

Broich on Pope, Heroes, and Satire

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Review of Ulrich Broich, “Alexander Pope, the Ideal of the Hero, Ovid, and Menippean Satire.”

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Professor Broich invokes Thomas Carlyle’s characterization of eighteenth-century England as a time of skepticism, lacking in faith and heroes, and a time when the concept of the hero and the great man had fallen out of favour with the great writers of the day (179). Despite this, eighteenth-century writers drew inspiration from ancient heroic epics. Broich has interesting reflections on this, particularly the writers’ failure to create true heroic epics of their own (if indeed an attempt was made). Broich takes an admirably objective view of the discussion, despite ultimately adding relatively little to the conversation at large. That said, he adds an increased emphasis on Ovid's influence on *The Rape of the Lock* and explores possibly overlooked genres within which to classify *The Dunciad*. Despite the article’s publication in 2005, Broich restrains from referencing contemporary skepticism of the concept of heroic figures and instead focuses on the subject at hand.

In part one, Broich addresses Pope's view of great men, emphasizing how the idealization of these men clashes with Pope’s sense of virtue. Broich cites Pope's *Essay on Man* as particularly relevant to Pope's views of heroes and great men (180). In it, Pope criticizes Julius Caesar for his ambition and equates it with madness in Epistle One (181). Broich notes Pope's unfavourable view of Cromwell, Alexander the Great, and Charles XII of Sweden (181-2). Broich claims Pope's view of “Nature's chain” makes clear that he believes “to remain in one's God-given station is a virtue: to want to move to a higher station is folly and vice” (182). Pope

holds to this, even going so far as to criticize Homer for what he perceives as glorification of violence (182). Broich argues that this situates Pope firmly within the mainstream opinion of his time regarding heroes and great men, a time emphasizing the importance of “polite conversation” (183). When referring to Pope's translation of the *Odyssey*, Broich points out that Pope made swineherds into (relatively) ideal characters (183). Broich contends that Pope represents a “group of writers who are often referred to as the 'country opposition,’” who favour “the simple virtues of the Roman Republic,” criticizing Julius Caesar and Rome's Imperial period more generally (184). Broich argues this led to Pope's inability to produce an original epic because “epic heroes for [Pope] did not represent the norm; rather they served as foils to other characters who represented a preferable and non-heroic alternative” (184).

In part two, concerning *The Rape of the Lock*, Broich reviews the work of other critics on the poets that influenced Pope's work, notably Homer and Virgil, and notices a lack of appreciation for Ovid's influence (185). Examples of transformation suggest Pope's translation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* had a more significant influence upon *The Rape of the Lock* than was suggested by Paul Baines's *Complete Critical Guide to Alexander Pope* (185-186). Broich goes so far as to refer to *The Rape of the Lock* as Pope's “most Ovidian poem” (188). Broich notes the similarities in structure, plot, and length, cementing the importance of *Metamorphoses* in discussions of *The Rape of the Lock* (188-189). He sees this paradox between eighteenth-century writers' affection for heroic poetry (with its inherent violence and ambition) and their own stated values as typical of the period (189-190).

In part three, Broich turns to *The Dunciad*. He notes Pope's own claims that his work is (though “little”) an epic (190). However, Broich suggests that while both this and *The Rape of the Lock* emulate epics, *The Dunciad* “seems to be connected to the tradition of the Menippean

or Varronian satire,” despite the lack of references to Menippus or Varro in any of Pope's writings (190). Although Broich cites Bakhtin, he does not clearly define Menippean satire. Broich borrows Dryden’s characterization of Varronian satire as a mixture of prose and verse, serious and comic tone, and without a real prototype (191). In this way, Broich suggests Pope may have borrowed *The Dunciad*’s form from Dryden. Broich uses the term “motley” to describe *The Dunciad* and the Menippean tradition, because both it and *Rape of the Lock* represent a mixture of elements and structure (193). In short, neither genre is clearly defined. In conclusion, Broich notes that while Pope was ideologically moderate in some respects (ridiculing the concept of great men), he also maintained an eccentricity (imitating ancient heroic works) which gives his works much of their “lasting validity and appeal” (194).

While Broich's article is interesting and fairly direct, I found myself wishing for more content. *The Dunciad* is relatively untouched in comparison to *The Rape of the Lock*. This article could use a stronger unifying theme to tie together all its concepts. This is an interesting reflective work, but I might pick another paper as an introductory piece to Alexander Pope as there are a few references that require the reader to be well versed in satiric subgenres. Broich himself, as a man dedicated to the study of English Literature, is clearly exercising the ideals of the more polite form of virtue eighteenth-century writers prized while maintaining scholarly distance: avoiding taking a moral stance or imposing values on his field of study, despite a clearly contentious subject.



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