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## Thesis Prospectus: Warburton's Pope: A Matter of Editorship

Theresa Neman

### The Critical Problem:

In the later years of his life, declining in health, his closest friends dead or distanced, Alexander Pope chose William Warburton to act as executor of his estate and editor of his works. This appointment of Warburton has generally been seen as a reward for his public defense of Pope against attacks upon *The Essay on Man*. In 1751, seven years after Pope's death, Warburton produced an edition of the *Collected Works* laden, in Scriblerian fashion, with elaborate footnotes, extensive commentary, essays-in-brief tracing sources and allusions, and translations of Pope's Latin and Greek transcriptions. He also included critical arguments about what he thought to be Pope's intentions in various poems.

Not long after the appearance of Warburton's edition, readers questioned both the wisdom and the motives of his editing. Samuel Johnson suggested that Warburton could never restrain himself from "saying something when there is nothing to be said" (Evans 174). And in *The Life of Pope*, although acknowledging that Warburton "excelled in critical perspicacity," Johnson remarks not long after that the editor "has endeavoured to find a train of thought which was never in the writer's head" (426, 434). Other contemporaries also remarked incidentally upon the intrusive heavy-handedness of Warburton's notes and commentary.<sup>1</sup> More pointed critical attention to Warburton's editorial apparatuses appeared in the nineteenth century. Isaac Disraeli, author of *Quarrels with Authors*, questioned the intent of the commentary and argued that Warburton used his control of Pope's works as a machine to publish his own opinions. John

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<sup>1</sup> Miss Catherine Talbot wrote to Mrs. Elizabeth Talbot, "Our present after-supper author is Mr. Pope in Mr. Warburton's edition... The notes are worth any body running over; some very wild, some very ingenious, some full of amusing anecdotes, some bitterly but not wittily satirical, but merely rough, unjust, and angry, and the greatest number, true commentator like, explaining what needs no explanation, and wire-drawing for meanings the author never thought of" (qtd. in Evans 174-77).

Wilson Croker questioned the authenticity of the footnotes that Warburton attributed to Pope, insinuating that the editor had written them himself.<sup>2</sup> For the most part, these early criticisms of Warburton's notes and commentary were *ad hominem* attacks questioning his motives. But no one could do more than imply his intent and self-interest: Because Warburton, as executor of Pope's estate, owned all of his papers, no critics had access to the manuscripts; they could not know if Pope had written notes attributed to him.

Pope's manuscripts did not survive, so the same obstacle continued to handicap readers in the twentieth century, when suspicions about Warburton's motives and editorial manipulations grew. His biographer A W. Evans agreed that Warburton had used Pope and his control of Pope's works to serve his own interests, but he made this assertion with less vitriol than Disraeli and Croker had. More recent scholars, including R.H. Griffin, John Trimble, and Seth Rudy, have also questioned the criticism that Warburton imposed on Pope's works. Griffin, for example, accused him of altering Pope's works, but he left open the suggestion that Warburton later reversed course and attempted to restore some of Pope's works to their original states. Most recently, Howard Erskine-Hill has concluded that critics can neither trust nor ignore Warburton (*Selected Letters*). While one might contend that additional footnotes and other extra-literary devices would not impact the critical understanding of a work, many of Pope's recent critics have held that both the extensiveness and authoritative tone of Warburton's additions do lead or mislead readers and, in their intrusiveness, interrupt the poetic rhythms and damage the coherence of the works. Warburton's pedantries and ponderous prose, they argue, denature Pope's verse. Such was the influence of Warburton's editorial work that Pope's reputation evolved from that of the most celebrated poet of the eighteenth century to that of a prose writer.

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<sup>2</sup> In 1831, Croker himself agreed to undertake an edition of Pope, but he died in 1857 before he was able to complete the work. The first volumes of his edition were published in 1871 (Sherburn, *The Early Career* 19-22).

In 1880, Matthew Arnold remarked famously of Dryden and Pope that they “are not classics of our poetry, they are classics of our prose” (9: 181).

Thesis Objectives and Methodology:

Those recent critics who have raised concerns about Warburton’s editorial “intrusions” have tended to do so incidentally in their discussions of Pope’s work; none has given primary attention to Warburton’s processes, commentaries, and notes on Pope’s complete works. While a comprehensive study of Warburton’s editing of Pope’s collected works is more than can be undertaken in this thesis, I will address both the nature and extent of the notes and commentaries in three important and representative pieces: *An Essay on Man* (1733-34), *The Dunciad Variorum* (1729), and *The Rape of the Lock* (1717) (listed here and addressed in the thesis in order of Warburton’s evolving role as Pope’s editor). Although I will avoid the temptation that other readers have indulged by impugning his motives, it does seem clear that Warburton, having insinuated himself into Pope’s favor, pursued an editorial course determined by his own literary and religious agenda. Operating with Pope’s permission to publish the poems, he included the notes and commentaries but left them, he claimed, “otherwise unchanged.”<sup>3</sup> In fact, he changed wordings, rhymes, and couplets, and he added content within the footnotes that limited or obscured Pope’s original meanings. Some of Warburton’s notes claim that Pope himself “intended” these changes. Without further documentation, however, we cannot know.

Although Pope’s autograph manuscripts are not available, access to both Pope’s works and Warburton’s editions of those same works in the Eighteenth-Century Collections Online (ECCO) database allows scholars now to compare the versions of both men. So in order to develop the discussion of Warburton’s role as editor, the thesis will reconstruct, as faithfully as

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<sup>3</sup> Pope specified in his last will and testament that Warburton could add commentaries and notes without altering the works themselves.

possible from the available documents, a line of transmission from versions of Pope's works published under his hand to the same poems in Warburton's 1751 edition of the *Collected Poems*. It will then examine and analyze the editorial devices from the different versions, with an eye toward identifying Warburton's additions, emendations, notes, and extra-literary commentary. Distinguishing Warburton's work from Pope's own is more complicated than it may seem at first because Warburton's role as editor evolved under Pope's own guidance. After Warburton, inexplicably and without solicitation, defended *An Essay on Man* in *A Vindication of Mr. Pope's Essay on Man from the Misrepresentations of Mr. de Crousaz* (1738), Pope befriended his apologist and invited his editorial suggestions. With *An Essay on Man* serving as an introduction of poet and editor, the two jointly produced an edition of the work in 1743, the year before Pope's death. In the same year, a collaborative edition of *The Dunciad Variorum* appeared. The title page of *An Essay on Man* claims explicitly that Warburton provided "Commentary and Notes."<sup>4</sup> Because both works were produced jointly, however, it is difficult to distinguish the individual author of notes. In his later edition, Warburton appended the letter "P." to notes that he claimed Pope himself had written. But scholars have contested these attributions, some suggesting that Warburton appropriated the "P." for some of his own notes to give them authority. Warburton's editorial role in *The Rape of the Lock* is easier to distinguish from Pope's because poet and editor did not collaborate on any edition of the work in Pope's own lifetime. Warburton's 1751 edition of the mock-epic more clearly show his editorial hand.

Thesis Outline:

The thesis will comprise five chapters, the first an introduction, the next three discussions of Warburton's editing of the three representative works, and the final one a brief conclusion:

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<sup>4</sup> Suggestively, the title page of the 1743 *Dunciad* promises "the Prolegomena of Scriblerus, and Notes Variorum" without mentioning Warburton by name.

## Chapter One: Introduction

In this chapter I will lay out the critical problem, addressed earlier in this prospectus, and detail the history of Warburton's and Pope's personal and professional relationship. While Pope believed that he was befriending an apologist for his work, Warburton was well aware that he was befriending a poet who had the fortune, or misfortune, of being acknowledged a great writer in his own day. Commentators like Disraeli questioned his motives, especially because he had earlier written contemptuously of Pope in a letter, "Dryden, I observe, borrows for want of leisure, and Pope for want of genius!" (qtd. in 244) Under Pope's favor, Warburton found his own literary fame and was introduced to Ralph Allen, who would settle him in a living, secure a bishopric for him, and even introduce him to his future wife; Allen, who had inherited much of Pope's library, left his entire library, in turn, to Warburton. Although I cannot draw definitive conclusions about Warburton's motives for insinuating himself into Pope's company, this introductory chapter will consider what others have charged. There is Disraeli, for example, who sneered that "the proud and supercilious Warburton [often] crouched and fawned" upon those like Pope who could serve his own interests (242). This chapter will acknowledge such charges.

## Chapter Two: *An Essay on Man*

Around *An Essay on Man* swirls much of the controversy about the relationship between Warburton and Pope. Before defending the poem against attacks on theological and philosophical grounds, Warburton had dismissed it privately as a mere collection of allusions derived "from the worst passages of the worst authors" (qtd. in Tyers 49). When the Swiss theologian Crousaz attacked Pope's Leibnizian theory and charged Pope himself with deism in

1738,<sup>5</sup> however, Warburton rushed to the poet's defense, without ever having met him.

Published in 1738, his *Vindication of an Essay on Man* sealed his relationship with Pope.

*An Essay on Man* allows scholars a unique opportunity to examine Warburton's editorial processes and agenda. Pope's original work, comprising four "epistles," contains only four footnotes, each explaining an allusion within the work. Warburton's *Vindication* is itself an extended gloss upon the work, which demonstrates his impulse toward prose explanation and commentary. In the 1743 edition of *An Essay*, undertaken jointly by Pope and Warburton, the number of notes has swollen extensively from Pope's original four, and they are intertwined with running commentary. (Because the work is a collaboration, Pope likely maintained control of the poem itself and gave his blessing to Warburton's additions, but I do want to be careful of presuming this.) In Warburton's 1751 edition, the work is forty pages longer than the original, and there are forty-five extensive notes, the forty-third of which is a full page long. Interestingly, none of these notes carries the attribution to "P." that we find in other works edited by Warburton. Warburton has collapsed his own notes with Pope's.

This chapter will compare the three versions of *An Essay on Man*, from the original 1734 edition to the 1751 edition and look also at Warburton's *Vindication*. In doing so, it will consider not only the method of Warburton's editing of the poem but also the religious and philosophical implications of his notes and the way that they lead readers to his own interpretation of Pope's poem.

### Chapter Three: *The Dunciad Variorum*

*The Dunciad Variorum* provides another glimpse into Pope's and Warburton's working relationship and into the increasing measure of control that Warburton asserted over the poet's

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<sup>5</sup> Crousaz had read a corrupt French translation of *An Essay on Man*. But his charges greatly upset Pope, who had derived the Leibnizian philosophy underpinning the poem not from his own reading but from conversations with his friend Bolingbroke.

works. The 1729 edition of *The Dunciad* crowns Lewis Theobald, a friend and mentor of Warburton himself, as King of the Dunces; at this time, of course, Warburton had no relationship with Pope, but there are indications that he feared that he himself would become a target of Pope's ridicule. When he came to know Pope, he encouraged him to rewrite *The Dunciad*. And *The Dunciad Variorum*, produced in 1743 with Warburton's collaboration, removes Theobald from the throne of Dunces and includes several of Warburton's own enemies among their number. In an "Advertisement to the Reader" of *The Dunciad Variorum*, Warburton also gives a rationale for adding notes, claiming that he is augmenting the work of the Scriblerians after listening to the author's own "*explanation of several passages in his Works.*" By adding notes and commentaries, of course, he is also insinuating himself into the inner circle of Pope's Scriblerians—"Mr. Cleland, Dr. Arbuthnot, and others"—an insinuation that connects him with the processes by which the poem was conceived and written.

Warburton's 1751 edition of *The Dunciad Variorum*, argue critics Catherine Ingrassia and Claudia Thomas, is stylistically opposed to the collaborative 1743 edition. The reason, they suggest, is that Warburton, bound by his own pedantry and heavy prosing, has missed the point of Pope's satire upon pedants and prosifiers. While Pope's own footnotes in his poems are typically sparse and are reserved for specific literary allusions, in his original version of the *The Dunciad Variorum*, Pope included copious notes as part of the satirical apparatus of the poem: These notes and variations, which overwhelm the content of the poem itself, are the very type of Scriblerian commentary that he is satirizing in writers like Theobald. As Seth Rudy remarks, "The relatively unimportant details and distractions satirized by many of the annotative remarks...sometimes threaten to overwhelm the verse and occasionally drive it almost entirely from the page" (11). In his 1751 of the poem, Warburton, apparently missing the point of these



notes, burdens the work with the very type of explicative commentary that Pope is ridiculing in the poem. He thereby blurs the contrast between Pope's original satiric apparatus and his own editorial apparatus and thus defuses the satiric function of the poem.

This chapter will examine the three versions of *The Dunciad Variorum*, from the original 1729 edition to the 1751 edition. It will consider especially the way that Warburton insinuated himself into the very process of composition. It will also give a reading of misreading, demonstrating how Warburton's heavy-handed annotations denatured the satire of Pope's satire on heavy-handed annotators.

#### Chapter Four: *The Rape of the Lock*

Although *The Rape of the Lock* is the earliest of the poems under discussion, it was the last of the three that shows the evolving role of Warburton as editor. During Pope's own lifetime, Warburton never collaborated with the poet in any production of the work, so I can more clearly distinguish between Pope's own editorial apparatus and Warburton's processes in the 1751 edition of the *Collected Works*.

For my reference text, I will use the first full version of the poem: Pope began the work in 1712 and added sections in 1714 and again in 1717, in which year he published the complete poem in its final form in *The Works of Mr. Alexander Pope*. I will compare this original full edition with later versions published during the poet's own lifetime.<sup>6</sup> The analysis of these versions will provide all of Pope's original notes for the poem; these tend to explain classical Greek and some Hebrew allusions. In the 1751 edition of Pope's *Collected Works*, Warburton added thirty-eight footnotes, the most influential and problematic being the note declaring Clarissa "The Moral" of this mock epic. It was an investigation of the Clarissa-as-moral footnote,

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<sup>6</sup> It appears independently in 1729 and then in various *Miscellanies* and editions of his *Collected Works* throughout the rest of Pope's life.

in fact, that first brought Warburton's editorial hand to my attention. The contentious responses to this particular note have shown how problematic Warburton's editorial intrusions have become. Some readers, like Erskine-Hill, counter that Clarissa's speech in Canto V, the last addition that Pope added to the poem, in 1717, is not a heavy-handed moral injunction but a pointed discussion of Jacobin political issues ("The Political Poet" 131). Others regard it primarily by its structural function, as providing a symmetrical contrast in ideals and behaviors to those of Belinda and the Baron. Yet others read it as a mock form of a speech from the *Iliad* between two generals, just before their men are defeated in battle. Warburton's reduction of the speech to monolithic moral obviates more nuanced readings of these sorts.

#### Chapter Five: Conclusion

The body of this thesis is concerned with discussing Warburton's editorial processes, especially as they changed or redirected meaning in the three poems. But I am also interested in the continuing impact of his notes, commentary, and emendations, as well as it can be defined. To this end, I will examine the poems in the authoritative modern Twickenham edition, published between 1939 and 1969. I am interested especially in how the editors may have collapsed Warburton's and Pope's own notes and other editorial devices.

Having examined these features, I will use the brief conclusion to summarize the results of my investigation and make an argument about how we should view Warburton's editorial work as we read Pope's poetry.

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