



## **The Works Of Alexander Pope Esq.**

In Nine Volumes Complete. With His Last Corrections, Additions, And  
Improvements; As they were delivered to the Editor a little before his  
Death

Containing The First of his Letters

**Pope, Alexander**

**London, 1751**

Letter I. Of Mr. Dryden's death: his moral character: the poets who  
succeeded him: the temper of critics.

---

---

**Nutzungsbedingungen**

[urn:nbn:de:hbz:466:1-56122](https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:hbz:466:1-56122)

---

# LETTERS

TO AND FROM

## Mr. WYCHERLEY<sup>a</sup>.

From the Year 1704 to 1710.

---

### LETTER I.

Binfield in Windsor Forest, Dec. 26, 1704<sup>b</sup>.

**I**T was certainly a great satisfaction to me to see and converse with a Man, whom in his writings I had so long known with pleasure; but it was a high addition to it, to hear

<sup>a</sup> If one were to judge of this set of Letters by the manner of thinking and turn of expression, one should conclude they had been all mis-titled; and that the Letters given to the boy of sixteen, were written by the man of seventy, and so on the contrary: such sober sense, such gravity of manners, and so much judgment, and knowledge of composition, enlivened with the sprightliness of manly wit,

distinguish those of Mr. Pope: while, on the other hand, a childish jealousy, a pueriel affectation, an attention and lying at catch for *turns* and *points*, together with a total ignorance of order, of method, and of all relation of the parts to one another to compose a reasonable whole, make up the character of those of Mr. Wycherley.

<sup>b</sup> The author's Age then Sixteen. P.



you, at our very first meeting, doing justice to your dead friend Mr. Dryden. I was not so happy as to know him: *Virgilium tantum vidi*<sup>c</sup>. Had I been born early enough, I must have known and lov'd him: For I have been assured, not only by yourself, but by Mr. Congreve and Sir William Trumbul, that his personal Qualities were as amiable as his Poetical, notwithstanding the many libellous misrepresentations of them, against which the former of these Gentlemen has told me he will one day vindicate him<sup>d</sup>. I suppose those injuries were begun by the violence of Party, but 'tis no doubt they were continued by envy at his success and fame<sup>e</sup>: And those Scriblers who attacked him in his latter times, were only like gnats in a summer's evening, which are never very troublesome but in the finest and most glorious season; for his fire, like the sun's, shined clearest towards its setting.

You must not therefore imagine, that when you told me my own performances were

<sup>c</sup> When a very young Boy, he prevailed with a friend to carry him to a Coffee-house which Dryden frequented; where he had the satisfaction he speaks of.

<sup>d</sup> He since did so, in his dedication to the Duke of Newcastle, prefix'd to the

duodecimo Edition of Dryden's Plays, 1717. P.

<sup>e</sup> The fact seems to have been just the reverse. One of the first Satires against him was the Duke of Buckingham's *Rehearsal*; and one of the last, Montague's parody of his *Hind and Panther*.



above those Critics, I was so vain as to believe it; and yet I may not be so humble as to think myself quite below their notice. For critics, as they are birds of prey, have ever a natural inclination to carrion: and tho' such poor writers as I are but beggars, no beggar is so poor but he can keep a cur, and no author is so beggarly but he can keep a critic. I am far from thinking the attacks of such people either any honour or dishonour even to me, much less to Mr. Dryden. I agree with you, that whatever lesser Wits have risen since his death, are but like stars appearing when the sun is set, that twinkle only in his absence, and with the rays they have borrowed from him. Our wit (as you call it) is but reflection or imitation, therefore scarce to be called ours. True Wit, I believe, may be defined a justness of thought, and a facility of expression; or (in the midwives phrase) a perfect conception, with an easy delivery<sup>f</sup>. However, this is far from a complete definition; pray help me to a better<sup>g</sup>, as, I doubt not, you can.

I am, &c.

<sup>f</sup> This is no definition of wit at all, but of good writing in general.

<sup>g</sup> Mr. Locke had given a better. But his Essay was a

work our young Poet did not then relish. He had met with it early; but he used to say, it was quite insipid to him.