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978-0-521-30965-3 - The Eighteenth-Century Mock-Heroic Poem

Ulrich Broich

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European Studies in English Literature

### The Eighteenth-Century Mock-Heroic Poem

Mock-heroic poetry is one of the most characteristic genres of English neoclassicism in the eighteenth century. It includes not only masterpieces such as Pope's *The Rape of the Lock* and *The Dunciad* but also numerous minor poems. Derived from French models, the mock-heroic became something more than merely a parody of the serious epic: relieved of its gravity, it was nevertheless a legitimate and independent form of epic poetry.

This book is the first comprehensive study of the theory, the conventions and the history of the mock-heroic genre. In the first part, Ulrich Broich shows how mock-heroic poetry combines the characteristics of various discourses – epic, comedy, parody, satire and occasional poetry. The 'polyphonic' genre which emerges from this analysis stands in ironic contrast to the neoclassical ideal of decorum, i.e. a harmonious unity of subject and form. The second part traces the history of mock-heroic poetry: its foreign sources, its beginnings in England, the 'rivalry' with other forms of comic narrative, and its decline in the second half of the eighteenth century.

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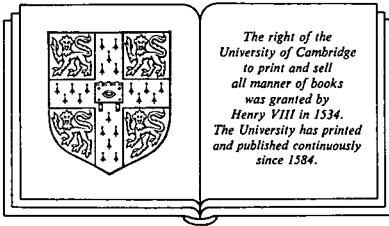
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# The Eighteenth-Century Mock-Heroic Poem

Ulrich Broich

*Professor of English, University of Munich*

Translated from the German by David Henry Wilson



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Ulrich Broich

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

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Dedicated to the memory of  
Walter F. Schirmer (1888–1984)

## Contents

<i>Preface</i>	<i>page xi</i>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>I</b>
Neoclassicism and the quest for the epic	I
The neoclassical approach to the comic epic	6
Studies of the mock-heroic poem up to the present day	22
Subject-matter and aim of this study	25
<b>Part I The conventions of the mock-heroic poem</b>	
1 <i>The presentation of contemporary reality</i>	27
The subject-matter of the mock-heroic poem	27
Contemporary society and local settings	30
References to real people and events	31
The mock-heroic poem as occasional poem	35
2 <i>The disguise and suspension of reality</i>	37
Generality and fictionality as principles of neoclassical literature	37
Disguising contemporary and 'low' reality as a principle of neoclassical literature	39
How the mock-heroic poem disguises references to real people and events	41
How the mock-heroic poem disguises and alienates reality	42
3 <i>Imitation and parody of the epic</i>	50
The mock-heroic poem as imitation of the epic	50
The mock-heroic poem as parody of the epic	57
The mock-heroic poem as an independent comic epic	61
The parodic nature of the mock-heroic poem and its roots	64
4 <i>The mock-heroic poem as satire</i>	68
The duality of the mock-heroic poem	68
Different types of satire in the mock-heroic poem	69
Neoclassical views of the mock-heroic poem as satire	70
Summary	73

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-30965-3 - The Eighteenth-Century Mock-Heroic Poem

Ulrich Broich

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## x Contents

**Part II The history of the mock-heroic poem**

- |   |  |     |
|---|--|-----|
| 5 | <i>Different types of mock-heroic poem and their pre-neoclassical models</i>                             | 75  |
|   | The twofold genealogy of the mock-heroic poem  | 75  |
|   | Direct imitations of <i>Batrachomyomachia</i>  | 77  |
|   | The 'battle poem' and its forerunners  | 80  |
|   | The 'invention poem' and its forerunners   | 83  |
|   | The 'game poem' and its forerunners  | 86  |
|   | The 'satire on dullness' and its forerunners   | 87  |
|   | Summary and further conclusions  | 90  |
| 6 | <i>Boileau's 'Le Lutrin' and the first phase of the genre's development in England (c. 1681–c. 1712)</i> | 93  |
|   | The origins of <i>Le Lutrin</i>  | 93  |
|   | <i>Le Lutrin</i> as satire and epic  | 95  |
|   | Crowne's <i>History of the Famous and Passionate Love</i>  | 101 |
|   | Garth's <i>Dispensary</i> and its early imitations   | 104 |
|   | Dryden's <i>Mac Flecknoe</i> and its early imitations  | 106 |
|   | Summary  | 108 |
| 7 | <i>Pope's 'The Rape of the Lock'</i>   | 109 |
|   | <i>The Rape of the Lock</i> and the tradition of the epic and the mock-heroic poem                       | 109 |
|   | <i>The Rape of the Lock</i> as prototype for a new form of the mock-heroic poem                          | 113 |
|   | <i>The Rape of the Lock</i> as a synthesis of opposites  | 120 |
| 8 | <i>The 'Rape of the Lock' and the heroi-comical poem (second phase, c. 1714–c. 1742)</i>                 | 128 |
|   | The heroi-comical poem as a new type of mock-heroic poetry   | 128 |
|   | The basic features of the heroi-comical poem   | 131 |
|   | The decline of the heroi-comical poem  | 137 |
|   | The transition to the third phase of the mock-heroic poem's history                                      | 140 |
| 9 | <i>Pope's 'Dunciad'</i>  | 142 |
|   | <i>The Dunciad</i> as a personal satire  | 142 |
|   | The epic as ironic mask in <i>The Dunciad</i>  | 144 |
|   | The epic significance of <i>The Dunciad</i>  | 147 |
|   | <i>The Dunciad</i> and the decline of the mock-heroic poem   | 153 |

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-30965-3 - The Eighteenth-Century Mock-Heroic Poem

Ulrich Broich

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Contents	xi
10 <i>The decline and fall of the mock-heroic poem (third phase, c. 1742–c. 1800)</i>	158
The predominance of personal satire in the mock-heroic poem of the third phase	158
The disappearance of epic parody	160
<i>Criticisms on the Rolliad</i> and Wolcot's <i>The Lousiad</i>	164
Cambridge's <i>The Scribleriad</i>	169
Hayley's <i>The Triumphs of Temper</i>	172
Conclusion	177
<i>Notes</i>	181
<i>Select bibliography</i>	216
<i>Index of authors and titles</i>	229



Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-30965-3 - The Eighteenth-Century Mock-Heroic Poem

Ulrich Broich

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## Preface

Since this book was first published some twenty years ago, there has been a proliferation of studies of eighteenth-century English literature, particularly on Dryden, Pope, and eighteenth-century satire. The two decades have also witnessed a veritable explosion of literary theories, including the structuralist theory of genres, the socio-historical approach, Bakhtin's concept of dialogicity, and the poststructuralist concept of intertextuality, for all of which the mock-heroic poem would have been a rich source of illustration. Had I been writing my study at the present time, perhaps my approach would have been different, and it would certainly have been influenced by the many excellent studies of *The Rape of the Lock* and *The Dunciad* (the two masterpieces of the genre) that have appeared in the interim. My justification, however, for offering the book to an English-speaking public must lie in the hope that it will cover ground hitherto somewhat neglected even by the most modern scholars. While great attention has been paid to individual authors and individual works, the history of the mock-heroic poem as a genre has remained largely unexplored, and it is this gap that I hope to fill.

For reasons of space I have omitted three chapters on pre-neoclassical forms of the comic epic, as well as a section on the sociological implications of the mock-heroic poem. I have rewritten the Introduction to include recent research, and the bibliography has been updated.

It is a sad fact of life that few scholars of English are sufficiently well versed in foreign languages to follow the research of their colleagues abroad, and so I am particularly grateful to Cambridge University Press for their courage and enterprise in breaking the language barrier. Especial thanks are due to Kevin Taylor, the press editor, and to Chris Lyall Grant, who as subeditor has been a model of patience.

The task of translating my book was undertaken by David Henry Wilson, who not only made elegant English out of my ponderous German, but also rectified deficiencies and streamlined arguments. I can pay him no higher compliment than to say that in many cases I preferred his version to my own original.

The painstaking and time-consuming work of checking references and quotations, and compiling the bibliography and index, was performed with infinite patience and fortitude by Klara Dreihues, and these sections were

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-30965-3 - The Eighteenth-Century Mock-Heroic Poem

Ulrich Broich

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

xiv Preface

efficiently retyped by Edeltraud Kolbeck. Many thanks also to Britta Mümmeler and Horst Zander for their meticulous proof-reading.

Finally, my thanks are due to the Bavarian Staatsministerium für Wissenschaft und Forschung, whose generosity in giving me a free semester enabled me to complete the revision and updating of this book.

U. BROICH