Finding Aid for the Alexander Pope [Letter, 1735 June 22?, to William Fortescue]

Descriptive Summary

Title: Alexander Pope [Letter, 1735 June 22?, to William Fortescue]
Date (inclusive): 1735 June 22?
Collection number: 170/332
Creator: Pope, Alexander, 1688-1744
Extent: 1 leaf : paper ; 186 x 303 mm.
Language: Finding aid is written in English.
Repository: University of California, Los Angeles. Library Special Collections.
Los Angeles, California 90095-1575
Physical location: Stored off-site at SRLF. Advance notice is required for access to the collection. Please contact the UCLA Library Special Collections Reference Desk for paging information.

Restrictions on Access

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Processing Note

Cataloged by Manushag Powell, with assistance from Jain Fletcher and Laurel McPhee, August 2004, in the Center For Primary Research and Training (CFPRT).

Preferred Citation


UCLA Catalog Record ID

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Biography

Alexander Pope (May 21, 1688 - May 30, 1744) was one of the most influential and successful writers of the eighteenth century, despite a physical disability and his Catholic faith during a Protestant regime. Pope participated in the first stirrings of the modern copyright system by engaging himself with the question of literary propriety and ownership as an alternative to private patronage.

This interest, as well as his fame and temper, led to numerous altercations with the infamously amoral publisher Edmund Curll. This letter is evidence of one of their most important quarrels, though hardly the last. In 1726 Curll published an unauthorized version of the correspondence of Pope and Henry Cromwell (Cromwell's mistress apparently procured him the letters), and – skipping ahead over a number of skirmishes – in 1733 Pope began to engineer an elaborate plot to strike back. He desired to publish an authorized collection of his own correspondence.

Using a variety of stratagems, he conveyed without using his name a large number of his letters, already printed and edited by himself, to Curll in 1735. There is some question as to how long Curll was really fooled by Pope's manipulations, but on 12 May 1735 Curll published a two volume collection of Pope's letters. The resulting wrangling and counter-wrangling included Pope's running newspaper advertisements denouncing Curll's edition as spurious, while at the same time, as noted in his letter to William Fortescue, having Thomas Cooper claim copyright and publish an edition of the letters to compete with Curll's in late May. Curll claimed in advertisements to be in possession of letters from Francis Atterbury to Pope and promised their publication in a new edition; Cooper censured the claim (correctly) as false, Curll attempted legal recourse against Cooper's competition, and Pope (in this letter) consulted William Fortescue, his friend and legal adviser, on the mess. Pope finally put forth an elaborate authorized edition of his own in 1737.

William Fortescue was a close friend of Pope's, as well as a lawyer, Master of the Rolls, and MP. He is also the admonishing second speaker in Pope's First Imitation of Horace (Sat. II.i).

Scope and Content
This brief letter alludes to Pope's attempts to manipulate Curll in the matter of publishing Pope's correspondence in 1735. Accompanying the manuscript is an undated dealer description, which states the letter is proof that Pope "was hand in glove with the justices before whom his enemy appeared for trial." Though Justice Fortescue was involved in Curll's trial over the pornographic Venus in the Cloister, this was unrelated to Pope. Pope did sue Curll in 1741 for publishing his correspondence with Swift, but in this he was represented by William Murray, not William Fortescue. The clipping is correct, however, in the letter offers a signed admission of Pope having worked with Cooper against Curll.

**Indexing Terms**

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the library's online public access catalog.

**Genres and Forms of Material**

Manuscripts.

**Related Material**

The text of this letter also appears in George Sherburn's *Correspondence of Alexander Pope* (Clarendon Press, 1956; see Volume 3, p 469). Sherburn silently emends some of Pope's abbreviations, and his punctuation differs very slightly from that of the manuscript.

[Bound Manuscripts Collection (Collection 170)](http://library.ucla.edu). Available at UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library.