, over-religious in two different ways, and always quarrelling together, is the chief point of view in it" (461). Pope utilized a similar criterion when Addison sought the poet's opinion of his Cato. He advised the dramatist to be content with printing the play, for he considered "the

lines well written, but the piece not theatrical enough" (153). Pope realized that first in the dramatist's design should be the creation of a piece to be performed, the embellishments being of secondary importance. But perhaps the clearest example of Pope's thoughts on design is his judgment of Milton's Paradise Lost. The style of that poem, he observes, is "not natural; 'tis an exotic style. As his subject lies a good deal out of our world, it has a particular propriety in those parts of the poem, and when he is on earth, wherever he is describing our parents in Paradise, you see he uses a more easy and natural way of writing. Though his formed style may fit the higher parts of his own poem, it does very ill for others who write on natural and pastoral subjects" (459). These remarks on Milton's design are typical of Pope's constant reliance on classical decorum. Each part must be assigned to its natural element.

Language is the second of the four tours in poetry. By language Pope meant the vocabulary which the practicing poet was to draw upon, his selection depending on whether he worked within the pastoral, epic, dramatic, or epistolary tradition. Language was foremost in determining a writer's style, although Pope was adamant in his assertion that no writer could always be identified by his style (392). Being a master in the art of imitation, a legitimate genre admired by the Augustans, Pope knew that a gifted writer could adopt a "borrowed" style to accomplish particular aims. Pope did so successfully in his letter on pastorals, an essay Addison published in The Guardian without recognizing the true author. Pope also realized that a writer's true style would not normally vary, for decorum demanded that he choose appropriate

words to convey particular ideas in his declared medium. He codified his statements on the subject when refuting the opinion that letters should be written "in an easy familiar style . . . ." Pope warned that such a guideline, "like most other general rules, will not hold. The style in letters, as in all other things, should be adapted to the subject" (406). As a critic, Pope was aware that good writing depended on far more than choice of language. He confided to Spence what might be considered the first principle of his critical method: "The great matter how to write well is 'to know thoroughly what one writes about,' and 'not to be affected'" (381). The fault of affectation was one Pope particularly abhorred, citing among others Ambrose Phillips as a writer whose works suffered from that defect.

Another fault of language is the tendency, especially of prose writers, to launch into elaborate "purple passages." In speaking of a contemporary work, Bolingbroke declared that he "'could never bear the saffron morning with her rosy fingers in prose.'" Pope agreed, mentioning his "prejudices against . . . that poetic kind of prose writing . . ." (524). Accompanying his ideas on such glaring faults as purple prose are Pope's critical opinions of slighter errors in style. When asked about the advisibility of ending sentences with prepositions, Pope replied, "'Tis certainly wrong, but I have made a rule to myself about them some time ago, and I think verily 'tis the right one. We use them so in common conversation, and that use will authorize one I think for doing the same in slighter pieces, but not in formal ones . . ." (394). Here Pope anticipates the modern grammarian's view. Although the point disputed is a minor one, Pope's answer is typical of the serious approach

he took to organizing his thoughts on language, and it is not infrequent that Pope's comments herald a modern trend.

The stabilization of the English language was not far enough advanced in Pope's age to furnish an authoritative literary vocabulary. Pope and his circle were highly concerned with establishing a truly English body of words from which young writers might derive their own choices. Pope had followed his own good sense in his writings, postulating that previous writers who had excelled in the language might serve as the proper measure. He observed that "in most doubts whether a word is English or not, or whether such a particular use of it is proper, one has nothing but authority for it. Is it in Sir William Temple, or Locke, or Tillotson? If it be, you may conclude that it is right, or at least won't be looked upon as wrong" (388). This idea was expanded later in conversations among the circle, the proposals being considered as far as a design toward a dictionary "that might be authoritative for our English writers. . ." (389). Eighteen writers were settled upon as authorities in prose, and an unfinished list of authorities for poetic diction mentioned nine names.[17] The lists are interesting and valuable as a factor in determining Augustan stylistic tastes.

Commenting on the language employed by specific writers, Pope directed particular praise to Dryden: "Dryden always uses proper language: lively, natural, and fitted to the subject. 'Tis scarce ever too high or too low. . ." (56). The tribute is only one example of Pope's treatment of the author he considered the finest poet in the language. The greatest masters of the prose technique in Pope's opinion were Lord Bolingbroke and Addison. He characterizes the latter's style as infused

with "great ease, fluency and happiness" (171). A stylistic flaw is exemplified in Shakespeare, who "generally used to stiffen his style with high words and metaphors for the speeches of his kings and great men. He mistook it for a mark of greatness" (421). Pope's censure here is representative of his criticism of dramatic style, central to which is a disapproval of bombast and affectation.

As might be expected, many of Pope's critical observations in the Anecdotes are directed at versification. Of the four tours in poetry, versification is the one in which Pope was most interested and upon which he was most qualified to speak. One of his basic tenets is the preference for rhymed over blank verse. One passage summarizes Pope's position quite well: "I have nothing to say for rhyme, but that I doubt whether a poem can support itself without it in our language, unless it be stiffened with such strange words as are likely to destroy our language itself. The high style that is affected so much in blank verse would not have been borne even in Milton, had not his subject turned so much on such strange out-of-the-world things as it does" (494). This critical assessment is vital for two reasons. First, the close relationship of design, language, versification, and expression is well illustrated by the reference to Paradise Lost. Secondly, Pope displays no unreasonableness in his partisan defense of rhyme, relying on the mediating influence of decorum to dictate whether rhyme or blank verse should be used.

As the acknowledged master of versification in his own age, Pope readily offers critical judgments on the history of English verse. He declares that he studied Dryden closely in his youth and learned his

predecessor's techniques fully, being of the opinion that Dryden had improved versification "much beyond any of our former poets, and would probably have brought it to its perfection, had not he been obliged to write so often in haste" (55). Utilizing the example of Dryden again, Pope touches upon a favorite Augustan subject, the consideration of softness and sweetness in versification. Pope states that a "sensible difference" exists between the two that he was aware of since his youth. Thus "Dryden will be found to be softer, and Waller sweeter" in any direct comparison (403). Spence offers additional comment on the Augustan definition of the terms, identifying sweetness as "a proper management of the pauses" and softness as "a proper intermixture of the vowels and consonants." In another anecdote, Pope adds that soft verses "may be very effeminate," whereas sweet verses "are not at all so" (405).

The same discussion is returned to when Pope treats pastoral verse specifically. He labels "sweetness" as "the distinguishing character of pastoral versification. The fourth and fifth syllables, and the last but two, are chiefly to be minded. . ." (402). This comment sheds critical light on Pope's own pastorals as well as the construction of his couplet form in general. He continues by admitting the difficulties inherent in writing pastoral poetry: "There is scarce any work of mine in which the versification was more laboured than in my Pastorals" (400). The method of composition was taxing, as one "must tune each line over in one's head to try whether they go right or not" (402). In summary, the poet's critical observations on versification reveal a tendency toward naturalness in verse, and a reliance on decorum coupled with the examples of past masters to lead the poet closer to

that ideal contained in Nature.

The artist's close contact with Nature is a neo-classic concept dear to Pope, and his comments on the subject come to fruition in those anecdotes concerned with the expression or the methods used by the writer to complete his design. Pope's aesthetic is perhaps nowhere better stated than in the Anecdotes: "Arts are taken from Nature, and after a thousand vain efforts for improvements, are best when they return to their first simplicity" (560). Related to this aphoristic observation are separate comments on what constitutes the picturesque and the beautiful. Pope illustrates his own concept of the picturesque "from the swan just gilded with the sun amidst the shade of a tree over the water" (613). Here Pope refers to physical nature, only one of the aspects of "naturalness" which the artist must take into account when seeking his expression. On the relationship of natural and refined beauty, Pope declares that "education leads us from the admiration of beauty in natural objects to the admiration of artificial (or customary) excellence. I don't doubt but that a thoroughbred lady might admire the stars because they twinkle like so many candles at a birthnight" (616). The critical metaphor provides additional interpretation of the neo-classic marriage of art and Nature, a pattern of highest importance to Pope in his own art.

Pope approaches critically the problem of expression as it relates to several types of writing, but the notable remarks refer to poetry. In speaking of descriptive poetry he cautions that "'tis a great fault . . . to describe everything. The good ancients (but when I named them I meant Virgil) have no long descriptions, commonly not

above ten lines, and scarce ever thirty" (384). Pope finds Thomson's Seasons suffering from this defect, and would caution young writers to avoid it. Not all his critical strictures are directed at the moderns, however, for he scores Virgil's pastorals as having "sometimes six or eight lines together that are epic . . ." (401). Labeling this intermixture of styles a fault, Pope brags that he himself has "been so scrupulous as scarce ever to admit above two together, even in the Messiah." This slightly amusing anecdote is evidence that Pope was not blind to faults in the ancients. The standards of taste and good judgment are always to be preferred over slavish imitation.

Of course, Pope did esteem the practice of limitating the ancients, and his criticism in the Anecdotes illustrates that more than lip service was involved. The rationale for imitation is neatly summed up: "My first taking to imitating was not out of vanity, but humility. I saw how defective my own things were, and endeavored to mend my manner by copying good strokes from others" (46). Pope returns frequently to this subject, urging fledgling writers to emulate the great writers of the past. Pope's beliefs are squarely in the center of neoclassical thought and are fully consistent with his own artistic practice. For art is Nature reflected, and the study of great writers is, in effect, the same as studying Nature.

There were certain defects in Pope's critical methods, and his comments on expression provide some examples. He was often unaware of the subtler motivations in art, as evidenced by his doubts that Milton "ever intended to have made a tragedy of his Fall of Man. At least I have Andreini's Adamo, and don't find that he has taken anything from

him" (460). The naivete displayed here is seen also in his remarks on pathetic tragedy. He boldly declares that he believes Otway and Lillo to have achieved the pathetic style "without much design," for "'tis a talent of nature rather than an effect of judgment to write so movingly" (482). This economical observation is beautifully stated, but the thought suggests a lack of serious acquaintance with dramatic literature.

There are a few critical observations in the Anecdotes that do not fit easily into Pope's four tours of poetry. Although miscellaneous in nature, the passages are still necessary to complete the picture of Pope as critic and arbiter of taste. The best of these anecdotes are related peripherally to the process of composition, as for example those concerned with critical revision. Pope favors the practice of correcting a poem "all over with one single view at a time. Thus for language, if an elegy: 'these lines are very good, but are not they of too heroical a strain?' and so vice versa" (391). He testifies to discovering such a method in Homer, when comparing the Iliad and Odyssey during his work on the translations. When asked about the profusion of ink in the margins of his foul copy of the Iliad, Pope replied, "'I believe you would find upon enquiry that those parts which have been the most corrected read the easiest'" (203). Pope's tireless habit of correction and revision is justly famous, and the Anecdotes emphasizes the importance he attached to it.

Of criticism itself, Pope indicts those who censure out of passion rather than calm judgment, citing Dennis as the typically bad critic (100). The more responsible critical method is represented by the "learned and strict" Mr. Rhymer, whom Pope considered the best professional

critic England had produced. Pope admits that he himself was well grounded in critical procedure, having endeavored to study the best modern and ancient critics in his youth (44).

Much of Pope's theory of criticism is founded on his firm belief in the didactic purpose for literature. He states flatly that "no writing is good that does not tend to better mankind some way or other. Even in love-verses it may be flung in by the way" (456). In another passage Pope declares that the only commendation he longs for is that prosterity should say "'He has writ in the cause of virture, and done something to mend people's morals'" (626). Spence's chronological arrangement of the *Anecdotes* leads one to believe that Pope became more obsessed with didacticism as the *primum mobile* for literature as he approached death, for all the comments in this vein were uttered in his later career.

As already illustrated, Pope's general critical statements as they appear in the *Anecdotes* are intermingled with evaluations of individual authors and works. The objects of Pope's attention are too numerous to be treated individually, but a sample of Pope's critical assessment of his fellow English writers should represent the tenor of his remarks. Again, Pope's own statement can furnish the figures to consider in such a sample: "'Tis easy to mark out the general course of our poetry. Chaucer, Spenser, Milton, and Dryden are the great landmarks for it" (410). Spence adds that Pope's omission of Shakespeare indicates that he was referring to miscellaneous poets, exclusive of dramatists. A brief survey of Pope's critical opinions of these four suthors should indicate his tastes and standards of judgment.

Pope was genuinely impressed with the variety met with in Chaucer. Perhaps taking some suggestions from Dryden, Pope studied Chaucer with delight and revered him as the first great English poet. He describes Chaucer as "a master of manners and of description, and the first tale-teller in the true enlivened natural way" (411). Vastly superior to Gower, Chaucer excells in "descriptiveness" and is possessed of "the spirit of poetry" (413). Pope proposes that certain of Chaucer's descriptions in the dream-vision poems "compliment particular gardens and buildings of a fine taste . . . though it is what nobody has observed."[18] This last suggestion is illustrative of the keen critical attention of which Pope was at times capable.

Of Spenser, Pope observes that "there is something that pleases one as strongly in one's old age, as it did in one's youth." He compares Spenser's poetry to "a collection of pictures" that strikes one with "a vast deal of delight" (419). Pope hailed Spenser as the great pastoral poet of England, and the greatest influence on succeeding poets.

Pope's appraisal of Milton is almost totally confined to the poet as author of Paradise Lost. His admiration for his epic is considerable, but he includes criticism of its faults as well. In one instance, he censures Milton for flinging too much learning into the poem. As noted before, Pope approves of the "high style" of blank verse only where Milton is dealing with cosmic materials. He viewed the style as "exotic," but suited to the particular subject with which the poem dealt (459). Pope's inclusion of Milton among the "authorities" for poetic diction is evident of the natural veneration he held for the author.

The *Anecdotes* presents clear evidence of Pope's tendency to defend Dryden's reputation from attack. Probably no other poet commanded Pope's allegiance to such a great extent. The partisan nature of Pope's comments extend to an appreciation of Dryden's dramatic talents as well as to his poetic gifts (64). Pope finds "many things finely said in his plays," citing *All for Love*, *Don Sebastian*, and *The Spanish Friar* as the best of his drama. When asked his opinion on the greatest age for English poetry, Pope replied without hesitation, "Why, the last, I think. But now the old are all gone, and the young ones seem to have no emulation among them" (155).

Many other English and foreign writers are discussed, but the brief nature of the remarks makes summary almost impossible. More of Pope's conversations are concerned with biographical details than with pure critical remarks. Still, the composite picture one derives of Pope's view of other authors is often helpful in approximating his critical mind. The majority of his critical judgments in the *Anecdotes* display a surprising unity and offer additional evidence of the power and scope of Pope's mind. A wider acquaintance with the nature of Spence's book should lead students of Pope to consult its pages more often than they have in the past.

CHAPTER III

THE PUBLISHED WORKS: POPE AS FORMAL CRITIC

That Alexander Pope will continue to be revered more as a poet than as a critic seems a safe enough evaluation. But Pope realized that the accomplished author was perhaps more capable of responsible criticism than any lay commentator could be. His injunction to "Let such teach Others who themselves Excel, / And Censure freely who have Written well"[19] is a neat summation of the role envisioned for Pope's ideal poet-critic. Pope himself fills the role admirably, although his first major critical statement, the *Essay on Criticism*, was published before he had distinguished himself as an author.

As the guiding spirit of literary taste and judgment in Augustan England, Pope published a number of works that rank among the leading critical documents of the eighteenth century. In 1711 the *Essay on Criticism* appeared, elevating Pope to the attention of the literary world and the admiration of the public. This classical imitation, in the center of the *Ars Poetica* tradition, was Pope's first great literary venture. The precocious accomplishment reflected his wide reading of the classical and continental critics and announced a set of critical precepts which Pope was to enlarge upon throughout his career. Pope's first critical treatment of a specific genre occurred in his "Discourse on Pastorals," a preface affixed to the 1717 edition of his own *Pastorals*. The eleven years from 1715 until 1726 found Pope engaged as an editor

and translator, and the critical literature produced in this period is necessarily directed toward the epic and dramatic genres. Pope's most brilliant Homeric criticism is found in the "Preface" to his translation of the _Iliad_ (1715). Included in the first copies of the translation was his _Observations on the Iliad_, a treatise more concerned with the scholarly problems of translating Homer. The less informative "Postscript" to the _Odyssey_ (1726) is a well reasoned plea for acceptance and understanding of the artistic differences between the _Iliad_ and _Odyssey_. The "Preface" to the _Works of Shakespeare_ (1725) is Pope's only considerable treatment of dramatic literature and probably the most valuable part of his unhappily inadequate edition. The highly ironic _Discourse on the Profund, or the Art of Sinking in Poetry_ (1727) represents yet another approach to criticism, that of shaming one's contemporaries into right reason toward writing. Closely related to this "backdoor" approach is the _Epistle to Augustus_ (1733), an Horatian imitation in which Pope ironically adopts a censurious treatment of past English poets in order to advance his case for a recognition of the moderns. Finally, there are the scattered critical comments to be collected from Pope's correspondence and his occasional essays, such as _Guardian_ No. 40, a piece of more interest to literary historians than to critical commentators.

It is a fact that Pope's critical output is more varied than prolific. He produced a considerable smaller volume of criticism than Dryden or Dr. Johnson, and probably never thought of himself as more than an "occasional" critic. He was more interested in correcting the literary abuses of the age than in formulating any new critical stand-

ards by which to judge literature.[20] Indeed, Pope's entire approach as a critic can be described as an attempt to "incorporate into his own aesthetic the often-conflicting literary beliefs of his predecessors and contemporaries" to produce a set of standards "not novel, [but] unique in their assimilation of the traditions which he inherited."[21] A description of Pope's critical method can be adequately realized by examining his early Essay on Criticism. Most commentators agree that the Essay comprises a "sufficient view of Pope as he wished to be taken critically."[22] Austin Warren affirms that no significant change occurred in Pope's critical theory subsequent to the Essay,[23] and Wimsatt and Brooks are content to accept the treatise as definitive of Pope's critical statement.[24]

An Essay on Criticism was published in 1711, although Pope later claimed to have written it as early as 1708.[25] Its publication was accompanied by a varied and heated reception in the literary circles of Augustan England. Addison reviewed it in the Spectator, according it, at first at least, a favorable reception. Although most of the literary establishment concurred with Addison's praise, angry denunciations were heard from isolated quarters, notably from the critic John Dennis. Much of the controversy centered around the sources of the poem rather than any critical standards which it advanced. Pope chose to model his poem after Horace's Ars Poetica and, as such, entitled the work an "essay," conforming to the desultory nature of Horace's style and the expected informality which the word "essay" implies. The poem was the last in a series of similar undertakings, following Vida's De Arte Poetica (1527) and Boileau's L'Art Poetique (1674). In addition, the treatise bears

historical kinship to Rochester's Allusion to the Tenth Satire of Horace (1680), Mulgrave's Essay on Poetry (1682), Roscommon's Essay on Translated Verse (1684), and Granville's Essay on Unnatural Flights in Poetry (1701).

The particular features of Pope's ars that established its pedigree for some critics but bastardized it for others was its assimilation of the best critical tenets of its predecessors. The poem is both an imitation of Horace's production and a compendium of pronouncements lifted from Longinus, Vida, Boileau, Le Bossu, Rapin, and every other reputable critic Pope had ever read. The wide dissatisfaction with these "authorized borrowings" grew partly from a failure to understand the imitative genre and partly from lack of sympathy with Pope's characteristic belief in assimilation. The negative view is amusingly represented by Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's judgment: "I admired Mr. Pope's Essay on Criticism at first very much, because I had not then read any of the ancient critics, and did not know that it was all stolen."[26] Regardless of certain Augustan inabilities to distinguish between assimilation and theft, Pope's effort in the ars tradition succeeds through its concise wit and brilliant versification.

Any analysis of the Essay must take into account the three levels of literary theory operating in the poem. First, Pope is influenced by a classical mode that existed in Horace's poem and elsewhere, and he is imitating that mode. Secondly, the subject of the poem itself is literary theory, its history and necessity. And, in addition, the poem itself is an example that conforms to the literary theory which it discusses. To clarify, the Essay "is not only influenced by the tra-

dition and clearly enough bent on talking about the tradition, but is at the same time exemplifying it . . . ."[27] The Essay differs from its predecessors by announcing a concern with criticism per se, but the distinction diminishes under scrutiny, for most of Pope's remarks are equally applicable to the art of composition. Part one (ll. 1-200) is concerned with the practice of criticism itself, part two (ll. 201-559) with the impediments to good criticism, and part three (ll. 560-744) with the skills of an ideal critic and a brief history of criticism. Like Horace's work, the Essay is loosely organized. Vivid injunctions of true value are intermixed with hackneyed pronouncements; repetition and inconsistency are obvious at times; loose terminology often leads to confusion. But a surprising number of valid statements endure despite the faults, and the poem remains the prototype of its sub-genre, a ready source of Pope's guiding principles in art.

To outline the critical precepts is almost impossible without resorting to a catalogue listing of practically every line. For the poem is more concerned with the details of criticism than any systematic organization of theory.[28] The Essay is primarily concerned with the source of art, the methods to be employed in portraying that source, and the relationship of the critic and poet in the process of transmitting art from source to product. The controlling concept is the function of Nature, that "clear, unchang'd, and Universal Light" (71). The ambiguous direction to "follow Nature" is expanded through a consideration of the terms "taste," "wit," and "judgment." Much of the developing argument is obscured by particular passages aimed at versification, language, characterization, and description. The resulting unity of the critical

theory is elusive, but it does exist.

To proceed then, Pope's use of the term "Nature" has at least three distinctive implications.[29] First, it is a type of universal order which prevades all reality:

> First follow Nature, and your Judgment frame
> By her just Standard, which is still the same:
> Unerring Nature, still divinely bright,
> One clean, unchang'd, and Universal Light,
> (68-71).

Secondly, Nature is a type of ultimate reality itself. It is the substance of all that is regular and corporeal in human existence. Not only the forests and fields, but the cities, buildings, institutions, and manners of men are a part of this earthly Nature, this nature of socially ordered human experience. Thirdly, there exists the harmony of Nature that resides in all true models of classical antiquity, an authoritative type of Nature that is really a reflection of all three types. It is with this third Nature that Pope deals when he enjoins the artist to follow "Those Rules of old discover'd, not devis'd" which "Are Nature still, but Nature Methodiz'd" (88-89). Thus, for purposes of commentary, Pope's Nature is the object of artistic imitation, the guiding force of Creation itself, discovered by the classical artist and offered as a medium through their surviving works. The function of the benevolent critic is to abstract the rules of art from the classical models and interpret their use for the poet. The truly great artist, even a modern one, might be capable of "a grace beyond the Reach of Art" (155) by employing imagination where no precedent exists, but that example itself would become a rule for future authors.

The critical consideration given to the term "taste" is less in the Essay than could be wished. The author states that "In Poets as true Genius is but rare, / True Taste as seldom is the Critick's Share" (11-12). Pope seems to equate taste with the faculty that allows the critic to distinguish between proper art and unlicensed departure from acceptable standards. In this use, he is very close to the accepted modern definition of the term. Taste, however, seems to be equated with "judgment" throughout the poem. Pope allows that most men have "the Seeds of Judgment in their Mind" (20), but envy, malice, "false learning," and overexertions "in search of wit" result in a decay of judgment, leaving them incapable of being good artists or discerning critics. The correction of the judgment is attained by adhering to three reliable sources. First, one must "follow Nature, and your Judgment frame / By her just Standard" (68-69). Secondly, the poet-critic must "Hear how learn'd Greece her useful Rules indites" (92). The close attention to classical models will lead one, like Virgil, to the recognition that Homer and Nature are the same standard. The laste route to follow is to allow the inspiration to come occasionally from beyond the rules and strike directly to the heart. Such a "Grace beyond the Reach of Art is admirable, but carries the added warning that a violation of precept must "ne'er transgress its End" (164). That end is the faithful imitation of Nature, and such flights will necessarily be rare in the object of imitation.

The Essay frequently opposes judgment to a highly ambiguous term -- that of "wit." Pope declares early in the poem that "Wit and Judgment often are at strife, / Tho' meant each other's Aid like Man and Wife"

(82-83). In this usage wit can be equated to the power of inspiration or creation, a volatile faculty that must be curbed by judgment (discipline). Wit is also to be equated with vitality, "the breath of life informing the dull clay."[30] But in Pope's own definition, wit is cherished as the medium of expression:

> True Wit is Nature to Advantage drest,
> What oft was Thought, but ne'er so well Exprest:
> Something, whose truth convinc'd at Sight we find,
> That gives us back the Image of our Mind.
> (297-300).

Pope's definition is fully consistent with the thread of his main argument in the *Essay*. The object of imitation is still Nature, ornamented by the Advantage of well chosen expression. The captivating influence of wit occurs when the truth of the imitation rebounds and becomes one with "the image of our mind," which, again, is Nature. Commentators often go astray when speculating on Pope's definition because they tend to weight the first couplet more heavily than the second.

The second poet of the *Essay* focuses on the abuses leading to poor writing and, at the same time, to faulty criticism. The most significant argument derives from the attention given to "aim" as opposed to "effect" and "part" as opposed to "whole." Pope warns critics to "regard the Writer's End, / Since none can compass more than they Intend" (255-56). Again, the critic is cautioned to "Survey the Whole, nor seek slight Faults to find" (235). These injunctions include faults arising from too close attention to language, versification, or expression. The proper method is to consider first the design of the work, and then judge how well the product fulfills that design. The misapplications of criticism described in this part of the *Essay* were what Pope deplored

in the critical reception which his translation of the Odyssey received, and he reiterates the position again in the "Postscript" to that work.

In treating language and versification, Pope momentarily discards his address to the critic and lays down some sound critical tenets for the writer. The careful artist is advised to employ the diction of his own day, cling neither too tenaciously to the outmoded nor eagerly grasp the newfangled (324-36). The propriety of language is stressed, and an appeal is made to concise elegance (309-17). The passages on versification (337-83) are a brilliant digest of the faults a poet can display in his "numbers." One should avoid the overuse of open vowels (345), the monotony of consecutive monosyllabic words (347), sterotyped rhymes (350-53), and needless Alexandrines (354-57). The prosodic example Pope employs to illustrate each fault is refreshing, and the method is continued in the enumeration of principles to be emulated. Pope's brilliant couplet "'Tis not enough no Harshness gives Offence, / The Sound must seem an Eccho to the Sense" (364-65) concisely states the relationship of a poem's substantive elements to its ornaments. The ideal line combines "Denham's strength" with "Waller's sweetness," the result reflecting the exact thought of the poet's design.

Part three of the Essay contains the most conspicuous passages of imitation and deference to Horace's tradition. The characters of the incorrigible poet and impertinent critic are followed by a description of the ideal poet-critic. The poem ends with a traditional sketch of the history of criticism, a passage that reveals Pope's uneven scholarship as well as his sensible judgment. Horace, Longinus, and Quintilian are rightly praised for their contirbutions, yet more obscure theorists

such as Roscommon and Walsh are treated with almost equal regard. The poem ends with declaration of its purpose: "Content, if hence th' Unlearned their wants may view, / The learn'd reflect on what before they knew" (739-40).

An analysis of the _Essay on Criticism_ should not conclude without a mention of the principal differences between Pope's treatise and the strictures of the Neo-Classical school. The general relation that Pope bears to the formalists is established by his departure from dogmatic adherance to the strict rules of art and slavish imitation of classical precedent. Pope allots the ideas of the Neo-Classical tradition their place in his scheme of criticism, but refuses to be confined by the essential narrowness they offer. Thus, he condemns those who "dryly plain, without Invention's Aid, / Write dull Receipts how Poems may be made" (114-15). He recognizes the necessity for a broader standard than mere rules for judging a poet's aim (119-29) and resulting product (255-56). It is not Homer's correctness that is praised throughout the poem, but the power of his "celestial fire." In short, Pope attempts characteristically to synthesize inherent traditions with his own critical insight to produce a theory of criticism, though not novel, yet at least consistently sound. The many guidelines that the Augustans valued -- reason, taste, Nature, the classics-- seemed to Pope bound to converge in any sensible treatise on critical theory.[31]

The remaining texts of Pope's critical thought are scattered over a varied career of some thirty-five years. Prefixed to the 1717 edition of his _Pastorals_ was a brief _Discourse_ on pastoral theory. Again, no startling innovations are urged, the remarks being rather a compilation

of sound advice gleaned from authoritative quarters. Calling forth Dryden's "Preface" to Virgil's Pastorals, Rapin's Discourse on Pastorals and Sur l'Art Poetique d'Aristote, Fontenelle's Discourse, and Heinsius' In Theocrite, Pope conceives a middle ground for the pastoral. He advocates restraint in both copying the humble manners and rustic life of ordinary peasants and the opposite extreme of enlisting the genre as a vehicle for paying courtly compliment and parading wit.[32] Pope's guidelines demand brevity for the entire eclogue and its sentences, short narrations and descriptions, and a compound of realistic and romantic subject matter.

The Homeric criticism comprises much of Pope's critical canon, but little is to be found there that is not better stated elsewhere. The argument of the "Preface" to the Iliad is that Homer's great accomplishment is "invention" and that it is this spark that distinguishes him from and elevates him above Virgil.[33] The development of the argument follows closely Pope's outline of Homer in the Essay on Criticism, but scores a new victory in its recognition of "invention" as the essence of Homeric spirit. Similarly, the contrasting evaluations of the Iliad and Aeneid distill the flavors of both admirably, while Pope's insistence that antithetical judgments need not diminish the power of either's ability to please is an incisive critical stance that he was to adopt again in defending his translation of the Odyssey. In the "Postscript" to the latter Pope emphasized the "necessity for keeping one's critical eye upon the work of art studied rather than upon some a priori standards or criteria."[34] The extended prose statement is an enlargement of the earlier caution in the Essay on Criticism to "read each work

of Wit / With the same Sprirt that its Author writ" (233-34). Finally, a new avenue of criticism is tentatively explored in the Observations on the Iliad (1720). The discussion is directed at the cultivated but non-scholarly reader in an effort to justify classical scholarship as a necessary vehicle for appreciation of Western cultural heritage. Although Pope's classical scholarship was "wide rather than deep," he felt the classics to be "an essential part of the continuity of European culture."[35] Consequently, he advocated a "firm reinforcement of the tradition which from Jonson on was capable of absorbing certain ancient authors and modes into English poetry in a way that was peculiarly English and yet strengthened its European ties."[36] In effect, Pope attempted in his Homeric criticism to plant the seeds of cultural acceptance of the ancient writings in an essentially fertile Neo-Classic environment so that succeeding generations might reap the product in maturity.

Pope's treatment of Homer is echoed in his critical evaluation in the "Preface" to the 1725 edition of Shakespeare. He hails Shakespeare as an English Homer, "not so much an imitator, as an instrument, of Nature."[37] The irregularity of Shakespeare's art is excused because he wrote in an unenlightened age without the patronage of learned critics to guide him or the model of classical standards to sustain him. Although Pope gives at least a shallow treatment to many "faults" in Shakespeare's art, he grants him the status of "an ancient majestic piece of architecture . . . more strong and more solemn" than "a neat modern building."[38] Although inferior to Dryden's or Johnson's estimations, Pope's Shakespearian criticism is consistently fair to an author so removed in time

and tradition from the Augustan milieu.

The criticism takes upon a new mold in Pope's Discourse on the Profund, or the Art of Sinking in Poetry (1727). In this precursor to the Dunciad, the highly ironic burlesque style attacks one of the chief faults of Augustan poetry -- misdirected attempts to obtain the sublime. Purposely misinterpreting the Longinian term "profundity" to mean "a ludricous descent from the elevated to the commonplace," Pope coins a new term -- bathos -- that maintains its meaning to the present day. Pope humorously calls attention to the general misconceptions arising from the poetaster's failure to comprehend either Longinus' treatise or Milton's style. In lengthy "praise" of passages which exhibit bathos, the treatise attacks practically every literary abuse that existed. The use of cant words, perisphrastic expressions, and false elevations is mercilessly exposed in references to the dunces' tortured lines and Pope's own early excesses as well. The satire is not only entertaining but critically important, for it was not left for later generations alone to decry the poetic abuses of misdirected classicism.

In 1733 Pope added the First Epistle of the Second Book of Horace to his group of Horatian imitations. The Epistle to Augustus takes its name from Horace's poem, in which he attempted to gain sympathy for the new school of Roman poetry by recalling the shortcomings of previous writers. Pope follows suit in urging the cause of the moderns against past English poets, and for this reason the Epistle is less valuable as pure criticism. One can never be certain whether Pope is making a critical judgment or merely employing a convenient parallel to Horace. For example, Pope deplores "Chaucer's worst ribaldry" (37),

Shakespeare's mercenary motives (69-72), Milton's ecclesiastical "Quibbles" (99-102), and Dryden's want of "the Art to blot" (281). The passage announcing that "We conquer'd France, but felt our captive's charms" (263-95) is an obvious parallel to Horace, and the adequate but somewhat timid apology for poetry bears closer relation to Augustan Rome than to Pope's usual fiery campaigns. Although some isolated judgments are fair enough, many of the remarks cannot be squared with Pope's critical thought at so late a date as 1733.

The remaining sources for Pope's critical comments are to be found in various essays and pamphlets of dubious ascription and in his correspondence. The former group contains little of any notice, while the latter is of little more value in mapping Pope's critical theory. The letters have "little to say to his correspondents about the process of poetical composition,"[40] containing for the most part records of business dealings and the amenities of personal relationships.

In summation, the critical precepts of Alexander Pope are wide in their application and legion in their selection of objects worthy of comment. But above all they are unified. Pope's method in criticism was to collect all that had been said through the ages on the many points of literary doctrine and to distill that considerable body of theory through his own sound judgment and good sense. It was method that rejected any temptation to rebell and begin anew, a recognition that the "task consisted of the assimilation of the tradition, and of its reproduction in forms adapted to the time and place of the poet."[41] Just as Pope observed of Longinus in the Essay on Criticism that his "own Example strengthens all his Laws, / And is himself that great sublime he

draws" (679-80), so is Pope's criticism a viable reflection of "What oft was Thought, but ne'er so well Exprest" (298). Pope's great contribution was to amass the worthiest and most useful of the critical tradition and finalize it for posterity by clothing it in inimitable expression.

With Nature as the standard for judgment, Pope outlined his stance on reason, taste, rules, the classics, and a myriad of other critical areas that so affected Augustan letters. He refused to be subject to either party spirit or doting patronage. He plainly avoided extremists, specialists, and virtuosi with their appeals to fanaticism and enthusiasm. The Essay on Criticism is an early but definitive statement of his approach to the galaxy of critical problems. As Saintsbury observes, "he could have improved it a little in form, but would hardly have altered it at all in matter, if he had written it thirty years later."[42] The poem, while loosely organized in form, is nevertheless tightly unified in theory, and the unity extends throughout Pope's later criticism. Pope can be considered at least as systematic a critic as his idols -- Horace, Boileau, Dryden -- and fully as original as a humanist can in any sense be.[43] He chose to place devout faith in mankind's ability to preserve and interpret the unchanging ideals of literary creation. In place of importance, he must rank a close third behind Dryden and Johnson as an exponent of classicism. He produced much more criticism than is generally realized, and the remarkable extend of his literary associations, productions, and reflections indicate that "largeness of attitude" so necessary in a great critic.

CHAPTER IV

THE UNITY OF POPE'S CRITICAL THEORY

As previously noted, the composite view of Alexander Pope as critic must be structured to take into account the variety and surprising volume of his critical writing. Scholarly work in this area to date has focused upon the unity of Pope's critical perspective. Austin Warren's valuable study attributes this unity to Pope's immersion in the continuing intellectual movement of humanism. A more recent study by Howard Nixon documents the same unity in Pope's literary theory and attributes it to the poet's adherence to the concept of an "eternal and unchanging nature, a nature which became for the poet the 'source and test of art.'"[44] Like other commentators on Pope's criticism, however, these scholars have treated the remarks from Spence's Anecdotes in conjunction with other sources of his critical theory. It seems that scholars have been apt to assume that Pope's observations in the Anecdotes are consistent with his other criticism, or else they have ignored the Anecdotes altogether. Thus, Spence's labors have been of use primarily as a source for occasional borrowings or obscure references. The relative obscurity of the Anecdotes itself and the fact that Spence's reliability has been in doubt until quite recently probably account for the minor role which the book has played in describing Pope's critical theory. But the contributions of Austin Wright and J. M. Osborn should retrieve the Anecdotes from its inauspicious surroundings. A moderate amount of familiarity with the collection should convince anyone that Spence's

Anecdotes furnishes at least as much insight into Pope's critical mind as the essays, poems, prefaces, and letters do.

Spence's acquaintance with Pope occurred during the latter part of the poet's career. Spence's notes reproduce conversations that took place in the mature years of Pope's life, from approximately age forty until his death at age fifty-six. The portrait one sees of Pope is that of a busy man of letters, a successful literary artist whose fame is established and whose place among the great poets of England already assured. Pope as revealed by Spence is a somewhat kindlier reflection of the self-portrait in the Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot (1735). He is a man glad to seek refuge from the hoard of hacks who would enlist his advice and preferment and literary enemies who still seek redress for old wounds. Fully willing to reflect on his own and others' writings, he is amiable in conversation. The stress of the decade of translation and editing is behind him, and he is quick to relish the satisfaction that the publication of such literary successes as the Essay on Criticism and The Rape of the Lock have brought. Spence's pages present a poet busily engaged on the Moral Essays, the Essay on Man, the Dunciad, and countless other ventures which he hopes to complete before physical deterioration halts his plans. This is the Pope that Spence knew, and the maturity of the critical remarks is less striking for their insights than for the relation they bear to earlier, more youthful judgments.

Pope's eclectic and synoptic approach to criticism is as apparent in the Anecdotes as in his published works. He refers several times to the breadth of his reading in the best classical and modern critics. He observes that "Scaliger's Poetics is an exceeding useful book in its

kind, and extremely well collected" (554). Similar praise is directed at the critical works of Rapin, Le Bossu, and Quintilian (45). Pope's early reading in the best modern and ancient poets is also to be noted, a list that includes Homer, Virgil, Statius, Tasso, and Ariosto (44). The many references of this type reinforce the evaluation of Pope as a critic who absorbed the best of the tradition he inherited into his own critical principles. The early advice to "Hear how learn'd Greece her useful Rules indites" (Essay on Crit., 92) is a continuing part of Pope's critical approach, both in the later published sources and in the Anecdotes.

Pope, however, never allowed the precedent of classical doctrine to usurp his allegiance to Nature as the guiding principle of criticism. He was able to equate the authority of the ancients with the order and harmony that Nature represents with unsurpassed eloquence. Nature, in whatever facet of its many implications, was to be the object of artistic imitation. The unity of this doctrine, expounded early in the Essay on Criticism, never varied in the poet's treatment of Homer, Shakespeare, or the many other literary figures that Pope considered critically. Similar terminology is employed in the Anecdotes, where Pope emphatically declares that "arts are taken from nature" (560). In another passage he observes that Milton's expression in Paradise Lost is "not natural, 'tis an exotic style . . ." (459). Time and again, Pope's judgments of the great writings are delivered in the context of their relationship to Nature's standard.

Whether he is indulging in general or specific criticism of an author or his works, Pope's judgments in the Anecdotes often echo re-

marks that appear in his published sources. Wright has noted several instances of this nature in establishing the reliability of Spence's manuscript.[45] At one point, Pope observes that "Racine's character is justness and correctness; Corneille's, passion and life" (520). An equivalent judgment is offered in the Epistle to Augustus: "Exact Racine, and Corneille's noble fire / show'd us that France had something to admire" (274-75). In another example, Pope comments on the general opinion that Shakespeare and Jonson "lived in enmity against one another." He offers Betterton's testimony to the effect that the idea gained currency because admirers of each writer attempted to exalt their idol at the expense of the other. Dryden's opinion that Jonson's elegiac tribute to Shakespeare was actually satiric appears, but Pope declares his inability to discover such supporting evidence (54, 67). The "Preface" to Shakespeare contains a passage that is practically a verbatim reprint of this material (p. 407). And finally, Pope's boast that "as L'Espirit, La Rouchefoucault, and that sort of people, prove that all virtues are disguised vices, I would engage to prove all vices to be disguised virtues" (517) is realized in these lines from the Essay on Man:

> The surest Virtues thus from Passions shoot,
> Wild Nature's vigour working at the Root.
> What crops of Wit and Honesty appear
> From Spleen, from Obstinacy, Hate or Fear!
> See Anger, Zeal and Fortitude supply;
> Ev'n Av'rice, Prudence; Sloth, Philosophy;
> Lust, through some certain Strainers well refined,
> Is gentle Love, and charms all Womankind;
> Envy, to which th' ignoble Mind's a Slave,
> Is Emulation in the learn'd or brave;
> Nor Virtue, male or female, can we name,
> But what will grow on Pride, or grow on Shame.
> (11.183-194)

Numerous other parallels to Pope's published criticism can be found in the Anecdotes, but these examples illustrate the point.

Pope's specific critical discussions of the four "tours in poetry -- design, language, versification, and expression -- have their parallels in many passages from the published sources. As noted earlier the reply to those critics who wondered why the fall and immortality of the soul were not included in the Essay on Man is an example. Pope responded that "they both lay out of my subject, which was only to consider man as he is, in his present state, not in his past or future" (306). The principal here is an illustration of the earlier charge from the Essay on Criticism: "In ev'ry Work regard the Writer's End, / Since none can compass more than They Intend" (255-56). Pope's remarks on language in the Anecdotes are also consistent with the criticism elaborated in other sources. For instance, the condemnation of "that poetic kind of prose writing" (524) has its parallel throughout the section of the Essay on Criticism which treats problems of diction (305-36). Pope cautions that "Words are like Leaves; and where they most abound, / Much Fruit of Sense beneath is rarely found" (309-10). In fact, that criticism in the Anecdotes directed to language comprises a body of specific observations to complement the concise summation of the topic in the Essay on Criticism.

Verbal echoes from the published criticism are in Pope's observations on versification and its history. The several judgments on softness, sweetness, and the contributions of Waller and Dryden (e.g. 55, 46, 403, 405) have their equivalents in most all passages where Pope discusses verse. In the Epistle to Augustus, Pope recalls that

after England fell captive to France's charms,

> Wit grew polite, and numbers learned to flow.
> Waller was smooth; but Dryden learned to join
> The varying verse, the full-resounding line
> The long majestic March, and Energy divine.
> (266-69)

A similar instance is contained in Pope's remarks on the expression. Spence tells us that "In speaking of comparisons upon an absurd and unnatural footing, he [Pope] mentioned Virgil and Homer . . ." (549). The "absurd and unnatural footing" is fully identified and developed in the "Preface" to his translation of the Iliad. Homer and Virgil are contrasted from the standpoint of the former's "invention" and the latter's "judgment and art".[46] One of the favorite Augustan forms of amusement -- that of citing parallels between suitably contrasting men of letters -- is employed as a critical tool in the preface. The same game must have been delightfully pursued often in Pope's parlor.

There are, in addition to the parade of critical remarks on specific genres and authors, many observations of a miscellaneous nature in the Anecdotes. Not unexpectedly, these random prouncements also have their analogues among the body of the published works. Pope's reflections on the value of the consensus gentium in the Essay on Criticism are well known:

> Yet if we look more closely, we shall find
> Most have the Seeds of Judgment in their Mind;
> Nature affords at least a glimmering Light;
> The Lines, tho' touch'd but faintly, are drawn right.
> (19-22)

This critical statement is repeated in the Anecdotes, but Pope elaborates the argument to an extent that his critical stance can be more fully understood. The additional remarks place a limit on the mass of man-

kind's ability to judge, stating that "as to higher things, it requires pains to distinguish justly: they are not fit for the crowd . . ." (571). This example is only one of many that illustrate the complementary value that Spence's Anecdotes possess in relation to Pope's published criticism. Another passage is useful for the evidence it contains that Pope's "off-the-record" comments to Spence represent his priorities faithfully. The mature critic remarks that "if I should be a good poet, there is one thing I value myself upon, and which can scarce be said of any of our good poets: and that is that I have never flattered any man, nor ever received anything of any man for my verses" (363). That Pope was indeed most proud of this claim is further evidenced in the concluding lines of the Epistle of Augustus. After a verse review of the major English poets, he concludes with an evaluation of himself:

> And when I flatter, let my dirty leaves
> (Like Journals, Odes, and such forgotten things
> As Eusden, Philips, Settle, writ of Kings)
> Cloath spice, line trunks, or flutt'ring in a row
> Befringe the rails of Bedlam and Soho.
> (415-19)

Although the above examples are intended as evidence that the Anecdotes contains material that substantiates and complements Pope's critical perspective, the selected illustrations should not be regarded as sole proof. Those passages referred to are only several of the many anecdotes of Pope which can be equated with the critical dicta of the published sources. The aim of this study has been to establish the usefulness of the Anecdotes as a reference source for those working with Pope's critical writings. The Anecdotes reveal the private view of

Pope as critic as opposed to his public image in the published works. A remarkable unity of Pope's critical theory prevades the *Anecdotes* as it does his other criticism, the two bodies of material comprising a portrait of a critical mind both agile and assured. The comparison of the *Anecdotes* with other sources of Pope's criticism offers evidence of the critical integrity of the private man of letters as opposed to the formal critic. This reassurance is not unimportant when any study of Pope as satirist is contemplated. In addition, the equation of the *Anecdotes* with the published criticism reinforces the value of the *Essay on Criticism*, for that early poem represents Pope's "deliberate theory of criticism, announced in youth, indorsed and emphasized in age."[47] Continuing necessity in Pope scholarship is the rescue of the *Essay* from consideration as a mere compendium of witty quotations. It should properly be viewed as Pope's definitive statement on not only the function of criticism, but the theory as well.

An even more important reason for the study of Pope's criticism in the *Anecdotes* is to illustrate the scholarly importance of the work as a whole. The consideration of Pope's critical theory represents only one facet of the book's value. Its use for biographies, literary historians, or scholars pursuing any avenue of Augustan studies should be emphasized. To scholars who are well acquainted with Osborn's recent edition, the value of Spence's book is already obvious. But more general recognition of the *Anecdotes*' contents and the nature of its material should aid in removing the work from its regrettable seclusion among collections of "table-talk" and introducing it to the mainstream of Augustan scholarship where it properly belongs.

Notes

Chapter I

[1] George Sherburn, *The Early Career of Alexander Pope* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1934).

[2] John E. Butt et al., eds., *The Twickenham Edition of the Poems of Alexander Pope*, 11 vols. (London: Methuen & Co., 1961-69).

[3] *Alexander Pope: A Bibliography*, 2nd ed. (1922; rpt. London: Holland Press, 1962).

[4] The reader is referred to James E. Tobin, *Alexander Pope: A List of Critical Studies Published from 1895 to 1944* (New York: Cosmopolitan Science and Art Service, 1945) and Cecilia L. Lopez, *Alexander Pope: An Annoted Bibliography 1945-1967* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1970) for a checklist of Pope scholarship.

[5] (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1929).

[6] Osborn, ed., Spence's *Anecdotes*, p. xxii.

[7] For a full account of Spence's literary pursuits, see Austin Wright, *Joseph Spence: A Critical Biography* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1950).

[8] Quoted from Wright, Biography, pp. 177-79. The discussion of the history of the Spence materials from 1768 to 1966 is indebted to other sources as well, notably Singer's introduction to the 1820 edition of the Anecdotes, Osborn's introduction to the 1966 edition, and numerous articles by Wright and Osborn which are cited in my bibliography.

[9] Wright, Biography, p. 179.

[10] Wright, Biography, p. 187.

[11] Wright, Biography, p. 189.

[12] Early Career, pp. 6-7.

[13] "The Veracity of Spence's Anecdotes," PMLA, 62 (1947), p. 129.

[14] Osborn, ed., Anecdotes, p. xxxiii.

Chapter II

[15] See, for example, Bertrand A. Goldgar, ed., Literary Criticism of Alexander Pope, Regents Critics Series (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1965); Howard K. Nixon, Jr., "The Literary Theories of Alexander Pope," Diss. Univ. of Illinois 1961; and J. P. Sullivan, "Alexander Pope on Classics and Classicists," Arion, 5 (1966), 235-53.

[16] Osborn, ed., Spence's Anecdotes, # 380. Subsequent references in my text will refer to this edition by number for each anecdote.

[17] The full lists are printed in Osborn, ed., Anecdotes, pp. 389-90.

[18] Osborn omits this comment since it is contained in a letter rather than actual conversation. Singer chooses to retain it in his edition (p. 140).

Chapter III

[19] Essay on Criticism, (15-16). Subsequent references to the poems will be cited in my text by line number and are keyed to the standard one-volume Twickenham text of The Poems of Alexander Pope, ed. John Butt, (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1963).

[20] J. W. H. Atkins, English Literary Criticism: 17th and 18th Centuries (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1950), p. 166.

[21] Howard K. Nixon, Jr., "The Literary Theories of Alexander Pope," Dissertation Abstracts, 22 (1961), 1614 (Univ. of Illinois).

[22] George Saintsbury, A History of Criticism and Literary Tastes in Europe (London: William Blackwood, 1900-4), II, p. 453.

[23] Pope as Critic, p. 276.

[24] William K. Wimsatt, Jr. and Cleanth Brooks, Literary Criticism: A Short History (1957; rpt. New York: Alfred Knopf, 1969), p. 234.

[25] Osborn, ed. Anecdotes, no. 99.

[26] Anecdotes, no. 745.

[27] Wimsatt and Brooks, p. 235.

[28] Warren, Pope as Critic, p. 276.

[29] Wimsatt and Brooks, pp. 237-38.

[30] Edward Niles Hooker, "Pope on Wit: The Essay on Criticism," in The Seventeenth Century: Studies in the History of English Thought and Literature from Bacon to Pope (R. F. Jones Festeschrift) (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1951), rpt. in Eighteenth Century English Literature: Modern Essays in Criticism, ed. James L. Clifford (1959; rpt. New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1969), p. 43.

[31] Warren, p. 277.

[32] Warren, pp. 73-74.

[33] Warren, p. 95.

[34] Warren, 117.

[35] J. P. Sullivan, "Alexander Pope on Classics and Classicists," Arion, 5 (1966), p. 235.

[36] Sullivan, pp. 235-36.

[37] "Preface to the Works of Shakespeare," in Eighteenth Century Poetry & Prose, ed. Louis Bredvold et al., 2nd ed. (1939; rpt. New York: Ronald Press, 1956), p. 404.

[38] "Preface to Shakespeare," p. 411.

[39] Atkins, English Literary Criticism, p. 172.

[40] John Butt, "Pope Seen Through His Letters," in The Listener, 20 June 1957, n.p., rpt. in Eighteenth Century Literature: Modern

Essays in Criticism, ed. James L. Clifford (1959; rpt. New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 64.

[41] Warren, Pope as Critic, p. 273.

[42] History of Criticism, p. 453.

[43] Warren, pp. 277-78.

Chapter IV

[44] Nixon, DA, p. 1615.

[45] Wright, Biography, pp. 191-93.

[46] Warren, p. 95.

[47] Saintsbury, p. 455.

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