AN EPISTLE TO DR. ARBUTHNOT
Alexander Pope

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Alexander Pope, (born May 21, 1688, London, England—died May 30, 1744, Twickenham, near London), poet and satirist of the English Augustan period, best known for his poems *An Essay on Criticism* (1711), *The Rape of the Lock* (1712–14), *The Dunciad* (1728), and *An Essay on Man* (1733–34). He is one of the most epigrammatic of all English authors. After Shakespeare, he is the second-most quoted author in *The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations*.

The acknowledged master of the heroic couplet and one of the primary tastemakers of the Augustan age, British writer Alexander Pope was a central figure in the Neoclassical movement of the early 18th century. He is known for having perfected the rhymed couplet form of his idol, John Dryden, and turned it to satiric and philosophical purposes.

Pope is also remembered as the first full-time professional English writer, having supported himself largely on subscription fees for his popular translations of Homer and his edition of the works of William Shakespeare.
A letter written in heroic couplet of 420 lines. Pope discusses the Current state of artists and political aDairs in England while examining his own long career. The tone of the letter is satiric and humorous with bitterness.

An Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot, poem by Alexander Pope, completed in 1734 and published in January 1735. Addressed to Pope’s friend John Arbuthnot the epistle is an apology in which Pope defends his works against the attacks of his detractors, particularly the writers Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, Joseph Addison, and John, Lord Hervey.

Pope wrote this poem in imitation of the Roman poet Horace, skilfully modulating the natural tempo of the rhymed couplets with enjambment, caesuras, and other forms of varied rhythm. The poem satirizes cowardly critics, hypocritical pedants, insipid patrons of the arts, and corrupt sycophants, and it caricatures Pope’s contemporaries.
John Arbuthnot was a physician known as a man of wit. He was a member of the Martinus Scriblerus Club, along with Pope, Jonathan Swift and John Gay. He was formerly the physician of Queen Anne. On 17 July 1734 Arbuthnot wrote to Pope to tell him that he had a terminal illness. In a response dated 2 August, Pope indicates that he planned to write more satire, and on 25 August told Arbuthnot that he was going to address one of his epistles to him, later characterizing it as a memorial to their friendship. Arbuthnot died on 27 February 1735, eight weeks after the poem was published.

According to Pope, the *Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot* was a satire "written piecemeal many years, and which I have now made haste to put together". The poem was completed by 3 September, when Pope wrote to Arbuthnot describing the poem as "the best Memorial that I can leave, both of my Friendship to you, & of my own Character being such as you need not be ashamed of that Friendship".

*Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot* has a "tangled" publishing history. The poem was first published as a *folio* of 24 pages on 2 January 1735 under the title *An Epistle from Mr. Pope to Dr. Arbuthnot*, with a date of 1734. It appeared in Pope's *Works* the same year in folio, *quarto* and *octavo*, with a Dublin edition and an Edinburgh piracy. During Pope's lifetime, it was included among the *Moral Essays*. In 1751, after the death of Pope, it was published at the beginning of *Imitations of Horace* and retitled *Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot, being the Prologue to the Satire*, even though it lacks both *Horatian* and *prologic* characteristics.
The poem opens with Pope ordering John, a servant, to shut the door. Pope is afraid of letting in the budding poets, who are like dogs. He asks John to tie the knocker of the door. He thinks that the mental institutions like Bedlam and Parnassus are let loose in the road. He finds the poets with papers in their hands and fire in their eyes. Pope is not left alone; wherever he goes he is followed by the budding poets. They come into his house by climbing the wall and shrubs. They get into his chariot and into his boat. They do not even leave him pray. Everyone blames Pope in some way or the other. All people come to Twitnam, Pope’s house, to scold him.

Pope finally addresses Dr. Arbuthnot as “friend of my life”. Pope finds his friend’s illness and the troublesome poets as a plague. Pope is confused on what to do and what not to do. If he appreciated their poetry they overflow with more poems, if he says something negative about their poetry, they feel hurt. Pope gives the advice of Horace to the new poets. He asks them to wait for nine years before publishing a poem. The writers are unable to accept this advice. They ask Pope to make some corrections in their poem. They also try to bribe him. Some poets blackmail him.
The second part of the poem talks about the dangers of being popular. Pope elaborates on the comparison of Midas. He ridicules the poetasters by using Midas image, which ultimately represents unreliability. Pope scolds a few poets like Colley, Harley, Bavius, Bishop Philips and Sappho. At this point Arbuthnot warns Pope not to use names in his poem. He advises Pope to be prudent. Arbuthnot ridicules Pope that he is twice as tall as Pope but he never uses any names. Pope is angry again. He is willing to be honest. He claims that he would not be called as cruel when he calls a fool as a fool. He then talks about how a few dramatists approach him to recommend scripts, which are rejected by the theatres and production companies. They all try to flatter Pope. Some say that Pope’s nose is like Ovid’s and they compare Pope with Hercules and Alexander the Great. Pope does not listen to such flattery. He calls himself as an ordinary man.
This part talks about Pope’s life as a writer. He starts explaining why he writes. He says that he wrote not out of any compulsion. He found it hard to learn numbers but it is not hard for him to write poetry. Nobody asked him to write poetry but he did it by himself. He writes because his friends like Swift, Granville, Congreve and others enjoyed reading his poetry. He did not write poem for his personal reasons like loving his wife. Arbuthnot asks why Pope publishes his works. Pope says that because his friends enjoyed reading his poetry. They praised his works. Even Dryden encourages Pope to write and publish poems so Pope published them.
Part IV of this poem discusses about why Pope attacks other poets through his satire. Pope says that he does not care a little for those who find fault with him. He calls them as donkeys and fools. He sometimes tried to be friendly with them. He tried to take them out for a dinner. In spite of all these some cheap critics criticizes him. Pope says that if their criticism is correct he would readily accept it. Pope satirizes Ambrose Philips. Ambrose is a plagiarist. He copies works from Greek literature and earns money. If he attempts to be original, he will not cross eight lines a year. Pope then criticizes Addison. Addison, according to Pope, is a genius. He is a good writer. His defect is that he wants to dominate the literary world. He thinks that he is the greatest of all writers. Pope calls Addison a coward, because Addison attacks many writers but he fears being attacked by them. Lord Halifax is attacked next. Lord Halifax loves being flattered. He helps the poetasters who flatter him.
This part describes Pope’s current attitude towards life and career. Pope asks the poetasters to let him leave live in a peaceful manner. He says that he lives in debt. He is someone normal who prays to god regularly. He says that only liars will fear his satire and attacks. A man of good intention and honest behaviour need not fear him.
In this part, Pope attacks Lord Hervey in the name Sporus. When Arbuthnot hears the name Sporus, he starts scolding him. Sporus is a man who drinks the milk of a donkey. He is capable only of killing a butterfly with his wheels. He is such a senseless person that he is not able to distinguish satire and other kinds of poem. If Pope is a paragon of independent judgment, Hervey is a man who will say anything to please the people at court and in government. He values glamour, sensual pleasure, and social climbing. Hervey was also homosexual. Hervey is not only a man-woman but an animal-demon, a shape-changer, like Satan.
Part 7 is Pope’s final draft of his self-portrait, summing up the virtues he wants Arbuthnot to believe he has. Pope says that he has never been a worshipper of fortune. He is bold and courageous. He has never flattered anyone for selfish reasons. He attacks his enemies and critics. He claims that he was brought up well by his parents. His parents are peace loving. They are good citizens of England. They led a happy domestic life. Pope also wants to live a similar life. He concludes the poem by praying that Arbuthnot should lead a happy, peaceful and prosperous life.