

# **DISTANCE EDUCATION**

**SELF LEARNING MATERIAL**



**M.A. Previous (ENGLISH)**

**PAPER - II**

**LITERATURE FROM 1660 TO 1798**

**MADHYA PRADESH BHOJ (OPEN) UNIVERSITY**  
RAJA BHOJ MARG (KOLAR ROAD), BHOPAL

**M.A. English  
Previous  
LITERATURE FROM 1660 TO 1798**

**Paper - II**

**Madhya Pradesh BHOJ (Open) UNIVERSITY,  
Bhopal**

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**M.A PREVIOUS EXAMINATION**

**PAPER II (Literature from 1660 to 1798)**

**Unit I Pope : The Rape of the Lock.**

**Unit II (a) Dryden : Macflecknoc**

**(b) Gray ; Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard: The Bard:**

**Progress of Poesy.**

**Unit III Sheridan : The Rivals**

**Unit IV Addison : Essays- The Spectators Account of Himself: The  
vision of Mirzah Sir Roger at home , Sir Roger at Church, Will  
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**Unit V Explanations- Two Pieces for Explanation from each  
Unit from Unit I to IV to be set and one from each Unit to be  
attempted.**



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## Paper II

### LITERATURE FROM 1660 - 1798

This manual aims to offer a general handbook of English Literature for students opting for MA English Literature, Bhoj University Bhopal. The first purpose of this manual is to give an outline to the development of the literature during the age of 1660-1798. The manual aims to put light on the national life, and give appreciative interpretation of the work of the most important authors of this era. The manual combines satisfactory accomplishment of selection of authors sufficiently limited for clearness and with adequate accuracy and fullness of details, biographical and other.

#### How to Study and Judge Literature

The manual aims to give the students an insight and approach to the study of literature it fulfil two aspects of literary study:

(I) the first aspect is intended to provide the student with some general knowledge of the conditions out of which English literature has come into being, as a whole and during its successive periods that is of the external facts of one sort or another without which it cannot be understood. This means chiefly (1) tracing in a general way, from period to period, the social life of the nation, and

(2) Getting some acquaintance with the lives of the more important authors. The principal thing, however

(II) The second aspect is the direct study of the literature itself. This study in turn should aim first at an understanding of the literature as an expression of the authors' views of life and of their personalities and especially as a portrayal and interpretation of the life of their periods

and of all life as they have seen it; it should aim further at an appreciation of each literary work as a product of Fine Art, appealing with peculiar power both to our minds and to our emotions, not least to the sense of Beauty and the whole higher nature.



## A Brief Overview of the Age

Restoration England 1660 AD

### The kings and their Reign

Charles II 1660-1685. James II 1685-1688. The English Revolution 1688-1689. William III 1689-1702.

The up side of the Restoration of 1660 was that forced military dictatorship of Cromwell and latterly his son was the restoration of the rule of Parliament and the rule of Law. The nobility and the gentry were, however, more completely restored to their power than the King, in the shape of Charles II who had been in exile in France. Cromwell's bones were dug up in a display of childishness by Charles II, but surprisingly many Roundhead leaders were retained in power such as Monk, Ashley Cooper, Colonel Birch and Andrew Marvell.

### The 'Clarendon Code' and the Anglican Church after the Restoration of the Monarchy. Puritans suffer.

Religious non-conformity was harshly put down under what was known as the Clarendon Code. The victims were the easy to get at middle class townfolk. This sufferance was often born by wealthy Middle Class merchants – who took their Roundhead spirit and turned it into the Whig 'party' – whilst it could be said that the Cavaliers turned into Tories. A rough definition. Anglicanism became the firm preserve of the Upper Classes, with some catholic families surviving in Lancashire and Northumberland. But, most Anglicans were gentry and thus the Church services were bound to the preference and patronage of the gentry who would sit in families' pews. Church became a pleasant, social gathering, lacking conflict and nonconformity.

Some Dissenters were around the country. Wesleyan, Quaker and Baptist movements had toe holds in some communities. Some were people like the poet John Bunyan. Quakers were led by George Fox (d. 1691 AD,) and they were persecuted by stripes and imprisonment. But their sufferance and patience got recruits and they were the most numerous of the sects. Quakerism got many thousands of converts in the common folk of England.



For a generation after 1660 AD Puritans were persecuted. People had had enough of their 'eat religion with your bread' attitude.

### **The formation of Tories and Whigs.**

With politics dividing between the pro Anglican Tories and Whigs promoting the idea of Toleration. The Tories wanted to make Anglicanism widely distributed across England. They, like the Cavaliers before them, were more in tune with the country and landed estates. Whigs were fewer in number, but like their Roundhead forefathers, were often wealthy commercial types with large estates. The nobility and gentry now truly ran England.

### **1663 AD. Censorship and the Press in Restoration England.**

This age produced Newton's Principia, Milton's Paradise Lost, Dryden's Absalom and Achitophel. Purcell's music, Wren's churches. But the print machines brought by Caxton from Belgium to England some 250 years before were few in number and press censorship was prevalent. In 1663 AD the Licensing Act was passed by the Cavalier Parliament, to stop heretical writings. Meaning mainly Puritan or Whig writings. For most of Charles II reign there were no newspapers except the Gazette, which was an official publication.

### **1667 AD. Sprat and The Royal Society.**

Early in Charles II reign Sprat wrote 'The History of the Royal Society.' It would be some time before the likes of Isaac Newton, but the Fellows of the Royal Society had the aim of increasing 'the powers of all mankind and to free them from the bondage of errors.' Puritanism had failed to produce religious orthodoxy in England and now God was no longer All in All. Science was here to stay.

### **1671 AD. The Game Laws.**

The Norman and Plantagenet Forest Laws had protected hunting estates, especially the rights of the King to hunt. But game that wandered freely on to Yeoman's land could be killed. Now the Squirearchy of the House of Commons banned that as well. So many poor families went without traditional meals, lest they risk severe punishment. The advent of the shotgun and its ability to kill game quicker than Hawking increased the anxiety of the Squires.



**1677 AD. The repeal of De hearetico comburendo.**

Despite the drive towards non-conformity spearheaded by the Clarendon Code, the above act was repealed and 'punishment by death in pursuance of any Ecclesiastical Censures' was abolished. Heresy was no longer a death sentence and the idea of religious Toleration had taken root in England. However, trials for Witchcraft were still being held as late as 1687 AD. Sir John Reresby's account of a Witch trial at the York Assizes was written in 1687:

**'a poor woman had the hard fate of being condemned a witch'.**

**The restoration of the Theatre.**

For many years one or two theatres had survived the austere years of the Cromwellian Regicide government. The Theatre Royal in Drury Lane London was one of them. Plays such as Wycherley's Country Wife was written.

Shakespeare and Ben Jonson works were revived. Dryden's dramas and Purcell's musical genius were adorning the stage.

**1684 AD. The first public library. Knowledge expands.**

Private libraries were growing from the collection of Samuel Pepys to small bookshelves in English Yeoman's manor house. The first public library was formed in 1684 Ad by Tenison when Rector of St Martin's in The Fields. Later the Archbishop of Canterbury. Evelyn writes in his diary:

**'Dr. Tenison communicated to me of his intention of erecting a library in St Martin's parish church, for the public use, and desired my assistance, with Sir Christopher Wren.....'**

The period also saw the researches of Sir William Dugdale of the Monasticon, Anthony Wood and Hearne of Oxford, Jeremy Collier, Nicholson, Burnet, and the first serious historian of the Restoration. Wharton of Anglia Sacra. Anglo-Saxon texts and mediaeval texts and antiquaries were studied in phenomenal detail and value from 1660 to 1730 AD. (See English Scholars, by Prof Davis Douglas 1929.)



### **The decline of the English county Squire.**

Many of the English squires post Restoration, like Sir John Reresby, baronet of Thryberg in the West Riding of Yorkshire did well – he paid off post Civil War family debts by 1688 and began to add to his estate. But others with no expansive lands or rent found it hard. The illiterate county squires needed capital in this changing society. Many were bought out by the likes of the Duke of Bedford.

### **The Corn Laws The Navigation Act and Bounties of Stuart England.**

Parliamentary control of the economy was centred on The House of Commons. Corn Laws, which restricted imports from Europe and Ireland, protected the English landowners they were supposed to. Those English landowners filled the House of Commons. A neat win-win. The House of Commons would now move into ever increasing areas of power, despite a King who believed in absolute power. The real result of the English Civil War.

This hold on the economy extended to the seas with the passing of the Navigation Act in 1651, passed by the Long Parliament. It kept sea trade on English ships, preventing use of competitive shipping, such as Dutch ships. Thus we see in the magnates their position. James, Duke of York, was also Lord High Admiral, Governor of the Royal African Company, and shareholder in East India Company stock. He succeeded Prince Rupert as Governor of the Hudson Bay Company and was in turn succeeded by Marlborough. The wars with Holiand during the reign of Charles II were mainly commercial in their objectives. To protect English trade.

Thus pacifist 'Little England' of the county squire was less and less influential in the House of Commons as the desire to increase colonial presence and commercial trade with Europe grew. English commercial magnates held true power.

### **Labour and Wages in Stuart England-**

The two largest classes by far I an analysis by Gregory King were the 'cottagers and the paupers'. The Elizabethan Statute of Artificers, which prevented work being unfinished, was still in place and Justices of the Peace set maximum wages.



This all controlled the 'lower' English classes. But all English classes insisted on a high standard of living. Defoe said:

Good husbandry is no English virtue. English labouring classes eat and drink, especially the latter, three times as much value as any sort of foreigner...

### **The English Revolution and Gregory King's Tables-**

The first Census for England was conducted in 1801. But the Tables calculated by Gregory King are worth note. It breaks down what it estimates to be a population of over 5.5 million. This is possibly quite accurate and is calculated from the Hearth Tax and other data at the time of the English Revolution and the installation of King William of Orange. The heads per family column relates to those living under one roof. The families and income data is average.

### **English Sporting and Hunting in Stuart Times-**

The English Civil War had broken open many deer parks, but deer hunting of the old deer chase still continued in a declining way. Fox hunting was popular as was pursuing hare. Singlestick (Cudgel) fighting (as Morris dancing celebrates,) boxing, sword-fighting, bull and bear baiting abounded in the country. Cock fighting was the most popular. Rough games of football and hurling were also favoured.

### **Coal Mining in Stuart England-**

The 17th Century saw important contributions by coal mining. Pits grew deeper and miners spent more time underground and became separate communities.

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### **English Ports in Stuart Times-**

Plymouth, Hull, Whitby, Yarmouth, Harwich and Newcastle flourished with shipbuilding, coal trading, Custom Houses controlled the ports and gathered duties. The trade routes bolstered by the Navigation Laws favoured trade to the West and increasingly the Americas and the Caribbean. Trade with Scandinavia and the Baltic reduced leaving many Eastern Ports to decline.

### **1665 to 1666 AD. The last 'Plague of London' and the Great Fire of London-**

The last outbreak of the Plague or Black Death in England was in 1665 AD. Followed quickly by the Great Fire of London in 1666 AD. London was ½ million in population and suffered greatly from both occurrences. But the resilience of the English, and that of 'Londoners' brought the City through. But London was rebuilt at an astonishing speed. Sir John Reresby wrote:

The dreadful effects of the fire were not so strange as the (speed of) rebuilding of this great city.

The Plague was the last in England because the mediaeval Black rat was replaced by the modern Brown rat, which does not carry plague fleas. Rebuilt - London was ready to spring forward into an era of Empire building. This was illuminated by the genius that was the architecture of Sir Christopher Wren, and the rebuilding of St Paul's Cathedral in London was his epitome. Its rebuild went on through to Queen Anne's reign, undeterred by the Popish Plot, the English Revolution, and the Marlborough Wars. It was built in White Portland Stone, which is now common to architecture in England and London in particular.



## RESTORATION AND THE 18th CENTURY (1660-1798)-A Literary Overview

### NEOCLASSICISM (Age of Reason, Enlightenment)

Neoclassicism: effort to imitate and reconstitute the literary values of ancient Greece and Rome, continuing the attention of humanism to these values but without the "stylistic indiscipline" and "excessive invention" of Ren. poets, esp. the concettismo of the Italians and the Eng. metaphysicals. Belief that classical poetry was a more direct and faithful representation of nature (esp. human nature) than has been achieved since; conviction that the restraint, simplicity and impersonality of style of the best Roman poets were more likely to please an audience

Mid -17th cent.: France is the major cultural influence in Europe (Corneille, Racine, Moliere, la Fontaine); Art Poétique of Nicholas Boileau (1674) = codifies the Aristotle's Poetics and Horace's Art of Poetry; Neoclassic tradition in criticism developed most fully in France

prescriptive standards of poetry: 1. verisimilitude is important ( the doctrine that poetry should be "probable", or "likely" or "lifelike"; the basic source is Aristotle) 2. against concettismo and baroque support of verbal ornament; arguing for restraint in metaphor 3. decorum (propriety; the use of the right form to suit the subject, of language to suit the character's social and native background, of action to match the nature of character)

In England: a new desire for elegant simplicity from about 1660

Neoclassicism in England: 1660-1798;

3 lesser periods: 1. Age of Dryden (until Dryden's death in 1700); 2. Age of Pope (until Pope's death in 1744) 3. Age of Johnson ( until the death of Johnson in 1784)

1660: Restoration; Charles II returns from his French exile; returning Royalists brought back an admiration and influence of French philosophy, literature, literary criticism and social behaviour



new poetic style: restraint, clarity, regularity and good sense = corresponds with the nation's yearning for peace and order after 20 years of civil war

Intellectual background. empiricism, direct observation of nature; "natural history" (collection and description of facts of nature). "natural philosophy" (the study of causes of what happens in nature). "natural religion" (the study of nature as the Book written by God)

Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) application of logic and terms of mechanics to language, psychology, government, morals and religion; man is matter put into motion by the stimulus of what he hopes to enjoy or the fear of pains to be avoided; Hobbes contributed to the change in literary style: he distrusted fanciful language which "obscured the rational approach to cause and effect"; separated judgement from wit: judgement is rational, wit is fanciful; metaphor is loose reasoning (Leviathan /1651/; Art of Rhetorique /1655/)

Isaac Newton (1642-1727) rose above simple empiricism; new mathematical-mechanical system of the world: universe both created and set in motion by God according to His own laws, laws which bound together all time and space; Newton's laws of optics and celestial mechanics (Philosophia Naturalis Principia Mathematica /1687/) seemed evidence of a universal order in creation (theologically: divine intelligence whose presence might be deduced from his works; Deism: First Cause withdrawn from universe which He set in motion)

"Nature and Nature's Laws were hid in Night / God said, Let Newton be! and All was Light" (Pope)

John Locke (1632-1704) An Essay Concerning Human Understanding (1690) disciplined, analytical, sceptical methods to show that assumptions about innate ideas could not be defended; tried to explore the human mind in general by closely watching one particular mind; ideas were clear when based on direct experience and adequate when clear, in order to discourse reasonably one must discard any idea that could not be given determinate shape and meaning; since nothing can be known in its essentials, religious truth is a matter of faith

Renaissance Neoplatonic idea of the Chain of Being



See, through this air, this ocean, and this earth,

All matter quick, and bursting into birth,

Above, how progressive life may go!

Around, how wide! how deep extend below!

Vast Chain of Being! Which from God began,

Natures ethereal, human, angel, man,

Beast, bird, fish, insect, what no eye can see,

No glass can reach! from Infinite to thee,

From thee to nothing.--On superior powers

Were we to press, inferior might on ours:

Or in the full creation leave a void,

Where, one step broken, the great scale's destroyed:

From Nature's chain whatever link you strike,

Tenth or ten thousandth, breaks the chain alike"

(Pope: An Essay on

Man I, 8)

### National tradition

Ben Jonson (1572-1637) adaptation to English many classical literary genres; consciously developed plain style; turned to the clearness and classicism of Catullus, Horace and Martial; aimed at a verse with unambiguous meaning and a natural voice without rhetoric; tense, epigrammatic style, rich in generalisation; desire for a harmonious society

The Underwood (1640) published posthumously by a friend includes examples of the plain style used for religious poetry, epistles, elegies, odes, translations of Horatian odes and excellent poems in which women defend "their Inconstancie":

Hang up those dull, and envious fooles

That talk abroad of Womans change,

We were not bred to sit on stooles,

Our proper vertue is to range:

Take that away, you take our lives.

We are not women then, but wives.

John Denham (1615-1669) brought to the developing Neoclassicism strength

his best poem: "Cooper's Hill"; a new type of poem: local poetry: combines description of a landscape with historical and moral reflections (natural description linked with meditation culminates in Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey")

O could I flow like thee, and make thy stream

My great example, as it is my theme!

Though deep, yet clear, though gentle, yet not dull,

Strong without rage, without o'erflowing full.

conciseness, sharp antithesis, balance of opposites, contrast betw. ideal and real linked association of ideas, subdued elegance: Dryden called the poem "an exact pattern of good writing"

AGE OF DRYDEN (1660-1700) characterised by an effort to bring new refinement to English literature according to sound principles of what is fitting and right: after the Restoration: literature adopts a public voice: focus of interest on politics and society; corresponding literary style: graceful, poised, observing the decorum; the metaphysical conceit survives but in a more explicit, tentative, amusing or ironic form: subtly implied analogies is the basis of poetry: main genres: panegyric, topical poem, ode, satire and verse epistle



John Dryden (1631-1700)

minor employee during the Protectorate; Heroic Stanzas (1659) elegies on the death of Cromwell

Astrea Redux (1660) celebrates the restoration of Charles II; the final 50 lines addressed to Charles are Virgilian echoes, analogy of the Restoration to Augustan Rome:

Oh Happy Age! Oh times like those alone

By Fate reser'd for Great Augustus Throne!

When the joint growth of Arms and Arts foreshew

The World a Monarch, and that Monarch You.

Early poems: reflect and celebrate the social, political and intellectual changes of his time; helped shape the ideology of the monarchy; Charles' reign depicted as analogous with the great periods of arts in Augustan Rome - accordingly: poetry attempts to achieve some of the characteristics of Augustan literature: 1. respect for elegy and panegyric (classical genres) 2. some traits of Latin syntax adapted to English 3. echoes of Virgil 4. elevated, public, reasonable tone 5. heroic couplets create sense of order, control and clarity

Dryden: a citizen of the world commenting publicly on matters of public concern (coronation, military victory, death of prominent figures)

Annus Mirabilis (1667) naval victory over the Dutch and the Great Fire of London (: naval victory and Great Fire: Providence had brought affliction so that, like a Phoenix, London will rise from its ashes with renewed vigour)

1668: Poet Laureate, 1670: Historiographer Royal

Absalom and Achitophel (1681) Dryden's greatest work: a verse satire on contemporary public affairs; basis: biblical story of the rebellion of Absalom against his father King David (Monmouth=Absalom, Shaftesbury=Achitophel; Charles II=David)

the very comparison of Charles II with King David allows some sly digs at the Merry Monarch's life. The poem opens:

In pious times, ere priestcraft did begin,  
Before polygamy was made a sin,  
When man on many multiplied his kind  
Ere one to one was cursedly confined  
When nature prompted and no law denied  
Promiscuous use of concubine and bride,  
Then Israel's monarch after Heaven's own heart  
His vigorous warmth did variously impart  
To wives and slaves, and wide as his command,  
Scattered his Maker's image through the land.

Didactic poems: 1682: *Religio Laici* (an essay in verse adocating the Church of England's golden mean between the rationalism of Deism and the authoritarianism of Rome)

1687: *The Hind and the Panther* (written after his conversion to the Catholic faith: "milk-white Hind, immortal and unchanged": Catholicism; fierce Panther: Church of England)

Lyrics: "A Song for St. Cecilia's Day" (1687)

"Alexander's Feast" (1697)

both are Pindaric Ode, poems in praise of music; attempt to imitate by metrical changes the varying tones of trumpet, flute, violin and the human voice

Translations: Virgil's *Aeneid*, (Ovid, Boccaccio and Chaucer)



AGE OF POPE (1700-1744) continues the literary tradition of the Age of Dryden and extends that effort to a wider circle of readers, with special satirical attention to what is unfitting and wrong; in London the coffeehouse replaces the Court as the meetingplace of men of culture; poetry becomes social and familiar; wit, restraint, good taste and the subordination of personal idiosyncrasy to a social norm; main genres: mock-epic topical satire, burlesque, generalised, reflective philosophical lyric; the prevalence of the heroic couplet; AUGUSTAN AGE

Alexander Pope (1688-1744) the first English professional writer

"Why did I write?... / To help me thro' this long disease, my life." (from Epistle to Dr Arbuthnot)

his Catholic faith limited his educational possibilities and excluded him from public office

tubercular and crookbacked, Pope strove to achieve perfection and correctness in poetry

Pastorals (written 1704-7, published 1709) admired by friends for the rhetorical niceties of his couplet: antithesis and parallel, pleasing repetitions and syntactic patternings, alliteration and assonance, metrical variations of pause and cadence

Essay on Criticism (1711) Pope's first striking success; reflects the taste of the Augustan age

ultimate source: Horace's Ars Poetica; aiming at a synthesis of the most valuable critical precepts since Aristotle to Boileau and Dryden

key concepts: wit, Nature, ancients, rules, genius

First follow Nature, and your judgement frame

By her just standard, which is all the same:

Unerring Nature, still divinely bright.

One clear, unchang'd and universal light

...

...wit and judgement are often at strife

Tho' meant each o'ther's aid, like man and wife.

'Tis more to guide, than spur the Muse's steed

Restrain her fury, than provoke his speed.

...

Those rules of old discover'd, not devis'd,

Are Nature still, but Nature methodiz'd:

Nature, like Liberty, is but restrained

By the same laws, which first herself ordai'd.

simple, conversational language: tone of well-bred ease; imagery drawn from all aspects of contemporary life: military, artistic, sexual, religious

Windsor Forest (1713) hailed the approaching Peace of Utrecht, built on Isaiah and Virgil

local (loco-descriptive or topographical) poem: while describing the landscape, the poet reflects upon its moral, political and literary associations: fertility of the scene--peaceful reign of Queen Anne

The Rape of the Lock (1714) mock-heroic poem based on an actual episode

drawing room war between the sexes; conflict: Lord Petre cut off a lock of hair from the head of Arabella Fermor

parodies and echoes of the Iliad, the Aeneid and Paradise Lost

epic machinery: the Rosicrucians' doctrine of spirits: sylphs (air), gnomes (earth), nymphs (water) salamanders (fire)

exquisite adjustment of epic and mundane planes



Translation of the Iliad and Odyssey: emphatically Augustan in its stress on design and clarity of outline, constantly pointing to the epic's 'moral' (even contemporaries expressed doubts about the appropriateness of his neat couplets and general 'politeness' of the translation of the violent Homeric world, yet the translation won him financial independence for his life)

Essay on Man (1732-34) philosophical poem, fragment of a planned majestic survey of human nature, society and morals

compound of diverse elements: Renaissance Platonism, Newtonian science, traditional theodicy

underlying and unifying the poem is the Great Chain of Being, the vast, perfectly ordered, all-inclusive hierarchy of created things, rising from inanimate matter through insects to man, angels and God; Man's fixed place in the Chain of Being is viewed in a series of perspectives

"In spite of Pride, in erring Reason's spite / One truth is clear, "Whatever is, is Right."

AGE OF JOHNSON (1744-1784) transition to a new literary age

Thomas Warton: History of English Poetry (1774-81) charted the poetic ancestry of Spenser. Focused interest on the poetry before Milton in order to restore poetry to its proper channel of "fiction and fancy, picturesque description and romantic imagery", after a period dominated by "wit and rhyme, sentiment and satire, polished numbers, sparkling couplets, and pointed periods." (Warton's Preface to Milton's Poems upon Several Occasions, 1785)

Age of Johnson: (in a sense) a quest for a lost literary culture, which was found in the Elizabethan age

Joseph Warton: Essay on the Genius and Writings of Pope (Vol. I:1756, II: 1782) dissatisfied with the poetry of Pope and the other Augustans, who seemed to them to lack the "nobler qualities" of earlier masters. Claimed that poetry declined because science and philosophy had impoverished the imagination. "The Sublime and the Pathetic [moving] are the two chief nerves of genuine poesy". (Shakespeare, Milton)



Edmund Burke: *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757) "A clear idea is another name for a little idea" marks a transition from the lucidity admired by Pope to the sublimity of writers like Thomas Gray; the classical formalism of the 18th cent. gave way to the aesthetic of romanticism. Central innovation: questioned the classical ideal of clarity, arguing that vagueness and obscurity is far more evocative of the infinite. Darkness is more productive of sublime ideas than light. Fear (desirable for Burke) is diminished by knowledge, but heightened by veiled intimations. "To make everything very terrible [terrifying], obscurity seems in general to be necessary. When we know the full extent of any danger, when we can accustom our eyes to it, a great deal of the apprehension vanishes." Sublime: emphasis on terror, obscurity, power, darkness, solitude, natural magnificence and vastness; the effect on the beholder: terror, (religious) awe, admiration, astonishment, reverence; "whatever is fitted in any sort to excite ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say whatever is in any sort terrible ... is a source of the sublime". Beautiful: based on the passion of love and associates with pleasure, smoothness, delicacy, smallness and light.

Although the sublime feelings of astonishment and awe may resemble pain, the excitation and exertion that they produce yield a very real pleasure: a consciousness of one's own powers.

Thomas Gray (1716-1771) his works mark a clear shift from neo-classical lucidity towards the obscure and the Sublime; one of the 'graveyard poets' (graveyard poetry: a type of meditative poetry, it takes as its major themes a melancholy sense of mutability, the inevitability of death, and the hope of a future life, arriving at such generalizations as Gray's „The paths of glory lead but to the grave". e.g. Gray: *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*; Young: *Night Thoughts*, Blair: *The Grave*).

Gray: one of the most known and respected English poets, yet his reputation rests on 3 major poems and a few shorter lyrics; scholarly recluse, main areas of study: pre-Elizabethan poetry and old Welsh and Norse literature; search for a new style, at once intimate and prophetic; yet often highly artificial diction and distorted word order („the language of the age is neve the language of poetry" cf. Wordsworth!)



most famous works: The Progress of Poesy: The Bard: Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College:

### Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard

elegy: lyric poem that laments a death; it frequently includes a movement from expressed sorrow toward consolation; although it usually mourns the death of an individual, it may also address the ravages of time

Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard: inspired by the death of the poet's close friend, but the poet is mourning not an individual, but an aspect of the human condition, the ultimate fate of all people; respect for established literary forms, knowledge of Greek and Roman culture (Classicism); subject matter and dignified tone (Romanticism)

Iambic pentameter quatrains abab (typical eighteen-century elegiac form)

stanzas 1-3: establish the setting and the mood (countryside, sunset, „solemn stillness“)

stanza 4: focus is shifted to the graveyard and its inhabitants („rude forefathers“)

stanza 5: morning sounds (cf. The evening sounds of the first stanzas) „No more shall rouse them from their lowly bed“

stanzas 6-7: illustrate the daily life of the humble people; sympathy with common people; working close to nature is both joyful and ennobling = Romantic features!

stanzas 8-11: inevitability of death, for rich and poor alike; elevated, formal style

stanzas 12-15: graveyard for a mighty ruler or a poet

stanzas 16-18: the lot of the dead prevented them from becoming great statesmen or tyrants

stanzas 19-23: focus shifted to the desire of humble people for some kind of immortality in the minds of the living

For who, to dumb forgetfulness a prey, On some fond breast the parting soul relies,

This pleasing anxious being e'er resign'd. Some pious drops the closing eye requires;

Let the warm precincts of the cheerful day, E'en from the tomb the voice of Nature cries,

Nor cast one longing lingering look behind? - E'en in our ashes live their wonted fires. -

stanzas 24-29: the 'me' of the 1st stanza reappears as 'thee'; the speaker is addressing himself, imagining the death of the kind of person he is („ For thee, who, mindful of the unhonoured dead, / Dost in these lines their artless tale relate”)

### The Epitaph

Here rests his head upon the lap of Earth

A Youth, to Fortune and to Fame unknown;

Fair Science frown'd not on his humble birth,

And Melancholy mark'd him for her own. -

Large was his bounty, and his soul sincere;

Heaven did a recompense as largely send:

He gave to Misery all he had, a tear.

He gain'd from Heaven. 'twas all he wish'd, a friend. -

No farther seek his merits to disclose,

Or draw his frailties from their dread abode,

(There they alike in trembling hope repose,)

The bosom of his Father and his God.

Consolation found in the belief that these dead repose in heaven with God.



## UNIT -I

**RAPE OF THE LOCK-ALEXANDER POPE**

Alexander Pope was born in Lombard Street, in the city of London, 1688. His father was a wholesale linen-draper, who, having realised a modest competence, retired to the country to live upon it. Pope's youth was spent at Binfield in the skirts of Windsor Forest. Pope was brought up a Catholic, his father, though the son of a beneficed clergyman of the Established Church, having become a convert to Catholicism during a residence on the continent. On the death of his father, Pope, who had largely increased his inheritance by the profits of his translation of Homer, established himself at Twickenham. Here he resided till his death in 1744, employing himself in writing, in embellishing his grounds, of five acres, and in intercourse with most of the wits, and other famous men and women of his time, among whom Gay, Swift, Arbuthnot, and Lord Bolingbroke were his especial intimates. Pope was deformed, and sickly from childhood, and his constant ill-health made his temper fretful, waspish, and irritable. Notwithstanding these defects of character he secured the warm attachment of his friends. Bolingbroke said of him that he never knew a man who had so tender a heart for his particular friends. Warburton, after spending a fortnight at Twickenham, said of him, 'He is as good a companion as a poet, and, what is more, appears to be as good a man.' Pope's principal works are—Pastorals, published in 1709; Essay on Criticism, 1711; Pollio, 1712; Rape of the Lock, 1714; Translation of Homer's Iliad, 1715-18; Edition of Shakspeare, 1725; Translation of Homer's Odyssey, 1726; Dunciad, 1st form, 1728; Epistle to the Earl of Burlington, 1731; On the Use of Riches, 1732; Essay on Man, Part I, 1732; Horace, Sat. 2. 1. imitated, 1733; Epistle to Lord Cobham, 1733; Epistle to Arbuthnot, 1735; Horace, Epistle 1. 1. imitated, 1737; Dunciad, altered and enlarged, 1742. His works were collected by his literary executor, Bishop Warburton, and published in 9 volumes in 1751.]

POPE is not only the foremost literary figure of his age, but the representative man of a system or style of writing which for a hundred years before and after him pervaded English poetry. The writers in this style are sometimes spoken of as the 'school of Pope.' But the title is a misnomer. A school coexists along with other schools from which it is distinguished by some special characteristics; all the contemporaneous schools taken together bearing the common and more general



stamp of their age. During the period now under review, which extends, speaking roughly, from the Restoration to the French Revolution, the whole of English literary effort, but especially poetical effort, has one aim and is governed by one principle. This is the desire to attain perfection of form; a sense of the beauty of literary composition as such. It was the rise within the vernacular language of that idea, which impregnating the Latin language as written and spoken in the fifteenth century had produced the revived, neo-latin literature of the Renaissance. Pope himself (Sat. and Ep. 5), in describing this 'manner,' spoke of it as French, and attributed it to the imitation of French fashions introduced into England at the Restoration.

'We conquer'd France, but felt our captive's charms;

Her arts victorious triumph'd o'er our arms;

Britain to soft refinements less a foe,

Wit grew polite, and numbers learn'd to flow.'

De Quincey (Works, vol. 9) expatiates upon the deficiencies of this explanation of a revolution in literary taste. Certainly the court of Louis XIV exercised a great influence in all matters of taste. But this influence of fashion ceased when the ascendancy of France was broken by the war of the Spanish succession, while the direction which had been impressed upon English poetry continued to dominate it till towards the close of the eighteenth century.

A better denomination for the period of our literature which extends from the Restoration to the French Revolution is 'the classical period.' And this is not to be taken to mean that English writers now imitated the Greek and Latin writers, or consciously formed themselves upon classical models, as the Latinists of the Renaissance imitated Cicero and Virgil. English writers had begun to perceive that there was such an art as the art of writing; that it was not enough to put down words upon paper anyhow, provided they conveyed your meaning. They found that sounds were capable of modulation, and that pleasure could be given by the arrangement of words, as well as instruction conveyed by their import. The public



ear was touched by this new harmony, and began imperatively to demand its satisfaction; and from that moment the rude volubility of the older time seemed to it as the gabble of savages. A poem was no longer to be a story told with picturesque imagery, but was to be a composition in symmetry and keeping. A thought or a feeling was not to be blurted out in the first words that came, but was to be matured by reflection and reduced to its simplest expression. Condensation, correctness, neatness, finish—all qualities hitherto unheard of in English—had to be studied. It was found to be possible to please by your manner as well as by your matter. And having been shown to be possible, it became necessary. No writer who neglected the graces of style could gain acceptance by the public.

This fastidiousness of the public ear required on the part of writers greatly increased labour. It was no longer possible to take a sheet of paper, and write out your thoughts as fast as the pen would move. 'The mob of gentlemen who wrote with ease' were distanced in the race. It was evident that, under the new standard thus set up, the prize would be to him who should be willing to take most trouble about his style. Pope was willing. As a boy he took as his life's lesson the advice given him by 'knowing Walsh,' who used to tell him 'there was one way left of excelling: for though we had several great poets, we never had any one great poet that was correct: and desired me to make that my study and aim.' De Quincey, misconstruing Walsh's meaning, has been at the pains to show that Pope's verses abound in grammatical incorrectnesses. 'The language,' he says, 'does not realise the idea; it simply suggests or hints it.' That conveyance by suggestion, instead of a perfect and plenary deliverance, is just what Pope aimed at, and what Walsh implicated, though he may not have chosen the very best word for what he meant.

Pope at once took the lead in the race of writers because he took more pains than they. He laboured day and night to form himself for his purpose, that viz. of becoming a writer of finished verse. To improve his mind, to enlarge his view of the world, to store up knowledge—these were things unknown to him. Any ideas, any thoughts, such as custom, chance, society or sect may suggest, are good enough, but each idea must be turned over till it has been reduced to its neatest and most epigrammatic expression.

If this definition of the literary aim which dominated all writing during the hundred years which followed 1660 be just, it follows from it that the period



would be more favourable to prose than to poetry. What in fact came to pass was that a compromise was effected between poetry and prose, and the leading writers adopted as the most telling form of utterance prosaic verse, metre without poetry. It is by courtesy that the versifiers of this century from Dryden to Churchill are styled poets, seeing that the literature they have bequeathed us wants just that element of inspired feeling, which is present in the feeblest of the Elizabethans.

But if these versifiers are not poets in the noblest sense of the term, it does not follow that what they produced is destitute of value. In the romantic reaction at the beginning of this century, the worthlessness of eighteenth-century poetry was part of the revolutionary creed. Sheer lawlessness was then admired, while labour was disdained as the badge of an unimaginative and artificial school. The sounder judgment of a riper period of criticism can now do justice to the writers of our classical period. What they had not got we know well enough. They wanted inspiration, lofty sentiment, the heroic soul, chivalrous devotion, the inner eye of faith—above all, love and sympathy. They could not mean greatly. But such meaning as they had they laboured to express in the neatest, most terse and pointed form which our language is capable of. If not poets they were literary artists. They showed that a couplet can do the work of a page, and a single line produce effects which in the infancy of writing would require sentences.

Of these masters of literary craft Pope is the most consummate. In two directions, in that of condensing and pointing his meaning, and in that of drawing the utmost harmony of sound out of the couplet. Pope carried versification far beyond the point at which it was when he took it up. Historical parallels are proverbially misleading. Yet the analogy between what Virgil did for the Latin hexameter as he received it from Lucretius, and Pope's maturing the ten-syllable couplet which he found as Dryden left it, is sufficiently close to be of use in aiding us to realise Pope's merit. Because, after Pope, his trick of versification became common property, and 'every warbler had his tune by heart,' we are apt to overlook the merit of the first invention.

But epigrammatic force and musical flow are not the sole elements of Pope's reputation. The matter which he worked up into his verse has a permanent value, and is indeed one of the most precious heirlooms which the eighteenth century has bequeathed us. And here we must distinguish between Pope when he attempts



general themes, and Pope when he draws that which he knew, viz. the social life of his own day. When in the Pastorals he writes of natural beauty, in the Essay on Criticism he lays down the rules of writing, in the Essay on Man he verifies Leibnitzian optimism, he does not rise above the herd of eighteenth-century writers, except in so far as his skill of language is more accomplished than theirs. The Rape of the Lock and The Dunciad have a little more interest, because they treat of contemporary manners. But even in these poems, because the incidents are trivial and the personages contemptible, Pope is not more than pretty in The Rape of the Lock, and forcible, where force is ludicrously misplaced, in The Dunciad. It is where he comes to describe the one thing which he knew, and about which he felt sympathy and antipathy, viz. the court and town of his time, in the Moral Essays, and the Satires and Epistles, that Pope found the proper material on which to lay out his elaborate workmanship. And even in these capital works we must distinguish between Pope's general theorems and his particular portraits. Where he moralises, or deduces general principles, he is superficial, second-hand, and one-sided as the veriest scribbler. For example: in the splendid lines on the Duke of Wharton (Mor. Ess. 1. 174) we must separate the childish theory of 'the ruling passion' from the telling accumulation of epigram on epigram which follows under that spurious rubric. Or again, we might instance his Epistle to Augustus (Ep. 5) sparkling with lines of wit and pregnant sense, and yet offering as our literary history the grotesque theory, that the French style, which came in with the Restoration, was a consequence of the conquest of France in the sixteenth century.

In short, Pope, wherever he recedes from what was immediately close to him, the manners, passions, prejudices, sentiments, of his own day, has only such merit—little enough—which wit divorced from truth can have. He is at his best only where the delicacies and subtle felicities of his diction are employed to embody some transient phase of contemporary feeling. Pope has small knowledge of books. Though he was, as Sir W. Hamilton says, 'a curious reader,' he read for style, not for facts. Of history, of science, of nature, of anything except 'the town' he knows nothing. He just shares the ordinary prejudices of the ordinary 'wit' of his day. He was a Tory-Catholic, like any other Tory-Catholic of George II's day. His sentiments reflect the social medium in which he lived. The complex web of his society, with its undefinable shades, its minute personal affluities and repulsions, is the world in which Pope lived and moved, and which he has drawn in a few



vivid lines, with the keenness and intensity of which there is nothing in our literature that can compare. Clarendon's portraits in his gallery of characters are more complete and discriminating, and infinitely more candid. But they do not flash the personage, or the situation, upon the imagination, and fix it in the memory, as one of Pope's incisive lines does. Like all the greatest poets, Pope is individual and local. He can paint with his full power only what he sees. When he attempts abstract truth, general themes, past history, his want of knowledge makes itself felt in feeble and distorted views.

The first production of Pope to appear in print was his Pastorals, published 1709, when the author was twenty-one, but written some years earlier. As the work of a youth of seventeen they are a marvellous feat of melodious versification. In any other respect they are only worthy of mention as already exemplifying the false taste which Pope never got rid of when he attempted any other theme than manners.

Of this false taste his Messiah is an elaborate specimen. This poem is an adaptation of Virgil's fourth Eclogue. Pollio, to Christ, grafting upon the lines of the Latin poet the images supplied by the prophecies of Isaiah. The ingenuity with which the double imitation is carried through is only surpassed by the mastery shown over the melody of the couplet, and the exhibition of a complete poetical vocabulary. These brilliant qualities carried by storm the admiration of Pope's contemporaries, and continued to command the homage of the eighteenth century down to Johnson. Language experience, enforced by the precept and example of Wordsworth, makes our age too keenly feel that the pathos and sublimity of the Hebrew prophet are destroyed by the artificial embroidery with which Pope has overlaid them. Pope's Messiah reads to us like a sickly paraphrase, in which all the majesty of the original is dissipated. 'Righteousness' becomes 'dewy nectar'; 'sheep' are the 'fleecy care'; the call to Jerusalem to 'arise and shine' is turned into an invocation to 'exalt her tow'ry head.' The 'fir-tree and box-tree' of Isaiah are 'the spiry fir and shapely box.' In his translation of the prediction 'the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice den,' Pope makes the cockatrice a 'crested basilisk,' and the asp 'a speckled snake'; they have both scales of a 'green lustre,' and a 'forky tongue,' and with this last the 'smiling infant shall innocently play.' 'The leopard,' says Isaiah, 'shall lie down with the kid, and the young lion and the fatling together,



and a little child shall lead them': Pope could not leave this exquisite picture undecorated, and with him 'boys in flowery bands the tiger lead.' The alternative is an example of the justice of De Quincey's observation that 'the Arcadia of Pope's age was the spurious Arcadia of the opera theatre.' (Elwin.)

The Essay on Criticism appeared in 1711. This is a didactic poem of which the remote prototype is Horace's *Ars poetica*, and the immediate, Boileau's *Art poétique*. It differs from these models in its subject, which is the Art of Criticism. To Dr. Johnson this production appeared 'to display such extent of comprehension, such nicety of distinction, such acquaintance with mankind, and such knowledge both of ancient and modern learning, as are not often attained by the matured age and the longest experience.' This verdict of Johnson may be cited to show the great advance which criticism has made in England in the course of a century. We should now say that the precepts of Pope's Essay are conventional truisms, the ordinary rules of composition which may be found in all school manuals, and which are taught to boys as part of their prosody. 'The Essay,' says De Quincey, 'is a mere versification, like a metrical multiplication table, of commonplaces the most mouldy with which criticism has baited its rat-traps.' It required very little reading of the French textbooks to find the maxims which Pope has here strung together. But he has dressed them so neatly, and turned them out with such sparkle and point, that these truisms have acquired a weight not their own, and they circulate as proverbs among us in virtue of their pithy form rather than their truth. They exemplify his own line 'What oft was thought, but ne'er so well expressed.' Pope told Spence that he had 'gone through all the best critics,' specifying Quintilian, Rapin and Le Bossu. But whatever trouble he took in collecting what to say, his main effort is expended upon how to say it. The Essay on Criticism abounds in those striking couplets which have lodged in all our memories, and given their last and abiding shape to dicta which have been extant in substance since literature began. A good example of this art is supplied by the couplet which has just been quoted from:

'True wit is nature to advantage dressed;

What oft was thought, but ne'er so well expressed.'



which is Pope's compressed form of the following prose of Boileau: 'Qu'est-ce qu'une pensée neuve, brillante, extraordinaire? Ce n'est point comme se le persuadent les ignorants, une pensée que personne n'a jamais eue, ni dû avoir. C'est au contraire une pensée qui a dû venir à tout le monde, et que quelqu'un s'avise le premier d'exprimer. Un bon mot n'est bon mot qu'en ce qu'il dit une chose que chacun pensoit, et qu'il la dit d'une manière vive, fine, et nouvelle.'

13

But though the Essay abounds with sparkle and point and memorable lines, it is very far from being composed throughout of nothing but such. Besides the general fault, which pervades all Pope's longer efforts, of want of coherent texture and consecutiveness of argument, the Essay on Criticism offers too many weak lines, obscure expressions, and monotonous rhymes. Negligences of versification, such as no piece of Pope's composition is entirely free from, abound in the Essay. One instance of this slovenliness is the want of variety in his endings. There are twelve couplets rhyming to wit, and ten rhyming to sense.

'Unhappy wit, like most mistaken things,

Atones not for that envy which it brings.'

'Mistaken things' here means 'things wrongly taken by others,' which is not the natural sense of the words; and 'atones' stands for 'compensates.'

'But sense survived when merry jests were passed.'

It requires explanation that 'were passed' here means 'had passed away.'

'Critics ...

Form short ideas, and offend in arts

As most in manners, from a love to parts.'

In this one couplet are three expressions, 'short ideas,' 'offend in arts,' and 'love to parts,' the meaning of which has to be guessed, or gathered from the context. It is not apparent on the face of the words used. In some styles of poetry enigmatical expression is not a fault: in an Aeschylean chorus it is of the essence of the drama that the revelations should be shrouded in clouds. But Pope's verse, like French



prose, is constructed on the principle of being immediately intelligible; the moment it is not so, its *raison d'être* is gone. 14

The Rape of the Lock is a mock-heroic poem, the style of which was suggested to Pope by Boileau's *Lutrin*. Pope followed his model in entitling his work 'An heroicomic poem,' the epithet employed by Boileau in the 1709 edition of his *Lutrin*. It was founded upon an incident which had caused great commotion in the circle of Catholic families in which Pope, though not himself a member of it, had friends. Lord Petre, in a moment of youthful frolic, had cut off a lock of hair from Miss Arabella Fermor's head, a liberty which was keenly resented, and had caused a violent quarrel between the families. Mr. Caryll, a Sussex squire, nephew to the Mr. John Caryll who had been Secretary to Mary, James II's Queen, suggested to Pope to write a poem, which by treating the incident playfully, might induce the offended family to take a more lenient view of what they regarded as an outrage. This was the motive of the first draft of the poem, as it was printed in *Tonson's Miscellany*, 1712, in two cantos, and no more than 330 lines. This first sketch was written off in a fortnight, but its author, pleased with the success of his work, elaborated it afterwards, and enlarged it especially by the introduction of what he calls the 'machinery,' or the agency of supernatural beings of the fairy species, whom he calls 'sylphs.' It is universally admitted that the later additions, and this invention especially, are great improvements, thus forming an exception to the rule that a poet should never recast, or supplement, a piece which he has turned out well in the first instance.

The heroine of the poem, Belinda, is Miss Fermor, the Baron is Lord Petre; Thalestris is Mrs. Morley; Sir Plume is Mrs. Morley's brother, Sir George Brown of Keddington. Pope obtained permission to dedicate the poem to Miss Fermor, but notwithstanding that he takes care to tell her that 'Belinda resembles her in nothing but in beauty,' the lady was more offended than flattered by the representation given of her. Sir George Brown was indignant at being made to talk nothing but nonsense. In bringing about its professed aim, the reconciliation of the two families, the poem was entirely unsuccessful.

But with the public it was otherwise. On its first publication Addison pronounced it a delicious little thing; 'merum sal.' Criticism the most hostile to Pope, of which there has been abundance in the modern reaction against his



influence, has agreed to spare the Rape. Macaulay pronounces it his best poem. De Quincey, who never spares Pope when he is weak, goes beyond Macaulay, and declares it 'the most exquisite monument of playful fancy that universal literature offers.' The Rape of the Lock, writes Hazlitt, 'is the most exquisite specimen of filigree work ever invented. It is made of gauze and silver spangles. The most glittering appearance is given to everything; to paste, pomatum, billets-doux, and patches. Airs, languid airs breathe around; the atmosphere is perfumed with affectation. A toilet is described with the solemnity of an altar raised to the goddess of vanity, and the history of a silver bodkin is given with all the pomp of heraldry. No pains are spared, no profusion of ornament, no splendour of poetic diction to set off the meanest things.... It is the triumph of insignificance, the apotheosis of foppery and folly. It is the perfection of the mock-heroic.' And Professor Conington thinks 'there can be little to say about a poem so exquisite in its peculiar style of art as to make the task of searching for faults almost hopeless, that of commending beauties simply impertinent.' 17

Such warmth of encomium as this is at least testimony to the admiration which the skill of the poet can still excite in the reader. But it is criticism which touches the workmanship rather than the work. Pope's execution is so clever as always to charm us even when his subject is most devoid of interest. The secret of the peculiar fascination of *The Rape of the Lock* lies, I believe, not merely in the art and management, but in the fact that here, for the first time, Pope is writing of that which he knew, of the life he saw and the people he lived with. For *Windsor Forest*, Nothing can exceed the art with which the satire is blended with the pomp, mocking without disturbing the unsubstantial gewgaw. The double vein is kept up with sustained skill in the picture of the outward charms and the inward frivolity of women.

'With varying vanities from every part

They shift the moving toyshop of their heart';

this is the tone throughout. Their hearts are toyshops. They reverse the relative importance of things; the little with them is great, and the great little.' (Elwin.) This feeling towards women is not the poet's idiosyncrasy; here he is but the representative of his age. The degradation of woman in England does not date



from the Restoration. It was complete before the Commonwealth, and is aptly symbolised in the behaviour of James I, who compelled all ladies to kneel on being presented to him. But the combination of the forms of chivalrous devotion with the reality of cynical contempt, was the peculiar tone of manners which came in with the court of Charles II, and gradually spread downwards through the lower social strata. The poem in our literature which gives the most finished representation of this sentiment is *The Rape of the Lock*.

It was to the translation of Homer, undertaken as a commercial speculation, that Pope owed, more than to anything else he produced, the great reputation he attained in his lifetime. The verdict of later times has reversed the decision of an age little versed in Greek, and whose artificial manners were alien from the primitive simplicity and savagery of Homer. Pope translated from the Latin version, from the French of Dacier, from the English of Chapman. But it was less his ignorance of Greek, than his theory of poetical expression, which led him astray. His solicitude is entirely spent upon the words he is using, and not upon the thing he is describing. He introduced ornaments which are not only foreign, but false and out of keeping. He reproduced neither the naiveté nor the dignity of the original. Pope's moonlight scene provoked Wordsworth's remark that 'the eye of the poet had never been steadily fixed upon its object,' and that 'it shows to what a low state knowledge of the most obvious and important phenomena had sunk.' Yet no selection from Pope would be complete which did not offer a specimen of the Homer. We give the moonlight scene from the 8th Book, partly for the sake of comparison with Chapman's rendering of the same lines, and also because it is a striking example of both the faults and excellences of the translation. We have in these few lines more than average infidelity to the original; we have unhomeric embroidery, such as 'refu'gent lamp of night'; but we have at the same time twenty-four lines (eleven in the Greek) of finished versification, the rapid, facile, and melodious flow of which, concentrating all the felicities of Pope's higher style, has never been surpassed in English poetry.

The translation of Homer occupied Pope during the ten best years of his life. The *Odyssey* was finished in 1725, and Pope turned to very different work, the composition of *The Dunciad*. The *Dunciad* is a personal satire, or lampoon, directed against the small authors of the day, who are bespattered with much mud and little wit, without any pretence of disguise, and under their own names. The



Dunciad has been the parent of a numerous progeny, The Scribleriad, The Baviad, The Pursuits of Literature, English Bards and Scotch Reviewers, all of which have had much vogue in their day, and lost their savour when the generation they libelled has passed away. It must not be concealed that critics of reputation have spoken with approbation of this amalgam of dirt, ribaldry and petty spite. De Quincey has allowed himself to say that The Dunciad is Pope's 'greatest work.' Thackeray, who had no toleration for similar offences when Swift was the offender, thought that the conclusion of The Dunciad 'shows the author to be the equal of all poets of all times': and Conington considers the poem as 'unquestionably a very great satire.' It certainly shows Pope's peculiar skill as an artist in its perfection. He has now (1727) attained a complete mastery over the couplet, and can compel it to do the work he requires of it. To the literary historian the value of The Dunciad is great, as a chapter of contemporary life, a record of small celebrities, otherwise lost to fame. But of its absolute merit as a poem, a just taste must agree with Taine (Litt. Angl. t. 4), that 'seldom has so much talent been expended to produce so much ennui.' The motive of the satire is not the desire of the moral reformer to improve mankind, but the rancour and malevolence of literary jealousy. And against whom is this petty irritation felt? Against feeble journalists, brutal pamphleteers, starving rhymesters, a crew of hackney authors, bohemians of ink and paper below literature. To sting and wound these unfortunates gave Pope pleasure as he sate, meditating stabs, in his elegant villa, the resort of the rich and the noble! By attacking these, he lowers himself to their level. The first poet of the age—of the century—chooses to hand himself down to posterity as bandying scurrilities with the meanest scribblers, hired defamers, the banditti of the printing-office, ready at the shortest notice to deliver half a crown's worth of slander. To be even with these miserable outcasts Pope condescended to employ one of the worst of them, Savage, as a spy and informer to bring him gossip from their haunts. When every other taunt fails him Pope can gibbet the poverty of these unsuccessful authors as a crime, and turn them into ridicule for wanting a dinner. The superfluous vehemence with which he rails against these insignificant enemies betrays the hollowness of the pretence that the satire was aimed not at individuals, but at the spirit of dullness or stupid conservatism. Of Pope's ignorance of everything, except society and the art of versifying, The Dunciad offers one signal instance. The first scholar in Europe, one possessing a genius for criticism to which philologists of all countries still



pay admiring homage, was an Englishman, and a contemporary of Pope. Pope looked on Richard Bentley but knew him not. The lines (included in our selection) in which the great critic is quizzed, are a typical specimen of the fatal flaw in Pope's writings, viz. that the workmanship is not supported by the matter; a palpable falsehood is enshrined in immortal lines.

The composition of *The Dunciad* had revealed to Pope where his true strength lay, in blending personalities with moral reflection. During the next decade, 1730-40, he confined himself to the one style of composition upon which his reputation as an English poet must rest, and in which he has never had a rival. The pieces which appear in his collected works under the various titles of *Moral Essays*, *Essay on Man*, *Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot*, *Imitations of Horace*, *Epilogue to the Satires*, were brought out singly at various times during these ten years. 22

The most celebrated of these poems are the four epistles addressed to Lord Bolingbroke, and known by the collective title of the *Essay on Man*. It is a didactic or argumentative poem, not on Man, as the title bears, but a *théodicée* or vindication of the ways of Providence. The view attempted to be presented is that of Leibnitzian optimism: the end of the universe is the general good of the whole; it was impossible to realise this without admitting partial evil. Man is not the end of creation, but only one in a graduated scale of beings; it is his pride which leads him to complain when he finds that everything has not been ordered for his benefit. The reasoning of the *Essay on Man* is feeble, the philosophy either trite or inconsistent, or obscure. But the less the intrinsic value of the argument, the more is our admiration excited by the literary skill and brilliant execution displayed in the management. The particular illustrations, the episodes and side-lights, always sparkle with wit, and are sometimes warm with feeling. when the main thesis is jejune and frigid. 'Whilst Pope frequently wastes his skill in gilding refuse, he is really most sensitive to the noblest sentiments of his contemporaries, and when he has good materials to work upon, his verse glows with unusual fervour.' (Leslie Stephen.) Ruskin points to the couplet

'Never elated, while one man's oppressed;

Never dejected whilst another 's blessed'



as 'the most complete, concise, and lofty expression of moral temper existing in English words.' 'If the Essay on Man were shivered into fragments, it would not lose its value; for it is precisely its details which constitute its moral as well as literary beauties.' (A. W. Ward.) 23

The Moral Essays, from which our next specimen is taken, consist of five epistles composed at different times, and placed in the works under a common title. Of these the same may be said as of the Essay on Man, that the ethical doctrine is not worthy of the exquisite workmanship. Our extract is from the first epistle, and includes the celebrated character of Philip Lord Wharton, a piece of portraiture which ranks with those of Addison, the Duchess of Marlborough, Lord Hervey, and the death-bed of Villiers Duke of Buckingham. They are masterpieces of English versification, medals cut with such sharp outlines and such vigour of hand that they have lost none of their freshness by lapse of time. 'When the poet engraves one of these figures, his compendious imagery, the surprises of his juxtaposition, the sustained and multiplied antitheses, the terse texture of each line, the incessant shocks from the play of his eloquence directed and concentrated continually upon one point, from these things the memory receives an impression which it never loses.' (Taine.)

Pope's peculiar powers found their most perfect development in the pieces, which in the collected works are entitled Satires and Epistles of Horace imitated. Casually suggested by Bolingbroke in the course of conversation, and calling themselves an imitation, these 'satires and epistles' are the most original of Pope's writings, and the most natural and spontaneous outcome of his genius. These pieces, nine in number, including a Prologue, and two Epilogues, form a total of some 2000 lines, and were the product of the four years 1735-8, and therefore of Pope's meridian period between his fortieth and fiftieth year. The ferocity of Pope's invective and the malice of his antipathies are here subdued, and though the coarser horse-laugh of the old time breaks out every now and then, yet on the whole the finer play of sarcasm and witty innuendo has taken the place of hard names and slander.

The Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot, or Prologue to the Satires may be singled out as Pope's most characteristic piece. We give it entire in our selections. It contains the two famous portraits, that of Lord Hervey (Sporus) and that of Addison (Atticus).



The libel, for such it is, on Lord Hervey cannot be excused even by the rancour of political party. This accomplished nobleman was Vice-Chamberlain in the court of George II, a position easy enough to a mere fribble, but which was sure to mark out a man of parts and wit such as Lord Hervey, as the object of hatred to the tory and jacobite opposition. Even as art, Pope must be considered in this sketch to have failed from overcharging his canvas with odious and disgusting images. Yet 'it is impossible not to admire, however we may condemn, the art by which acknowledged wit, beauty and gentle manners, the Queen's favour, and even a valetudinary diet are travestied into the most odious defects and offences.' (Croker.) The satire on Addison, in a more refined style, but not less unjust in fact, had been written twenty years before, during Addison's lifetime. Pope regarded the piece with the affection with which an author regards the product of much time and labour; and he had meditated each stab in this finished lampoon for years. Having printed it separately in 1727, he now finally adapted it into this Prologue to the Satires, only suppressing the real name, but not concealing it under the thin disguise of 'Atticus.' The art of these malignant lines is much greater than that of those on Lord Hervey. Pope here not only avoids any images which were in themselves offensive, but allows his victim many virtues and accomplishments.

### **The Rape of the Lock**

#### **A Brief Overview**

The Rape of the Lock (1714) had its origins in an actual incident that occurred in 1711. Robert, Lord Petre surreptitiously cut a lock of hair from Arabella Fermor, who he had been courting at the time. The Fermors took offense, and a schism developed between the two families. John Caryll, a friend of both families and of Pope's who had been present, suggested that Pope write a humorous poem about the event which would demonstrate to both families that the affair had been blown out of proportion, thereby effecting a reconciliation between them. Pope accordingly composed *The Rape of the Lock*.

Obviously aware of the celebrated mock epics of Boileau (*Le lutrin*, 1674) and Dryden (*MacFlecknoe*, 1676), Pope adopted the mock-heroic genre for his poem. Throughout the poem, Pope adopts classical epic devices to develop an ironic



contrast between its structure and its content. The poem's subject matter extends beyond an attempt to pacify two families, which became particularly obvious after a revised and enlarged version of the poem was published in 1714. It simultaneously satirizes the trivialities of fashionable society, provides a commentary on the contemporary distortion of moral values, and indicts human pride. The fashionable world that Pope depicts in *The Rape of the Lock* is at once artificial and trivial, governed by strict rules of decorum and the sublimation of human emotion. The severing of Belinda's hair acts as a catalyst that shatters the order of this artificial world. Once the rules of decorum are broken, an emotional floodgate opens, and the characters' reactions to this disruption are correspondingly hyperbolic. Pope thus reveals the fragility and vulnerability of these larger-than-life characters.

Once comfortable with the epic and mock-heroic genres, Pope channeled his writing into two separate projects: translations of classical epics (most famously, *The Iliad*) and various satires, several of which borrowed the mock-heroic structure he explored in *The Rape of the Lock*.

#### An Essay on Man

*An Essay on Man* (1732-4) is a philosophical piece written in Pope's characteristic heroic couplets. It was published in installments between 1732 and 1734. Pope's authorship was initially kept secret, and the poem was celebrated by readers as the work of a new and unsatirical poet. Pope later revealed himself to be the author. He intended the poem to be the centerpiece of a proposed system of ethics. This system was to be put forth in poetic form, and this text would comprise the first book of this larger work. Pope did not, however, live to complete this project, but the extant poem provides a glimpse at Pope's philosophical beliefs.

It consists of four epistles, addressed to Henry St. John, Lord Bolingbroke. Bolingbroke was a friend of Pope's, and Pope's arguments in the "Essay" derive in part from Bolingbroke's fragmentary philosophical writings.

The poem was a controversial work at the time of its publication. Though it received its share of praise, critics faulted the poem's emphasis on poetry rather



than a coherent philosophy. Indeed, *An Essay on Man* was generally read as a poetic work in spite of its themes.

### **Character List**

#### **Belinda**

The character of Belinda is the heroine of *The Rape of the Lock*. Pope bases her character on the historical Arabella Fermor, the daughter of an aristocratic Catholic family. Robert, Lord Petre, a family friend, snipped a lock of her hair without permission, thereby causing a rift between their two families. Pope depicts this incident in the poem.

#### **The Baron**

The Baron is an admirer of Belinda's, and he enacts the "rape of the lock" by cutting off one of the curls of hair that hung down her neck. He is based on the historical Robert, Lord Petre.

#### **Caryll**

Though Caryll is not so much a character in the poem (he is mentioned only in line 3), he is the dedicatee of the poem. "Caryll" is John Caryll, a friend of Pope's who witnessed the incident between Arabella Fermor and Lord Petre. He commissioned Pope to turn the incident into a jest in the hope that it would encourage reconciliation between the two families.

#### **Clarissa**

Clarissa is one of the women in attendance at the Hampton Court party. She is complicit in the severing of Belinda's hair, lending her sewing scissors to the Baron. She later delivers a moralizing sermon on the ephemeral nature of beauty and the importance of good sense once a woman's looks have faded.

#### **Ariel**

Ariel is Belinda's guardian Sylph. Once a coquettish woman during his human life, he is now an air spirit who protects virginal women with the aid of an army



of Sylphs. Pope takes the sprite's name from the character in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*.

### **Umbriel**

Umbriel is a mischievous Gnome, who travels to the Cave of Spleen and returns with a bag of sighs and a vial of tears which he uses to intensify Belinda's despair at the loss of her hair.

### **Thalestris**

Thalestris is Belinda's friend. She tries to convince Belinda to avenge the Baron's affront to her honor and is the most vicious aggressor in the battle over the lock. Appropriately, Pope takes her name from an Amazonian Queen of Greek mythology.

### **Themes of the poem : The Rape of the Lock**

#### **Gender Roles**

In *The Rape of the Lock*, Pope constantly manipulates traditional gender roles to satiric effect. He portrays Belinda, the poem's protagonist, alternately as an epic hero preparing for battle (I.139-44), a cunning military general reviewing his troops (III.45-6), and a Moor bellowing in rage (V.105-6). The poem thus describes Belinda in specifically male terms: heroism, battle, anger. Other women in the poem similarly demonstrate masculine characteristics. Thalestris displays her prowess on the battlefield while Clarissa provides a weapon to the otherwise impotent Baron. By contrast, the men act with feminine delicacy, fainting during the battle. Pope figures the Baron in mostly feminine terms. He is a fop, willing to prostrate himself before the altar of Love, and he cannot act on his desire without the explicit assistance of a woman. When Belinda conquers him in battle, she stands above him in a position of dominance. Even the poem's more mechanical elements partake in this reversal of gender roles. The mythological sprites literally switch genders after they die, transforming from human women to male spirits. All this gender manipulation calls attention to the perverse behaviors of this fictional society. The poem certainly alludes to the expected behavior of each gender role: women should act with modesty while men should embody heroic



and chivalric ideals. However, these characters flout the rules of traditional society.

### **Female Sexuality**

Pope frequently focuses on female sexuality and the place of women in society throughout the corpus of his poetry, and it was a popular topic in the early eighteenth century (just think of Jonathan Swift's misogynistic poems). The Rape of the Lock does not, however, feature a Swiftian tirade concerning the evils of women. It instead makes a considered exploration of society's expectations for women. The rules of eighteenth-century society dictate that a woman attract a suitable husband while preserving her chastity and virtuous reputation. Pope renders this double-standard dramatically in his depiction of Belinda's hair, which attracts male admirers, and its petticoat counterpart, which acts as a barrier to protect her virginity. Of course, a woman who compromised her virtue—either by deed or reputation—usually lost her place in respectable society. Pope examines the loss of reputation in the poem's sexual allegory, i.e., the "rape" of the lock. By figuring the severing of Belinda's hair as a sexual violation, Pope delves into implications of sexual transgression. After the Baron steals her curl, Belinda exiles herself from the party, retiring to a bedchamber to mourn her loss. Pope thus dramatizes the retreat from society that a sexually-compromised woman would eventually experience. Though Belinda is ultimately celebrated, not ostracized, by her community, her narrative provides Pope with the opportunity to explore society's views on female sexuality.

### **The Deterioration of Heroic Ideals**

Pope's use of the mock epic genre in *The Rape of the Lock* affords him the poetic occasion to lament the deterioration of heroic ideals in the modern era. Though he depicts conventional epic themes such as love and war, his comic tone indicates that the grandeur of these matters has suffered since the days of Homer and Virgil. The "amorous causes" in Pope's poem have little in common with Hector's love for Andromache or Paris' theft of Helen in *The Iliad* or Penelope's devotion to Odysseus in *The Odyssey* (l. 1). By contrast, the love Pope portrays is that of the Baron for Belinda's icon (her hair), not Belinda herself. Similarly, the "mighty contests" that once populated epic poetry now arise "from trivial things" (l.2).



Achilles' rage at Agamemnon for affronting his honor with the theft of *Briseis* has diminished to the anger of a young beauty at the theft of her hair, which will certainly grow back. Pope thus presents a society that is merely a shadow of its heroic past.

### **Religious Piety**

The Rape of the Lock demonstrates Pope's anxieties concerning the state of religious piety during the early eighteenth century. Pope was Catholic, and in the poem he indicates his concern that society has embraced objects of worship (beauty, for example) rather than God. His use of religious imagery reveals this perversion. The rituals he depicts in the first and second cantos equate religion with secular love. During Belinda's toilette, the poem imbues the Bibles and billet-doux (love letters) on her dressing table with equal significance. The Baron's altar to Love in the second canto echoes this scene. On the altar—itsself an integral part of Christian worship, in particular Catholic Mass—the Baron places “twelve vast French romances, neatly gilt” to honor Love, rather than gilded Bibles (38). Pope symbolizes this equation of religious and erotic love in the cross that Belinda wears. This central symbol of Christianity serves an ornamental, not religious function, adorning Belinda's “white breast” (7). The cross remains sufficiently secular that “Jews might kiss” it and “infidels adore” it (8). Of course, Pope leaves ambiguous the implication that the Jews and infidels are admiring Belinda's breasts and not the cross. This subversion of established principles of Christian worship critiques the laxity of early eighteenth-century attitudes towards religion and morality.

### **Idleness of the Upper Classes**

The idleness and ignorance of the upper classes is integral to Pope's critique of contemporary society in *The Rape of the Lock*. His satire focuses largely on the foibles of the aristocracy and gentry, who he depicts as interested only in trivial matters, such as flirting, gossip, and card games. Pope's rendering of ombre as an epic battle demonstrates the frivolity of upper-class entertainment. In reality an excuse for flirting and gambling, the card game represents the young aristocrats' only opportunity to gain heroic recognition. This is not, of course, true heroism, but rather a skill that serves no purpose in the outside world. Chief among the



upper classes' other pastimes is gossip, but Pope limits their conversation to the insular world of the aristocratic lifestyle. They care most about "who gave the ball, or paid the visit last," the irrelevant structures of upper-class socializing (III.12). Few discuss the world beyond the society of Hampton Court: "One speaks the glory of the British Queen, / And one describes a charming Indian screen" (III.13-4). This couplet alludes to the worldly pursuits of trade and empire that are occurring outside of these aristocrats' small social world.

### **Ephemeral Nature of Beauty**

Beauty's ephemeral nature reinforces Pope's critical project in *The Rape of the Lock*. His poem attempts to dissuade society from placing excessive value on external appearances, especially since such things fade over time. Clarissa's lecture in particular questions the value that society places on appearances. She notes that men worship female beauty without assessing moral character. Pope demonstrates that this is essentially a house without foundation: because "frail beauty must decay," women must have other qualities to sustain them (V.25). Though Clarissa is complicit in the general frivolity and pettiness that Pope censures in the poem, her articulated scruples with regard to appearances serve his social critique.

### **Man's Place and Purpose in the Universe**

In his prefatory address to the reader of *An Essay on Man*, Pope describes his intention to consider "man in the abstract, his Nature and his State, since, to prove any moral duty, to enforce any moral precept, or to examine the perfection of any creature whatsoever, it is necessary first to know what imperfection of any creature it is placed in, and what is the proper end and purpose of its condition and relation it is placed in, and what is the proper end and purpose of its being." Pope explores man's nature and his place in the world throughout the poem. The first epistle explains man's relation to the universe. Pope explains that man's place in the "Vast chain of being" is in a middle state, below the angels but above beasts and fowl (I.237). Because man is an integral part of God's creation, he cannot and should not try to comprehend God's design. The second epistle depicts man's relation to the individual. Pope argues that man is governed by the principles of self-love and reason. Self-love and the passions are the origins of human action while reason regulates human behavior. The third epistle examines



man's relation to society. The bonds that unite man to others are governed by instinct or reason. Man's relationship with nature is largely instinctual, based on a primordial knowledge of the things necessary to survival (nourishment, sex, etc.). By contrast, man's relationship to other men and to God is based on reason, and consequently, man established the institutions of government and religion. The former proves his love for other men and the second his love for God. The fourth epistle investigates man's relation to happiness, which, Pope argues, is man's ultimate aim. Though Pope does not provide a universal solution to "the proper end and purpose" of man, he does reveal one of the defining characteristics of humanity: man will always seek to understand his purpose in the world.

### **The Rape of the Lock: Canto I**

#### **Summary**

The Rape of the Lock opens with an invocation of a muse and establishes the poem's subject matter, specifically a "dire offense from amorous causes" and the "mighty contests [rising] from trivial things" (1-2). The speaker concludes his invocation by asking the muse to explain first why a lord of good-breeding would assault a lady and, secondly, why a lady would reject a lord.

The action of the poem begins with the rising sun awakening the residents of a wealthy household. Though everyone, including the lapdogs, has risen, Belinda remains asleep. She dreams of a handsome youth who informs her that she is protected by a "thousand bright inhabitants of air:" spirits that were once human women who now protect virgins.

The youth explains that after a woman dies, her spirit returns to elemental form; namely, to fire, water, earth, and air. Each element is characterized by different types of women. Termagants or scolds become fire spirits or Salamanders. Indecisive women become water spirits. Prudes or women who delight in rejecting men become Gnomes (earth spirits). Coquettes become Sylphs (air spirits).

The dream is sent to Belinda by Ariel, "her guardian Sylph" (20). The Sylphs are Belinda's guardians because they understand her vanity and pride, having been coquettes when they were humans. They are devoted to any woman who "rejects



mankind" (68). Their role is to guide young women through the "mystic mazes" of social interaction (92).

At the end of the dream, Ariel warns Belinda of an impending "dread event," urging her to "Beware of all, but most beware of Man" (109, 114). Belinda is then awoken by her lapdog, Shock. Upon rising, she sees that a billet-doux, or a love-letter, has arrived for her, causing her to forget the details of the dream.

Now awake, Belinda begins her elaborate toilette. Pope endows every object from combs and pins to billet-doux and Bibles with significance in this ritual of dressing: "Each silver vase in mystic order laid" (122). Belinda herself is described as a "goddess," looking at her "heavenly image" in the mirror (132, 125). The elegant language and importance of such objects thus elevate the process of dressing to a sacred rite.

The Sylphs assist in Belinda's dressing routine, setting her hair and straightening her gown. Fully arrayed, Belinda emerges from her chamber.

### **Analysis**

The opening of *The Rape of the Lock* establishes the poem's mock-heroic tone. In the tradition of epic poetry, Pope opens the poem by invoking a muse, but rather than invoke one of the mythic Greek muses, Pope leaves the muse anonymous and instead dedicates the poem to John Caryl, the man who commissioned the poem. The first verse-paragraph also introduces Pope's epic subject matter: a war arising from "amorous causes" (1). Unlike Menelaus' fury at Paris' theft of Helen or Achilles' quarrel with Agamemnon over Briseis in *The Iliad*, however, the poem's "mighty contests rise from trivial things" (2). Indeed, these "mighty contests" are merely flirtations and card games rather than the great battles of the Greek epic tradition.

The second verse-paragraph encapsulates Pope's subversion of the epic genre. In lines 11-12 Pope juxtaposes grand emotions with unheroic character-types, specifically "little men" and women: "In tasks so bold can little men engage, / And in soft bosoms dwells such mighty rage." The irony of pairing epic characteristics with lowly human characters contributes to Pope's mock-heroic style. Furthermore, the "mighty rage" of women evokes the rage of Achilles at the



outset of *The Iliad*, foreshadowing the comic gender-reversal that characterizes the rest of the poem. Rather than distinguish the subjects of the poem as in a traditional epic, Pope uses the mock-heroic genre to elevate and ridicule his subjects simultaneously, creating a satire that chides society for its misplaced values and emphasis on trivial matters.

Belinda's dream provides the mythic structure of the poem. In this segment, Pope introduces the supernatural forces that affect the action of the poem, much the way that the gods and goddesses of *The Iliad* would influence the progress of the Trojan War. Just as Athena protects Diomedes and Aphrodite supports Paris during the Trojan War, Ariel is the guardian of Belinda. Unlike the Greek gods, however, Ariel possesses little power to protect his ward and preserve her chastity. In this initial canto, Belinda forgets Ariel's warnings of impending dangers upon receiving a billet-doux. Though charged with protecting Belinda's virtue, it seems that Ariel cannot fully guard her from the perils of love, unable to distract her even from a relatively harmless love letter. In the dream Ariel indicates that all women have patron sprites, depending on their personality type. Ariel explains that when women die, their spirits return "from earthly vehicles" to "their first elements" (50, 58). Each personality type—scolds, undecided women, prudes, coquettes—becomes a Salamander, Nymph, Gnome, or Symp, respectively. These four types are associated with both the four humors and the four elements. Having been "light coquettes" as human women, the Sylphs are most closely affiliated with Belinda. Belinda herself is a coquette, and it is this aspect of femininity with which Pope is most concerned.

Pope explores the role of the coquette in this first canto. He demonstrates that womanly priorities are limited to personal pleasures and social aspirations. In his description of the Sylphs during the dream sequence, Pope enumerates coquetish vanities. As humans these women valued their "beauteous mold" and enjoyed frivolous diversions, which they continue to take pleasure in as sprites (48). The "joy in gilded chariots" suggests a preference for superficial grandeur and external signifiers of wealth (55). Similarly, their "love of ombre," a popular card game featuring elements of bridge and poker, indicates a desire for fashionable entertainment (56). Through this love of finery and these trivial pastimes, Pope depicts a society that emphasizes appearances rather than moral principles. This focus on appearance extends to attitudes towards honor and virtue. Society



dictates that women remain chaste while enticing suitable husbands. Of course, if a woman seemed to compromise herself, society would censure her as though she had lost her virtue. This concern about female sexuality represents the underlying anxiety in *The Rape of the Lock*: the theft of the lock (a metonymic substitution for Belinda's chastity) creates the appearance of lost virtue.

At this point in the poem, however, Pope depicts Belinda not as a coquette but as a powerful figure, similar to the (male) heroes of epic poetry. Pope reimagines Belinda's morning routine as a hero's ritualized preparation before battle. Her toilette commences as a religious rite in praise of a goddess. Belinda's reflection in the mirror becomes the image of the goddess while her maid is the "inferior priestess," worshipping at the altar (127). These "sacred rites" perform a secondary purpose: once the sacraments are performed, the goddess should protect Belinda during her day's adventures (128). Upon completion of the morning's ceremony, Belinda begins to array herself, a scene which Pope figures within the epic paradigm as the ritualized arming of the hero. The combs, pins, "puffs, powders, patches" become the weapons and armor of this hero as the "awful Beauty [puts] on all its arms" (138, 139). This depiction of Belinda as an epic hero establishes the mock-heroic motifs that occur throughout the poem.

Rivaling the sun in her beauty and radiance, Belinda sets off for Hampton Court Palace, traveling by boat on the River Thames. A group of fashionable ladies and gentlemen accompanies her, but "every eye was fixed on her alone" (6). Her "lovely looks" and "quick" eyes command the attention and adoration of those who see her (9, 10). Belinda's glittering raiment includes a "sparkling cross," which she wears on her "white breast," inspiring the worship of her admirers (7). Her most striking attribute is the "two locks which graceful hung" in ringlets on her "ivory neck" (20, 22). Pope describes these curls as labyrinths of love intended for the "destruction of mankind," imprisoning any hearts that get caught in their snares (19).

One of her devotees, the Baron, greatly admires her ringlets and has resolved to steal them for himself, "by force [...] or by fraud" (32). On this particular morning he rose early to build an altar to Love at which to pray for success in this venture. He created a pyre and on it sacrificed "all the trophies of his former loves" (40). Fanning the flames with "three amorous sighs," he burned "three garters, half a



pair of gloves" and "tender billet-doux" (42, 39, 41). The powers heard his prayer and chose to grant half of it.

As the boat makes its way to Hampton Court, Belinda and her companions enjoy a lighthearted journey. Ariel, however, is anxious, remembering the foretold "impending woe" (54). Concerned for Belinda's safety, he summons an army of Sylphs to protect her. The sprites assemble, their bodies incandescent in the glittering sunlight. Ariel addresses them, much the same as a general addressing his troops. He reminds them of their duties: guiding celestial bodies, regulating weather, guarding the British Throne, and "[tending] to the Fair" (91). As part of their responsibilities to the Fair, the sprites protect ladies' powders, perfumes, curls, cosmetics, and hair, working to "assist their blushes, and inspire their airs" (98).

Because "some dire disaster" looms over Belinda, Ariel charges a phalanx of Sylphs to act as her bodyguards (103). He charges Zephyretta with the care of Belinda's fan, Brillante her earrings, Momentilla her watch, and Crispissa her locks. Ariel himself will protect Shock, her lapdog. Above all, he is concerned that someone might "stain her honor" (107). He therefore chooses fifty select Sylphs to guard her petticoat, which sometimes fails to protect a woman's virtue. Ariel warns that any sprite who neglects his duties "shall feel sharp vengeance" (125). The Sylphs report to their posts and wait for the "birth of Fate" (142).

### Analysis

In the second canto, Pope relies on martial language to situate his poem within the epic tradition and reinforce his satiric manipulation of the genre. Much like the combs, pins, and cosmetics that Pope assigns military value in the first canto, Belinda's physical appearance is defined within militaristic terms. The beauty of her curls attracts admirers, which Pope compares to a trap meant to ensnare enemies. Similarly, he refigures Belinda's seven-layered petticoat as a fortified wall meant to withstand the attacks of invading forces. As Pope establishes in his description of the coquette, a woman must attract a suitable husband but simultaneously refrain from so great an attraction that she compromises her virtue. Her curls thus perform the former duty, capturing the attention of men while her petticoat functions as an impediment to the loss of her chastity. Of course, as



Ariel notes, "we have known that seven fold fence to fail," and he commands an army of fifty Sylphs to take defensive positions around the petticoat, ready to defend Belinda's virtue from amorous assailants (119). Pope, however, makes the Sylphs' military role ironic: they are not guarding against Belinda's failure but rather protecting her from excessive success at attracting admirers. Pope thus critiques society's contradictory expectations with regard to female sexuality.

As the irony of Pope's military allusions suggests, Pope develops the poem's sexual allegory in the second canto. From the outset of the poem, the theft of Belinda's hair has sexual implications, specifically in the poem's title: *The Rape of the Lock*. Pope's use of the word "rape" denotes explicit sexuality in the cutting of Belinda's curls. Pope's word choice in the second canto strengthens this sexual imagery. The poem indicates that the Baron has resolved to steal the locks "by force to ravish" (32). The use of the words "force" and "ravish" emphasizes this theme of sexual violation. The phrase "by fraud betray" with regard to the Baron's desire for the curls similarly equates the theft of the lock with a man taking advantage of a woman's innocence (32).

Even Ariel suspects that the foretold "dire disaster" will take the form of a sexual assault (103). He speculates that Belinda might be fated to "break Diana's law," an allusion to the Roman goddess of chastity (105). In the following line he worries that "some frail china jar [will] receive a flaw" (106). Literary instances of broken pottery often indicate the loss of virginity. Ariel's final anxiety is that Belinda might "stain her honor or her new brocade" (107). While the staining of Belinda's honor is overtly sexual, the staining of her dress likewise has sexual implications, alluding both to female sexual maturity (menstruation) and to the tearing of the hymen (loss of virginity).

The sexual implications of *The Rape of the Lock* culminate with the locks themselves. Though Pope describes Belinda's ringlets as hanging down her "smooth ivory neck," the sexualized double-readings throughout the second canto suggest a more explicit secondary reading of Belinda's curls (22). A sexualized reading of Belinda's locks as pubic hairs reinforces Pope's portrayal of their theft as rape. The "rape" of the lock therefore represents a greater threat to Belinda's virtue than the theft of her hair would suggest.



Just as it does in the first canto, religious imagery parallels the language of force in the second canto. Much like the ritualism of Belinda's toilette in the first canto, Belinda's charms become objects of worship. Of particular note, of course, are her locks, which draw the attention of many admirers, chief among them the Baron. The rituals he performs at dawn are an act of worship. He builds an altar—a feature of both pagan and Christian worship—to celebrate Belinda's beauty. On the altar the Baron places "twelve vast French romances, neatly gilt" to honor Love, rather than gilded Bibles (38). This equation of religion and secular love echoes the presence of Bibles and billet-doux together on Belinda's dressing table in the first canto and further serves Pope's mock-heroic purposes. The ritual sacrifices performed by the Baron mimic the epic convention of sacrificing to the gods to secure their favor before a venture. The powers' decision to grant only half of the Baron's desire alludes to a common feature of the epic in which the interference of the gods is a mixed blessing. Yet Pope undercuts the traditional power of the gods. Their half-blessing does not have tragic consequences for the Baron; rather, he only succeeds at securing one of Belinda's curls. Pope further undermines the piety of prayer, replacing it with the Baron's "three amorous sighs" (42).

The poem's comic attitude towards religion implies that the worship of beauty amounts to sacrilege. Pope crystallizes this religious perversion in the cross that Belinda wears. The cross seems to serve not a religious function but rather an ornamental one, much like the equation of the Bible with billet-doux and French romances. Indeed, this central symbol of Christianity remains secular, so "Jews might kiss" and "infidels adore" it just as easily as Christians (8). Pope even sexualizes this traditionally religious object, placing it on Belinda's "white breast" and thereby suggesting that the Jews and infidels are instead admiring her breasts (7). By subverting established principles of religious worship, Pope critiques society's willingness to value appearances and other insignificant matters over a moral lifestyle.

Pope's Poems and Prose Summary and Analysis of The Rape of the Lock: Canto III



### Summary

The third canto begins with a description of Hampton Court Palace and the amusements of life at court. The palace's towers rise up from the meadows overlooking the River Thames. Pope indicates that it is at this site that "Britain's statesmen" deal with matters at home and abroad and where Queen Anne holds court (5). Belinda and her companions arrive at Hampton Court and disembark the boat to take part in the day's activities. They first engage in gossip, discussing balls, fashion, and political matters. They punctuate their conversation with taking snuff and fluttering fans.

After the afternoon's pleasant conversation, Belinda sits down to play cards with the Baron and another man. They play ombre, a three-handed bridge with some features of poker. Pope describes the game as a battle: the three players' hands are "three bands [prepared] in arms," troops sent to "combat on the velvet plain" of the card table (29, 44). Like the commander of an army, Belinda reviews her cards, declares spades trumps, and sends her cards into combat. She meets with early success, leading with her high trumps (49-56).

The suit breaks badly (54) when "to the Baron fate inclines the field" (66). He retains the queen of spades (67) with which he trumps her king of clubs (69). The Baron then leads high diamonds until he nearly sets (beats) Belinda, who is "just in the jaws of ruin" (92). On the last trick, however, Belinda takes the Baron's ace of hearts with the king, who "spring to vengeance with an eager pace, / And falls like thunder on the prostrate Ace" (97-8). By recovering the last trick, Belinda wins back the amount she bid and therefore takes the game. Thrilled at her victory, Belinda "fills with shouts the sky" (99). The speaker then interjects to remind the reader that Fate holds some disaster for Belinda.

After the game, coffee is served to the ladies and gentlemen at Hampton Court. The vapors of the coffee inspire the Baron with new strategies for stealing Belinda's locks. With the assistance of Clarissa, who presents him with her scissors, he endeavors to cut Belinda's hair. He fails three times to clip her lock from behind, without her knowledge; the Sylphs frustrate his every attempt. They intervene by blowing the hair out of danger and tugging on her earrings to make her turn around. In a last-ditch effort to protect his charge, Ariel accesses



Belinda's mind with the intent to warn her, but he is shocked to find "an early lover lurking at her heart" (144). Belinda's strong attraction to the Baron places her beyond Ariel's control, and he retreats, defeated. The scissors' blades finally close on the curl. As the shears close, a Sylph gets in the way and is cut in two. As a supernatural being the Sylph is easily repaired; the curl, however, cannot be restored. The Baron celebrates his victory while Belinda's "screams of horror rend the affrighted skies" (156).

### Analysis

Pope's rendering of the card game as a heroic battle advances his epic parody and foreshadows the scuffle over the lock in the fifth canto. He again figures Belinda as an epic hero, and the extended metaphor of the game as a battle reinforces her masculine approach. During the game, Belinda's strategy is aggressive and ambitious, and Pope shows Belinda's desire for the recognition that the "battle" will bring to her: "Belinda now, whom thirst of fame invites, / Burns to encounter two adventurous knights / [...] And swells her breast with conquests yet to come" (25-8). In keeping with the martial theme, Pope portrays Belinda as a cunning general: "The skillful nymph reviews her force with care" (45). He further depicts her cards—her army—as virile male characters: "Now move to war her sable Matadores / In show like leaders of the swarthy Moors" (47-8). Pope emphasizes this hyper-masculine depiction of Belinda when she wins the game. Rather than graciously acknowledge her victory with modest reserve, Belinda gloats over the losers: "The nymph exulting fills with shouts the sky" (99). Unlike the ten years of violent combat over Troy in *The Iliad*, however this evening's card game is the pastime of young aristocrats. By elevating this trivial amusement with the language of the epic struggle between two civilizations, Pope suggests that the bravery once exhibited on the battlefield by Greek and Trojan heroes is now limited to the petty games and flirtations of the upper classes.

The heroic theme extends to the severing of the lock. The Baron's three attempts to cut Belinda's hair mirror the hero's trials before completing his quest, which Pope emphasizes at the end of the canto by comparing the Baron's victory to the conquest of Troy. Likewise Clarissa's arming of the Baron with her sewing scissors evokes the tradition of lovers' farewells before battle. Of course, the theft



of Belinda's hair is an insignificant squabble in comparison to the abduction of Helen and a decade of war.

With the complicity of Clarissa in the severing of Belinda's lock, Pope introduces a criticism of the relationships between women, which he explores in the poem's sexual allegory. Clarissa's willingness to participate in the metaphoric "rape" of Belinda suggests that rather than a sisterhood united against male sexual advances, women seek to undermine each other in the competition to find a suitable husband. Belinda's sexual fall would remove her from the marriage market, ensuring less competition for rich or titled young men such as the b. . . . Of course, a woman does not have to compromise her virtue to lose her honor, which Pope depicts during the gossip at the beginning of the canto: "At every word a reputation dies" (16). In this society, the loss of reputation has much the same result as sexual transgression. Pope's depiction of unkind womanly attitudes towards each other serves to criticize society's sexual double-standard in which a woman must attract a husband without compromising her virtue.

In the third canto Pope expands his social critique beyond the . . . entertainments and petty squabbles of the aristocracy. Using the structure of the heroic couplet (rhyming pairs of lines in iambic pentameter), he creates parallel constructions that expose the harsh realities of life outside of the . . . of Hampton Court Palace. He describes Hampton Court as the place where Queen Anne "dost sometimes counsel take—and sometimes tea" (8). Here Pope employs a zeugma, a rhetorical device in which a word modifies two other words or phrases in a parallel construction, modifying each according to a different sense. In this instance, "take" modifies both "counsel" and "tea," but one does not take counsel and tea in the same way. The zeugma thus reveals Hampton Court as a palace that hosts both matters of state and social diversions. Similarly, in the second verse-paragraph, some of Belinda's companions discuss balls and visits while another "speaks the glory of the British Queen, / And one describes a charming Indian screen" (13-4). While some members of the party relate stories about their social engagements, the references to the "British Queen" and "Indian screen" serve as reminders of the world outside of Hampton Court. In particular the words "British" and "Indian" evoke the British Empire, worlds away from the comfort of Hampton Court. The serving of coffee, "which makes the politician wise, / And see through all things with his half-shut eyes" likewise suggests



British trade and a political world beyond the amusements of this aristocratic party (117-8). Pope's use of parallel constructions within the heroic couplet thus reveals the serious matters that exist outside of the lords' and ladies'

### Summary

Belinda's "anxious cares" and "secret passions" at the loss of her hair eclipse the "rage, resentment, and despair" felt by captured kings, scorned virgins, tragic lovers, and unrepentant tyrants (1, 2, 9). After the Sylphs withdraw, weeping at their failure to protect Belinda, a Gnome named Umbriel descends to the center of the earth to the Cave of Spleen. (During the eighteenth century, the spleen was associated with the passions, melancholy and discontentment in particular.) During his descent, he passes "a grotto, sheltered close from air," in which Belinda reclines, afflicted by pain and a migraine (21). Two handmaidens attend to Belinda in her distress: Ill-Nature and Affectation.

Mists and vapors shroud the palace of Spleen. Grotesque figures of fiends and specters line Umbriel's path, their "bodies changed to various forms by Spleen" (48). In this splenetic world everything is upside-down or inverted: "Men prove with child" (53). Carrying a sprig of "spleenwort" for protection against these fantastic figures, Umbriel arrives safely in the depths of the cave and addresses the Goddess of Spleen. Umbriel enumerates his unsuccessful acts which range from causing a beautiful woman to break out in pimples to convincing men that their wives are cuckolding them. He asks the goddess to "touch Belinda with chagrin" (77). Though dismissive, the goddess grants his wish. She gives the Gnome a bag containing "sighs, sobs, and passions, and the war of tongues" and a vial with "fairing fears, / Soft sorrows, melting griefs, and flowing tears" (84, 85). Umbriel takes the goddess' gifts and ascends from the Cave of Spleen to Hampton Court Palace.

The Gnome returns to find Belinda in a disheveled and dejected state while being comforted by her friend Thalestris. (In Greek mythology, Thalestris was an Amazon; Pope's use of the name suggests a fierce, combative woman.) Umbriel empties the contents of the goddess' bag on the two women, fueling Belinda's ire. Now outraged, Thalestris attempts to convince Belinda to avenge the wrongs committed by the Baron. In a speech full of rhetorical flourishes, Thalestris warns



Belinda that the Baron will display her hair for the amusement of others, which will thereby endanger Belinda's honor and reputation: "I [...] / Already hear the horrid things they say, / Already see you a degraded toast, / And all your honor in a whisper lost" (107-10).

Unable to rouse Belinda, Thalestris goes in a rage to Sir Plume, her own beau, asking him to demand the return of the hair. Sir Plume addresses the Baron in an unintelligible speech filled with eighteenth-century slang. The Baron mocks his manner of speaking and haughtily refuses to honor the request. He vainly displays the honors he has won, claiming that "this hand, which won it, shall forever wear" (138).

Upon the Baron's refusal, Umbriel releases the contents of the goddess' vial. The contents of the vial cause Belinda to cry self-piteously and languish in her "beauteous grief" (143). She curses the day's events and bemoans her fate, wishing that she had never entered fashionable society but rather "unadmired remained / In some lone isle, or distant northern land" (153-4). She articulates her regret at not having listened to the Sylph's warning or the morning's evil omens. Belinda then laments the state of the lonely curl that remains, the sister of the severed lock.

### Analysis

The fourth canto opens with Belinda languishing in "rage, resentment, and despair," eclipsing the sorrows of kings imprisoned after battle, scornful women who become spinsters, lovers robbed of their happiness, medieval women refused kisses, tyrants who die without repenting, and a woman whose dress is unkempt (9). Pope places each of these individuals in their own line so that their sorrows have equal footing and none is subordinate. Of course, the despair of a captured king far outweighs the aggravation of a woman who appears disheveled. By placing all of these figures subordinate to Belinda, Pope accentuates the excess and impropriety of her grief after the theft of her hair, a minor setback. He thus chastises those who place excessive significance on trivial problems. Furthermore, by equating the disparate sorrows enumerated in this first verse-paragraph, Pope emphasizes the importance of a moral code with which to evaluate the validity of these emotions.



Umbriel's descent into the Cave of Spleen evokes the journeys to the underworld made by Odysseus in *The Odyssey* and Aeneas in *The Aeneid*. This sequence perverts the traditional epic justifications for visiting the underworld. Usually the hero requires guidance for his quest and travels to the underworld to consult a deceased friend or relative. Overcome with despair, Belinda has retired to her bed, so instead of the hero's visit to the underworld, Pope depicts the descent of a trouble-making Gnome. Of course, Umbriel has no intention of assisting Belinda in recovering the lock; rather, he travels to the Cave of Spleen for methods to exacerbate Belinda's pain. The use of the "spleen" sequence also allows Pope to explore Belinda's emotional distress. In her sorrow Belinda is attended by Ill-Nature and Affectation whose presence suggests that the heroine's grief is affected rather than a true reflection of her emotion. Her anguish is thus equally as decorative as her locks, completely undermining the elevation of her misery in the first verse-paragraph.

Pope further emphasizes the epic tradition in Thalestris' speech. She figures the severing of the lock as an affront to Belinda's honor, encouraging her friend to avenge this insult. Offended honor is a common theme in epic poetry; at the outset of *The Iliad*, Achilles is enraged at Agamemnon for insulting him. Thalestris' attempts to rouse Belinda's anger serve as a reminder of the behavior Belinda should be demonstrating as the epic hero. In Belinda's place, Thalestris is outraged. Her presence reinforces Pope's manipulation of the epic genre, borrowing the Amazon from Greek mythology. Here Pope also draws on chivalric ideals from the romance genre. She asks Sir Plume to defend Belinda's honor by demanding that the Baron return the lock. Sir Plume fails utterly, muttering only slang terms in his confrontation with the Baron. His failure to restore Belinda's honor demonstrates the degree to which chivalry has declined.

Pope's discussion of honor in this canto reemphasizes the poem's sexual allegory. Though the poem's title figures the severing of Belinda's hair as an overt sexual violation, Thalestris intimates that Belinda's ultimate concern should be what the Baron will do with the ringlet. She worries that the Baron will display the curl to the public and thereby endanger Belinda's honor and reputation. She envisions the Baron's triumphant exhibition of the hair: "Methinks already I your tears survey, / Already hear the horrid things they say, / Already see you a degraded toast, / And all your honor in a whisper lost" (107-10). Thalestris' depiction of Belinda's



humiliation demonstrates society's emphasis on the external appearance of morality (i.e., reputation). Pope reinforces this focus on appearances at the end of the canto when Belinda laments her lost curl: "Oh, hadst though, cruel! Been content to seize / hairs less in sight, or any hairs but these!" (175-6). The "hairs less in sight" suggest her pubic hairs, which are more explicitly sexual than the ringlet that the Baron stole. Belinda's preference for the theft of her public hairs indicates that she would rather compromise her virtue than suffer damage to her looks. Pope thus demonstrates the misplaced significance and value that society places on external appearances.

#### Pope's Poems and Prose Summary and Analysis of The Rape of the Lock: Canto V

##### Summary

Despite Belinda's tears and Thalestris' reproaches, the Baron remains unmoved, refusing to relinquish the curl. Clarissa then waves her fan to gather the attention of those present. She asks the assembled group why society places so much value on beauty when it is not tempered by good sense. She notes that men often call women angels and worship them as such without assessing their moral character. She observes that beauty is ephemeral: "Curled or uncurled, since locks will turn to gray; / Since Painted, or not painted all shall fade" (26-7). Because "frail beauty must decay," women must have other qualities, good sense in particular, to guide them after beauty fades (25). Consequently Clarissa tries to convince Belinda that when tantrums ("airs, and flights, and screams, and scolding") fail to restore her looks, it is "good humor" that will win the day (32, 31). Clarissa's moralizing fails to comfort Belinda, and Thalestris calls her a prude.

Not pacified by Clarissa's speech, Belinda and Thalestris prepare the other women to launch an attack on the men to regain the curl. Umbriel sits perched on a scone, presiding over the epic struggle with mischievous glee. The humans fight "like Gods [...] nor dread a mortal wound" (44). The women quickly overpower many of the men: "A beau and wiling perished in the throng. / One died in metaphor, and one in song" (59-60). Dapperwit falls in a faint, and Sir Fopling prays for mercy before falling as well. Sir Plume nearly overcomes



Clarissa, but Chloe saves her, killing Sir Plume "with a frown" (68). When she smiles to see him fall, he quickly revives.

Belinda flies at the Baron, and the two lock in combat. She gains the upper hand, throwing snuff at his nose which causes his eyes to tear. She draws a "deadly bodkin" (here, an ornamental hairpin) and holds it at the Baron's throat (88). (This is not, however, just any hairpin but rather has a mystical history. It was once three seal rings that Belinda's great-great-grandfather wore, which were melted down after his death to make a belt buckle for his widow. The buckle was transformed into a whistle for her grandmother before it was melted into a hairpin for her mother, a hairpin which she, in turn, inherited.) Having defeated the Baron, Belinda again demands the return of her hair, her roar shaking the "vaulted roofs" (104). The lock, however, has been lost in the scuffle and cannot be found.

Though the humans cannot find Belinda's lock, the Muse saw it rise towards the sky, for "none but quick, poetic eyes" could see it (124). The curl becomes "a sudden star [...] / And drew behind a radiant trail of hair" (127-8). The poem finally addresses Belinda, urging her not to "mourn thy ravished hair" (141). As a star, her ringlet adds "new glory to the shining sphere," and stargazers for years to come can admire it (142). Long after Belinda herself dies and "all those tresses shall be laid in dust," the star will remain a testament to her beauty (148).

### **Analysis**

Some critics have interpreted Clarissa's moralizing as the voice of Pope, articulating the poem's moral, but this is a gross misreading of the poem. Though Clarissa's speech would certainly serve Pope's basic purpose of reconciling the families of Arabella Fermor and Lord Petre, Pope's satire achieves a broader and more complex social critique, ranging from the idleness of the upper classes to the sexual double-standard for women. Clarissa's warnings about the ephemeral nature of beauty are valid but provide an interpretive problem. Although she assumes the voice of moral superiority at this point in the poem, it was she who provided the weapon that severed Belinda's hair. She has therefore undermined Belinda's honor and is largely responsible for the present quarrel. Thus Clarissa cannot claim moral authority as she attempts to do in this speech.



Clarissa's failure to pacify Belinda creates an occasion for the poem's second epic battle. Unlike the card game in the third canto, the struggle over the lock has erotic implications, which befit the sexual allegory of the poem. The din made during the fight—rustling clothing and confused shouts—more closely resembles erotic sounds than the noises of battle: "Fans clap, silks rustle, and tough whalebones crack; Heroes' and heroines' shouts confusedly rise" (40-1). The postures of the combatants likewise take on sexual connotations. During the fight, Sir Plume "draw[s] Clarissa down," suggesting a sexual act rather than the striking down of an enemy (67). Similarly, Belinda basically sits on the Baron when she overcomes him, an obviously sexual position. The eroticism of the battle culminates with the sexual double meaning of the word "die." Though "die" can refer to physical death, it is clear that the men are not actually expiring during the fight. Rather, Pope uses the word "die" as a metaphor for orgasm, in the sense of *la petite mort* (the little death). Most significantly, the Baron, who stole Belinda's sexually-charged lock of hair, fights unafraid because he "sought no more than on his foe to die" (78). This suggests that his goal throughout the poem has been sexual gratification.

Despite its erotic overtones, the battle over the lock is also the culmination of Pope's heroic parody. Following the epic paradigm, Pope invokes the martial Greek and Roman gods: "'Gainst Pallas, Mars; Latona, Hermes arms; / And all Olympus rings with loud alarms; / Jove's thunder roars [...] / Blue Neptune storms" (47-50). Pope simultaneously undermines these lofty allusions by killing the men in rather ridiculous fashions. Dapperwit and Sir Fopling faint as the women overcome them, while Chloe kills Sir Plume "with a frown" (68). She smiles when he dies, and at her smile, Sir Plume "revive[s] again" (70). The absurdity of these deaths demonstrates the triviality of the scuffle and emphasizes Pope's mock-heroic tone. The reversal of gender roles also contributes to Pope's parody of the epic. In this battle, the women are the aggressors. Pope calls Thalestris "the fierce virago," and she easily overcomes many of the men (37). While Thalestris is the most vicious of the female combatants, Belinda remains the heroic figure, flying to her enemy "with more than usual lightning in her eyes" (76). She abandons all pretext of lady-like grace. In a shout that echoes her victorious cry at the end of the card game, Belinda demands for the return of the lock: "Not fierce Othello in so loud a strain / Roared for the handkerchief that



caused his pain" (105-6). Her rage thus turns her into a swarthy warrior, and she easily overcomes the Baron. At this point, Pope diffuses the epic tone of the poem. Belinda's use of snuff trivializes the fight, causing the Baron to sneeze, a most unheroic action.

Pope provides a final epic flourish by relating the history of Belinda's bodkin. He relates an elaborate tale that memorializes the bodkin's evolution from three signet rings to a buckle to a whistle and finally to an ornamental hairpin. This history imbues the hairpin with the same significance as Agamemnon's scepter or Achilles' shield in *The Iliad*.

Pope concludes the poem with a final compliment to Arabella Fermor, the historical inspiration for Belinda. By depicting the lost curl as a star in the firmament, he refuses to chastise Belinda's behavior and instead celebrates Miss Fermor and Belinda. The poem's conclusion indulges female vanity, immortalizing Miss Fermor's experience in verse just as the heavens become an eternal testament to Belinda's beauty. Despite the poem's social critiques, the poem ends with little moral development. Belinda's hair will grow back, and her beauty will be admired even after her death. The poem is thus an example of Horatian satire; rather than exposing the evils of the aristocracy, the poem provides a gentle

### **The Rape of the Lock: Canto I**

#### **Summary**

The *Rape of the Lock* opens with an invocation of a muse and establishes the poem's subject matter, specifically a "dire offense from amorous causes" and the "mighty contests [rising] from trivial things" (1-2). The speaker concludes his invocation by asking the muse to explain first why a lord of good-breeding would assault a lady and, secondly, why a lady would reject a lord.

The action of the poem begins with the rising sun awakening the residents of a wealthy household. Though everyone, including the lapdogs, has risen, Belinda remains asleep. She dreams of a handsome youth who informs her that she is protected by a "thousand bright inhabitants of air:" spirits that were once human women who now protect virgins.



The youth explains that after a woman dies, her spirit returns to elemental form; namely, to fire, water, earth, and air. Each element is characterized by different types of women. Termagants or scolds become fire spirits or Salamanders. Indecisive women become water spirits. Prudes or women who delight in rejecting men become Gnomes (earth spirits). Coquettes become Sylphs (air spirits).

The dream is sent to Belinda by Ariel, "her guardian Sylph" (20). The Sylphs are Belinda's guardians because they understand her vanity and pride, having been coquettes when they were humans. They are devoted to any woman who "rejects mankind" (68). Their role is to guide young women through the "mystic mazes" of social interaction (92).

At the end of the dream, Ariel warns Belinda of an impending "dread event," urging her to "Beware of all, but most beware of Man" (109, 114). Belinda is then awoken by her lapdog, Shock. Upon rising, she sees that a billet-doux, or a love-letter, has arrived for her, causing her to forget the details of the dream.

Now awake, Belinda begins her elaborate toilette. Pope endows every object from combs and pins to billet-doux and Bibles with significance in this ritual of dressing: "Each silver vase in mystic order laid" (122). Belinda herself is described as a "goddess," looking at her "heavenly image" in the mirror (132, 125). The elegant language and importance of such objects thus elevate the process of dressing to a sacred rite.

The Sylphs assist in Belinda's dressing routine, setting her hair and straightening her gown. Fully arrayed, Belinda emerges from her chamber.

### **Analysis**

The opening of *The Rape of the Lock* establishes the poem's mock-heroic tone. In the tradition of epic poetry, Pope opens the poem by invoking a muse, but rather than invoke one of the mythic Greek muses, Pope leaves the muse anonymous and instead dedicates the poem to John Caryl, the man who commissioned the poem. The first verse-paragraph also introduces Pope's epic subject matter: a war arising from "amorous causes" (1). Unlike Menelaus' fury at Paris' theft of Helen or Achilles' quarrel with Agamemnon over Briseis in *The Iliad*, however, the



poem's "mighty contests rise from trivial things" (2). Indeed, these "mighty contests" are merely flirtations and card games rather than the great battles of the Greek epic tradition.

The second verse-paragraph encapsulates Pope's subversion of the epic genre. In lines 11-12 Pope juxtaposes grand emotions with unheroic character-types, specifically "little men" and women: "In tasks so bold can little men engage, And in soft bosoms dwells such mighty rage." The irony of pairing epic characteristics with lowly human characters contributes to Pope's mock-heroic style. Furthermore, the "mighty rage" of women evokes the rage of Achilles at the outset of *The Iliad*, foreshadowing the comic gender-reversal that characterizes the rest of the poem. Rather than distinguish the subjects of the poem as in a traditional epic, Pope uses the mock-heroic genre to elevate and ridicule his subjects simultaneously, creating a satire that chides society for its misplaced values and emphasis on trivial matters.

Belinda's dream provides the mythic structure of the poem. In this segment, Pope introduces the supernatural forces that affect the action of the poem, much the way that the gods and goddesses of *The Iliad* would influence the progress of the Trojan War. Just as Athena protects Diomedes and Aphrodite support Paris during the Trojan War, Ariel is the guardian of Belinda. Unlike the Greek gods, however, Ariel possesses little power to protect his ward and preserve her chastity. In this initial canto, Belinda forgets Ariel's warnings of impending dangers upon receiving a billet-doux. Though charged with protecting Belinda's virtue, it seems that Ariel cannot fully guard her from the perils of love, unable to distract her even from a relatively harmless love letter. In the dream Ariel indicates that all women have patron sprites, depending on their personality type. Ariel explains that when women die, their spirits return "from earthly vehicles" to "their first elements" (50, 58). Each personality type—scolds, undecided women, prudes, coquettes—becomes a Salamander, Nymph, Gnome, or Sylph, respectively. These four types are associated with both the four humors and the four elements. Having been "light coquettes" as human women, the Sylphs are most closely affiliated with Belinda. Belinda herself is a coquette, and it is this aspect of femininity with which Pope is most concerned.



Pope explores the role of the coquette in this first canto. He demonstrates that womanly priorities are limited to personal pleasures and social aspirations. In his description of the Sylphs during the dream sequence, Pope enumerates coquettish vanities. As humans these women valued their "beauteous mold" and enjoyed frivolous diversions, which they continue to take pleasure in as sprites (48). The "joy in gilded chariots" suggests a preference for superficial grandeur and external signifiers of wealth (55). Similarly, their "love of ombre," a popular card game featuring elements of bridge and poker, indicates a desire for fashionable entertainment (56). Through this love of finery and these trivial pastimes, Pope depicts a society that emphasizes appearances rather than moral principles. This focus on appearance extends to attitudes towards honor and virtue. Society dictates that women remain chaste while enticing suitable husbands. Of course, if a woman seemed to compromise herself, society would censure her as though she had lost her virtue. This concern about female sexuality represents the underlying anxiety in *The Rape of the Lock*: the theft of the lock (a metonymic substitution for Belinda's chastity) creates the appearance of lost virtue.

At this point in the poem, however, Pope depicts Belinda not as a coquette but as a powerful figure, similar to the (male) heroes of epic poetry. Pope reimagines Belinda's morning routine as a hero's ritualized preparation before battle. Her toilette commences as a religious rite in praise of a goddess. Belinda's reflection in the mirror becomes the image of the goddess while her maid is the "inferior priestess," worshipping at the altar (127). These "sacred rites" perform a secondary purpose: once the sacraments are performed, the goddess should protect Belinda during her day's adventures (128). Upon completion of the morning's ceremony, Belinda begins to array herself, a scene which Pope figures within the epic paradigm as the ritualized arming of the hero. The combs, pins, "puffs, powders, patches" become the weapons and armor of this hero as the "awful Beauty [puts] on all its arms" (138, 139). This depiction of Belinda as an epic hero establishes the mock-heroic motifs that occur throughout the poem.



**Passage:**

1. The original version of *The Rape of the Lock* accomplished its task—since the Fermors and Petres were reconciled—and it immediately received an enthusiastic response from the public and the critics alike. Joseph Addison, who considered the poem perfect as it was first written, advised Pope against revision, but with the addition of the “machinery” and other material, the poem soon was deemed Pope’s most brilliant performance as well as one of his most popular and lucrative, going through seven printings by 1723. Throughout the eighteenth century the poem remained a perennial favorite. Samuel Johnson pronounced it “the most attractive of ludicrous compositions,” in which “New things are made familiar and familiar things are made new.” Although appreciation of Pope’s poetry generally declined throughout the nineteenth century, Victorian readers and critics continued to delight in the ethereal qualities of *The Rape of the Lock*. James Russell Lowell declared, “For wit, fancy, invention, and keeping, it has never been surpassed,” and Leslie Stephen observed that Pope’s poem “is allowed, even by his bitterest critics, to be a masterpiece of delicate fancy.”

Twentieth-century critics have interpreted the poem in a diverse range of contexts, from character analyses and examinations of the poem’s extensive allusions to both literary and folklore traditions, to investigations into Pope’s political motivations and his understanding of the commercial aspects of the burgeoning publishing industry. A common thread in much twentieth-century criticism of *The Rape of the Lock* has acknowledged the way in which a deep appreciation for English high society meshes with Pope’s critique of its weaknesses. Since the 1980s a number of critics have delved into other areas of Pope’s career in relation to the poem, including the nature of Pope’s habit of revision and its effect on the poem’s meaning as well as the connections between mercantile discourse and Popean aesthetics. In addition, feminist critics have approached the poem in terms of ideological and cultural assumptions about women and their status in Pope’s society, uncovering a significant response to the poem by women readers since its publication. Inarguably, Pope’s most popularly cherished poem, *The Rape of the Lock*, also is his most conceptually imaginative work.



**Short and Long Answer Questions:**

1. Discuss two mock-heroic elements of the poem.
2. What are some of the images that recur through the poem, and what significance do they have?
3. What function does the poem's supernatural machinery serve?
4. Is Pope being ironic when he treats Belinda's beauty as something almost divine?
5. To what degree can the poem be read as a sexual allegory?
6. What are the distinctive formal features of Pope's poetry?
7. How is the heroic couplet suited to Pope's subject matter or to satire more generally?
8. What incident involving a young girl in the Fermor family served as the basis of "The Rape of the Lock"?
9. Who tried to cut Belinda's hair in "The Rape of the Lock"?
10. What elements of the epic have been parodied in Canto 3 of Alexander Pope's The Rape of the Lock?



**Multiple Choice Question :**

**1. Who is Shock?**

- (A) Belinda's horse
- (B) Belinda's lapdog
- (C) The Baron's horse
- (D) The poet's muse

**2. At what time do "sleepless lovers" awake in this poem?**

- (A) Dawn
- (B) Noon
- (C) Tea-time
- (D) Midnight

**3. Who inspires Belinda's dream in the first canto?**

- (A) The muse
- (B) The Baron
- (C) Ariel
- (D) Umbriel



**4. To what are Belinda's eyes repeatedly compared?**

- (A) The sun
- (B) Stars
- (C) Flames
- (D) Gems

**5. To what do the four types of supernatural beings correspond?**

- (A) Spades, hearts, clubs, and diamonds
- (B) Ace, king, queen, and jack
- (C) Earth, air, fire, and water
- (D) North, south, east, and west

**6. What does Belinda wear around her neck?**

- (A) A cross
- (B) A locket
- (C) A ribbon
- (D) A ruby

**7. Where is the party held?**

- (A) Cheapside
- (B) St. James Park



(C) The Tower of London

(D) Hampton Court Palace

**8. Who wins the hand of ombre?**

(A) Belinda

(B) The Baron

(C) Ariel

(D) The Queen

**9. What beverage is served after the card game ends?**

(A) Tea

(B) Coffee

(C) Wine

(D) Brandy

**10. Who arms the Baron with a pair of scissors?**

(A) Belinda

(B) Sir Plume

(C) Lord Petre

(D) Clarissa



**UNIT II- This Unit consist of two sections**

Section A John Dryden- Mac Flecknoe

Section B Grey- An Elegy Written in the country's churchyard

The Bard

The Progress of Poesy

Unit II section A will explore 'Mac Flecknoe', John Dryden's famous satirical poem. Unit II will look at the context, form, meaning, and influence of the poem and will be followed by a short quiz.

**Context of the Poem**

One of the best recipes for great literature is a setting in which writers and poets mock and antagonize one another. One great example of this is the Restoration period, which lasted from 1660 to about 1698.

Like many eras of literature and art, the Restoration period is strongly influenced by its political context. Much of its literature takes as its subject the turmoil resulting from the political events that had occurred in previous decades, particularly the conflicts between Catholic supporters of a traditional royal government and Protestant supporters of more democratic parliamentary government. After the Protestants defeated the Catholics in the English Civil War, which lasted from 1642 to 1651, a Protestant Parliament ruled England from 1651 to 1660. The violence that took place during this time came to an end once Charles II claimed the throne, and this restoring of a traditional king is what gives the period the title 'Restoration'.

Many of the writers of Restoration literature believed the violence of the previous decades was caused by the strict adherence to extreme political and religious ideologies, hence Restoration writers' suspicion of anyone who held dogmatic positions. This context helps explain why the poetry and drama of the Restoration era was marked by witty and often relentless satire that mocks orthodox positions and those who held them. Restoration writers also despised any unrefined aspects



of English culture and, in contrast to the Protestant calls for humble living, strongly embraced lavish lifestyles.

### **John Dryden –The Poet**

John Dryden. (born Aug. 9 [Aug. 19, New Style], 1631, Aldwinkle, Northamptonshire, Eng.—died May 1 [May 12], 1700, London), English poet, dramatist, and literary critic who so dominated the literary scene of his day that it came to be known as the Age of Dryden.

#### **Youth and education**

The son of a country gentleman, Dryden grew up in the country. When he was 11 years old the Civil War broke out. Both his father's and mother's families sided with Parliament against the king, but Dryden's own sympathies in his youth are unknown.

About 1644 Dryden was admitted to Westminster School, where he received a predominantly classical education under the celebrated Richard Busby. His easy and lifelong familiarity with classical literature begun at Westminster later resulted in idiomatic English translations.

In 1650 he entered Trinity College, Cambridge, where he took his B.A. degree in 1654. What Dryden did between leaving the university in 1654 and the Restoration of Charles II in 1660 is not known with certainty. In 1659 his contribution to a memorial volume for Oliver Cromwell marked him as a poet worth watching. His "heroic stanzas" were mature, considered, sonorous, and sprinkled with those classical and scientific allusions that characterized his later verse. This kind of public poetry was always one of the things Dryden did best.

When in May 1660 Charles II was restored to the throne, Dryden joined the poets of the day in welcoming him, publishing in June *Astraea Redux*, a poem of more than 300 lines in rhymed couplets. For the coronation in 1661, he wrote *To His Sacred Majesty*. These two poems were designed to dignify and strengthen the monarchy and to invest the young monarch with an aura of majesty, permanence, and even divinity. Thereafter, Dryden's ambitions and fortunes as a writer were shaped by his relationship with the monarchy. On Dec. 1, 1663, he married



Elizabeth Howard, the youngest daughter of Thomas Howard, 1st earl of Berkshire. In due course she bore him three sons.

Dryden's longest poem to date, *Annus Mirabilis* (1667), was a celebration of two victories by the English fleet over the Dutch and the Londoners' survival of the Great Fire of 1666. In this work Dryden was once again gilding the royal image and reinforcing the concept of a loyal nation united under the best of kings. It was hardly surprising that when the poet laureate, Sir William Davenant, died in 1668, Dryden was appointed poet laureate in his place and two years later was appointed royal historiographer.

### Writing for the stage

Soon after his restoration to the throne in 1660, Charles II granted two patents for theatres, which had been closed by the Puritans in 1642. Dryden soon joined the little band of dramatists who were writing new plays for the revived English theatre. His first play, *The Wild Gallant*, a farcical comedy with some strokes of humour and a good deal of licentious dialogue, was produced in 1663. It was a comparative failure, but in January 1664 he had some share in the success of *The Indian Queen*, a heroic tragedy in rhymed couplets in which he had collaborated with Sir Robert Howard, his brother-in-law. Dryden was soon to successfully exploit this new and popular genre, with its conflicts between love and honour and its lovely heroines before whose charms the blustering heroes sank down in awed submission. In the spring of 1665 Dryden had his own first outstanding success with *The Indian Emperour*, a play that was a sequel to *The Indian Queen*.

In 1667 Dryden had another remarkable hit with a tragicomedy, *Secret Love, or the Maiden Queen*, which appealed particularly to the king. The part of Florimel, a gay and witty maid of honour, was played to perfection by the king's latest mistress, Nell Gwynn. In Florimel's rattling exchanges with Celadon, the Restoration aptitude for witty repartee reached a new level of accomplishment. In 1667 Dryden also reworked for the stage Molière's comedy *L'Étourdi* (translated by William Cavendish, duke of Newcastle) under the title *Sir Martin Mar-all*.

In 1668 Dryden published *Of Dramatick Poesie, an Essay*, a leisurely discussion between four contemporary writers of whom Dryden (as Neander) is one. This work is a defense of English drama against the champions of both ancient



Classical drama and the Neoclassical French theatre; it is also an attempt to discover general principles of dramatic criticism. By deploying his disputants so as to break down the conventional oppositions of ancient and modern, French and English, Elizabethan and Restoration, Dryden deepens and complicates the discussion. This is the first substantial piece of modern dramatic criticism; it is sensible, judicious, and exploratory and combines general principles and analysis in a gracefully informal style. Dryden's approach in this and all his best criticism is characteristically speculative and shows the influence of detached scientific inquiry. The prefaces to his plays and translations over the next three decades were to constitute a substantial body of critical writing and reflection.

In 1668 Dryden agreed to write exclusively for Thomas Killigrew's company at the rate of three plays a year and became a shareholder entitled to one-tenth of the profits. Although Dryden averaged only a play a year, the contract apparently was mutually profitable. In June 1669 he gave the company *Tyrannick Love*, with its blustering and blaspheming hero Maximin. In December of the next year came the first part of *The Conquest of Granada by the Spaniards*, followed by the second part about a month later. All three plays were highly successful; and in the character Almanzor, the intrepid hero of *The Conquest of Granada*, the theme of love and honour reached its climax. But the vein had now been almost worked out, as seen in the 1671 production of that witty burlesque of heroic drama *The Rehearsal*, by George Villiers, 2nd duke of Buckingham, in which Dryden (Mr. Bayes) was the main satirical victim. *The Rehearsal* did not kill the heroic play, however; as late as November 1675, Dryden staged his last and most intelligent example of the genre, *Aureng-Zebe*. In this play he abandoned the use of rhymed couplets for that of blank verse.

In writing those heroic plays, Dryden had been catering to an audience that was prepared to be stunned into admiration by drums and trumpets, rant and extravagance, stage battles, rich costumes, and exotic scenes. His abandonment of crowd-pleasing rant and bombast was symbolized in 1672 with his brilliant comedy *Marriage A-la-Mode*, in which the Restoration battle of the sexes was given a sophisticated and civilized expression that only Sir George Etherege and William Congreve at their best would equal. Equally fine in a different mode was his tragedy *All for Love* (1677), based on Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* and written in a flowing but controlled blank verse. He had earlier adapted *The*



*Tempest* (1667), and later he reworked yet another Shakespeare play, *Troilus and Cressida* (1679). Dryden had now entered what may be called his Neoclassical period, and, if his new tragedy was not without some echoes of the old extravagance, it was admirably constructed, with the action developing naturally from situation and character.

By 1678 Dryden was at loggerheads with his fellow shareholders in the Killigrew company, which was in grave difficulties owing to mismanagement. Dryden offered his tragedy *Oedipus*, a collaboration with Nathaniel Lee, to a rival theatre company and ceased to be a Killigrew shareholder.

### Verse satires

Since the publication of *Annus Mirabilis* 12 years earlier, Dryden had given almost all his time to playwriting. If he had died in 1680, it is as a dramatist that he would be chiefly remembered. Now, in the short space of two years, he was to make his name as the greatest verse satirist that England had so far produced. In 1681 the king's difficulties—arising from political misgivings that his brother, James, the Roman Catholic duke of York, might succeed him—had come to a head. Led by the earl of Shaftesbury, the Whig Party leaders had used the Popish Plot to try to exclude James in favour of Charles's illegitimate Protestant son, the duke of Monmouth. But the king's shrewd maneuvers eventually turned public opinion against the Whigs, and Shaftesbury was imprisoned on a charge of high treason.

As poet laureate in those critical months Dryden could not stand aside, and in November 1681 he came to the support of the king with his *Absalom and Achitophel*, so drawing upon himself the wrath of the Whigs. Adopting as his framework the Old Testament story of King David (Charles II), his favourite son Absalom (Monmouth), and the false Achitophel (Shaftesbury), who persuaded Absalom to revolt against his father, Dryden gave a satirical version of the events of the past few years as seen from the point of view of the king and his Tory ministers and yet succeeded in maintaining the heroic tone suitable to the king and to the seriousness of the political situation. As anti-Whig propaganda, ridiculing their leaders in a succession of ludicrous satirical portraits, Dryden's poem is a masterpiece of confident denunciation; as pro-Tory propaganda it is equally



remarkable for its serene and persuasive affirmation. When a London grand jury refused to indict Shaftesbury for treason, his fellow Whigs voted him a medal. In response Dryden published early in 1682 *The Medall*, a work full of unsparing invective against the Whigs, prefaced by a vigorous and plainspoken prose "Epistle to the Whigs." In the same year, anonymously and apparently without Dryden's authority, there also appeared in print his famous extended lampoon, *Mac Flecknoe*, written about four years earlier. What triggered this devastating attack on the Whig playwright Thomas Shadwell has never been satisfactorily explained; all that can be said is that in *Mac Flecknoe* Shadwell's abilities as a literary artist and critic are ridiculed so ludicrously and with such good-humoured contempt that his reputation has suffered ever since. The basis of the satire, which represents Shadwell as a literary dunce, is the disagreement between him and Dryden over the quality of Ben Jonson's wit. Dryden thinks Jonson deficient in this quality, while Shadwell regards the Elizabethan playwright with uncritical reverence. This hilarious comic lampoon was both the first English mock-heroic poem and the immediate ancestor of Alexander Pope's *The Dunciad*.

### Late works

In 1685, after the newly acceded king James II seemed to be moving to Catholic toleration, Dryden was received into the Roman Catholic church. In his longest poem, the beast fable *The Hind and the Panther* (1687), he argued the case for his adopted church against the Church of England and the sects. His earlier *Religio Laici* (1682) had argued in eloquent couplets for the consolations of Anglicanism and against unbelievers, Protestant dissenters, and Roman Catholics. Biographical debate about Dryden has often focused on his shifts of political and religious allegiance; critics, like his hostile contemporaries, have sometimes charged him with opportunism.

The abdication of James II in 1688 destroyed Dryden's political prospects, and he lost his laureateship to Shadwell. He turned to the theatre again. The tragedy *Don Sebastian* (1689) failed, but *Amphitryon* (1690) succeeded, helped by the music of Henry Purcell. Dryden collaborated with Purcell in a dramatic opera, *King Arthur* (1691), which also succeeded. His tragedy *Cleomenes* was long refused a license because of what was thought to be the politically dangerous material in it,



and with the failure of the tragicomedy *Love Triumphant* in 1694, Dryden stopped writing for the stage.

In the 1680s and '90s Dryden supervised poetical miscellanies and translated the works of Juvenal and Persius for the publisher Jacob Tonson with success. In 1692 he published *Eleonora*, a long memorial poem commissioned for a handsome fee by the husband of the Countess of Abingdon. But his great late work was his complete translation of Virgil, contracted by Tonson in 1694 and published in 1697. Dryden was now the grand old man of English letters and was often seen at Will's Coffee-House chatting with younger writers. His last work for Tonson was *Fables Ancient and Modern* (1700), which were mainly verse adaptations from the works of Ovid, Geoffrey Chaucer, and Giovanni Boccaccio, introduced with a critical preface. He died in 1700 and was buried in Westminster Abbey between Chaucer and Abraham Cowley in the Poets' Corner.

Besides being the greatest English poet of the later 17th century, Dryden wrote almost 30 tragedies, comedies, and dramatic operas. He also made a valuable contribution in his commentaries on poetry and drama, which are sufficiently extensive and original to entitle him to be considered, in the words of Dr. Samuel Johnson, as "the father of English criticism."

After Dryden's death his reputation remained high for the next 100 years, and even in the Romantic period the reaction against him was never so great as that against Alexander Pope. In the 20th century there was a notable revival of interest in his poems, plays, and criticism, and much scholarly work was done on them. In the late 20th century his reputation stood almost as high as at any time since his death.

John Dryden produced some of the most influential works of Restoration satire. Known for his incredibly impersonal poems and his relentless wit, Dryden had a significant impact on the language and rhetorical forms used by future writers.

One great example of his influential work is *Mac Flecknoe*, which is believed to have been written in late 1678 or 1679, although it wasn't published until 1682. In the poem, Dryden mocks Thomas Shadwell, a fellow poet with whom Dryden had been friends for many years. Although it's not known exactly what events ended



the friendship and began the feud, Shadwell and Dryden had quite a few differences, including their theories of literature, their religions, and their politics.

### **Overview of the Poem**

Mac Flecknoe begins by explaining that the reigning king of dull poetry, Mac Flecknoe, is retiring from his position and that the throne of dullest poet must now be filled by another writer. The poem then humorously quotes Mac Flecknoe's departing speech. In the speech, Flecknoe relates that although he was able to produce impressively dull poetry throughout his career, Shadwell's ability to write terrible poetry easily surpasses his own.

### **Type of Work**

"Mac Flecknoe" is a mock epic. Such a work uses the elevated style of the classical epic poem such as *The Iliad* to satirize human follies. A mock epic pretends that a person, a place, a thing, or an idea is extraordinary when—in the author's view—it is actually insignificant and trivial. For example, a mock epic about an inconsequential U.S. president such as Millard Fillmore might compare him to such rulers as Pericles, Julius Caesar, Saladin, Louis XIV, and George Washington.

In writing "Mac Flecknoe," John Dryden imitated not only the characteristics of Homer's epics but also those of later writers such as Virgil, Dante, and Milton.

### **Publication**

"Mac Flecknoe" first appeared in 1682 in an unedited, and probably unauthorized, edition printed in London for D. Green. Jacob Tonson published an edited and authorized copy of the poem in London in 1684 as part of a Dryden collection entitled *Miscellany Poems*.

### **Background**

#### **Dryden and Shadwell**

John Dryden wrote "Mac Flecknoe" to satirize another English writer, Thomas Shadwell (1642-1692), author of eighteen plays and a small body of poetry.



Dryden and Shadwell had once treated each other amicably but became enemies because of their differing views on the following:

1...Politics. Dryden was a Tory; Shadwell was a Whig.

2...Religion. Shadwell offended Dryden when he satirized Catholic and Anglican priests in a play entitled *The Lancashire-Witches, and Tegue o Dively the Irish-Priest* (1682). Dryden was considering becoming a Catholic at the time (and did in 1686).

3...Literature: Dryden and Shadwell differed strongly on who was the better writer: Shakespeare or Ben Jonson. Dryden took the part of Shakespeare; Shadwell idolized Jonson.

When Shadwell attacked Dryden in *The Medal of John Bayes* (1682) and in a political work, Dryden retaliated with "Mac Flecknoe," a masterpiece of satire.

Although many of Shadwell's plays were popular in his time, critics generally regard him today as a writer of small merit. Dryden, on the other hand, enjoys a reputation as one of the greats of English literature.

### **Richard Flecknoe**

Richard Flecknoe (1600-1678) was an English dramatist and poet whose writing was ridiculed by poet Andrew Marvell (1621-1678), as well as Dryden. In "Mac Flecknoe," Dryden casts him in the fictional role of the King of Nonsense. When the time comes for the aging king to select his successor, he chooses Thomas Shadwell. (In the poem, Dryden casts Shadwell as the son of the King of Nonsense.) Shadwell accedes to the crown as Mac Flecknoe. (Mac means son of.)

### **Setting**

The poem is set in London, referred to in the poem as Augusta. Augusta is the feminine form of the Latin Augustus, the name of one of ancient Rome's most powerful leaders, Augustus Caesar. As part of his mockery of Shadwell, Dryden chose the high-sounding Augusta as the name for the city Shadwell is to rule as King of Nonsense.



### Point of View

The speaker/narrator presents the poem in third-person point of view but allows the elderly King of Nonsense to tell why he has selected Shadwell to succeed him.

### Summary

Flecknoe assumed the throne as King of Nonsense when he was young. In this respect, he was not unlike Augustus Caesar, who became emperor of Rome when he, too, was a young. And, like Caesar, Flecknoe rules for many years.

When the time comes for him to choose which of his sons is worthy to succeed him and "wage immortal war with wit" (line 12), Flecknoe decides that the son most like him should receive the honor. That son is Thomas Shadwell, who has been "mature in dullness from his tender years" (line 16) and is the only one of his offspring who stands "confirm'd in full stupidity" (line 18).

So Shadwell inherits the throne as Mac Flecknoe (son of Flecknoe).

Shadwell is so witless (and, therefore, perfect for the throne) that he does no more thinking than a monarch oak shading a plain. There are others with similar virtues, such as Heywood and Shirley. However, other writers are no match for Shadwell—not even his father. True, Flecknoe was a renowned dunce, but he was merely a harbinger, a forerunner, to prepare the way for the ultimate dunce, his son. Nitwit writers who came before Shadwell occasionally displayed the dimmest glimmer of intelligence. But Shadwell never wrote a line that made any sense.

When Mac Flecknoe's royal barge makes its way on the River Thames for the first time, people gather to shout his name and "the little fishes throng" (line 49) around his boat. His elderly father "wept for joy / In silent raptures of the hopeful boy" (lines 60-61). No one can argue against Shadwell as the ideal King of



Nonsense, for all of his writings—in particular his plays—indicate “that for anointed dullness he was made” (line 63).

Shadwell takes the throne in a district of Augusta (London) where “brothel-houses rise” (line 7). Nearby is a nursery for children who will be trained as actors. The plays of Fletcher and Jonson (allusion to writers John Fletcher and Ben Jonson) are never staged in this place, but the dull and shoddy plays of Shadwell find a ready audience here. At the beginning of his reign, Shadwell swears “That he till death true dullness would maintain (line 15) . . . [and] “Ne'er to have peace with wit, nor truce with sense” (line 117).

While holding a mug of ale in his left hand, he holds the manuscript of his play *Love's Kingdom* in his right, declaring it “his sceptre and his rule of sway” (line 123). On his head is a wreath of poppies (the source of opium, an addictive drug which Shadwell used).

Then from his left hand fly twelve owls, a happening that reminds observers of Romulus, legendary co-founder of ancient Rome. Twelve vultures heralded his reign.

The proud father of Shadwell hopes that his son's domain will one day encompass all the earth and that he will produce new dull plays to delight the dimwitted. “The people cry'd amen,” the narrator says.

Shadwell's father then expresses the hope that his son “advance in new impudence, new ignorance” (line 146) and write virtuosic plays exhibiting no evidence of intelligence. Moreover, he says, let other writers imitate his son. The only difference between Shadwell and them, he says, will be their names. Flecknoe advises his son to avoid straining to choose “false flowers of rhetoric” (line 165). Instead, he need only trust his natural instincts, and dullness will pour forth. For inspiration, Shadwell should imitate his father rather than writers of wit, like Ben Jonson.

“Like mine.” his father says, “thy gentle numbers [lines of verse] feebly creep. / Thy Tragic Muse gives smiles, thy Comic sleep” (lines 197-198).



And though Shadwell may have passionate ideas in his head, Flecknoe says, they will die whenever he manifests them with his pen. Perhaps, he says, Shadwell should quit writing plays and devote himself to acrostics.

"There thou may'st wings display and altars raise, / And torture one poor word ten thousand ways" (lines 207-208).

Or perhaps he should write songs and sing them to the accompaniment of a lute.

While still speaking Flecknoe disappears through a trap door. A wind carries his royal robe upward, and it falls upon the shoulders of the new King of Nonsense—Shadwell, Mac Flecknoe.....

### Annotated Text of the Poem

All human things are subject to decay,

And, when Fate summons, monarchs must obey:

This Flecknoe I found, who, like Augustus, young

Was call'd to empire,<sup>2</sup> and had govern'd long:

In prose and verse, was own'd, without dispute

Through all the realms of Non-sense, absolute.

This aged prince now flourishing in peace,

And blest with issue<sup>3</sup> of a large increase,<sup>3</sup>

Worn out with business, did at length debate

To settle the succession of the State:<sup>4</sup>.....10

And pond'ring which of all his sons was fit

To reign, and wage immortal war with wit;

Cry'd, 'tis resolv'd; for nature pleads that he

Should only rule, who most resembles me:



Shadwell<sup>5</sup> alone my perfect image bears,  
 Mature in dullness from his tender years.  
 Shadwell alone, of all my sons, is he  
 Who stands confirm'd in full stupidity.  
 The rest to some faint meaning make pretence,  
 But Shadwell never deviates into sense.....20  
 Some beams of wit<sup>6</sup> on other souls may fall,  
 Strike through and make a lucid interval;  
 But Shadwell's genuine night<sup>7</sup> admits no ray.  
 His rising fogs prevail upon the day:  
 Besides his goodly fabric<sup>8</sup> fills the eye,  
 And seems design'd for thoughtless majesty:  
 Thoughtless as monarch oaks, that shade the plain,  
 And, spread in solemn state, supinely reign.  
 Heywood<sup>9</sup> and Shirley<sup>10</sup> were but types of thee,  
 Thou last great prophet of tautology: 11 .....30  
 Even I, a dunce of more renown than they,  
 Was sent before but to prepare thy way;  
 And coarsely clad in Norwich<sup>12</sup> drugg<sup>13</sup> came  
 To teach the nations in thy greater name.  
 35 My warbling lute,<sup>14</sup> the lute I whilom<sup>15</sup> strung  
 When to King John of Portugal I sung,



Was but the prelude to that glorious day,  
When thou on silver Thames did'st cut thy way,  
With well tim'd oars before the royal barge,  
40Swell'd with the pride of thy celestial charge;.....40  
And big with hymn, commander of an host,  
The like was ne'er in Epsom blankets toss'd. 16  
Methinks I see the new Arion 17 sail,  
The lute still trembling underneath thy nail.  
At thy well sharpen'd thumb from shore to shore  
The treble squeaks for fear, the basses roar:  
Echoes from Pissing-Alley, 18 Shadwell call,  
And Shadwell they resound from Aston Hall.  
About thy boat the little fishes throng,  
As at the morning toast, 19 that floats along.....50  
Sometimes as prince of thy harmonious band  
Thou wield'st thy papers in thy threshing hand. 20  
St. André's 21 feet ne'er kept more equal time,  
Not ev'n the feet 22 of thy own Psyche's 23 rhyme:  
Though they in number as in sense excel:  
So just, so like tautology they fell.  
That, pale with envy, Singleton 24 forswore  
The lute and sword which he in triumph bore



And vow'd he ne'er would act Villerius<sup>25</sup> more.  
Here stopt the good old sire; and wept for joy.....60  
In silent raptures of the hopeful boy.  
All arguments, but most his plays, persuade,  
That for anointed dullness he was made.  
Close to the walls which fair Augusta<sup>26</sup> bind,  
(The fair Augusta much to fears inclin'd)<sup>27</sup>  
An ancient fabric, rais'd t'inform the sight,  
There stood of yore, and Barbican<sup>28</sup> it hight:<sup>29</sup>  
A watch tower once; but now, so fate ordains,  
Of all the pile<sup>30</sup> an empty name remains.  
From its old ruins brothel-houses rise.....70  
Scenes of lewd loves, and of polluted joys.  
Where their vast courts, the mother-strumpets keep,  
And, undisturb'd by watch, in silence sleep.  
Near these a nursery<sup>31</sup> erects its head,  
Where queens are form'd, and future heroes bred;  
Where unfledg'd actors learn to laugh and cry,  
Where infant punks their tender voices try.  
And little Maximins<sup>32</sup> the gods defy.  
Great Fletcher<sup>33</sup> never treads in buskins<sup>34</sup> here,  
Nor greater Jonson<sup>35</sup> dares in socks<sup>36</sup> appear.....80



But gentle Simkin<sup>37</sup> just reception finds  
Amidst this monument of vanish'd minds:  
Pure clinches.<sup>38</sup> the suburban muse affords:  
And Panton<sup>39</sup> waging harmless war with words.  
Here Flecknoe, as a place to fame well known,  
Ambitiously design'd his Shadwell's throne.  
For ancient Decker<sup>40</sup> prophesi'd long since,  
That in this pile should reign a mighty prince,  
Born for a scourge of wit, and flail of sense:  
To whom true dullness should some Psyches owe.....<sup>90</sup>  
But worlds of Misers<sup>41</sup> from his pen should flow:  
Humorists<sup>42</sup> and hypocrites it should produce,  
Whole Raymond<sup>43</sup> families, and tribes of Bruce.<sup>44</sup>  
Now Empress Fame had publisht the renown,  
Of Shadwell's coronation through the town.  
Rous'd by report of fame, the nations meet,  
From near Bun-Hill, and distant Watling-street.  
No Persian carpets spread th'imperial way,  
But scatter'd limbs<sup>45</sup> of mangled poets lay:  
From dusty shops neglected authors come,.....<sup>100</sup>  
Martyrs of pies,<sup>46</sup> and reliques of the bum.<sup>47</sup>  
Much Heywood, Shirley, Ogleby<sup>48</sup> there lay,



But loads of Shadwell almost chok'd the way,  
Bilk'd stationers<sup>49</sup> for yeoman<sup>50</sup> stood prepar'd,  
And Herringman<sup>51</sup> was Captain of the Guard.  
The hoary prince<sup>52</sup> in majesty appear'd,  
High on a throne of his own labours rear'd.  
At his right hand our young Ascanius<sup>53</sup> sat  
Rome's other hope, and pillar of the state.  
His brows thick fogs, instead of glories, grace,.....110  
And lambent dullness play'd around his face.  
As Hannibal<sup>54</sup> did to the altars come,  
Sworn by his sire a mortal foe to Rome:  
So Shadwell swore, nor should his vow be vain,  
That he till death true dullness would maintain;  
And in his father's right, and realm's defence,  
Ne'er to have peace with wit, nor truce with sense.  
The king himself the sacred unction made,  
As king by office, and as priest<sup>55</sup> by trade:  
In his sinister<sup>56</sup> hand, instead of ball,<sup>57</sup>.....120  
He plac'd a mighty mug of potent ale;  
Love's Kingdom<sup>58</sup> to his right he did convey.  
At once his sceptre and his rule of sway:  
Whose righteous lore the prince had practis'd young.



And from whose loins recorded Psyche sprung,<sup>59</sup>  
His temples last with poppies<sup>60</sup> were o'er spread,  
That nodding seem'd to consecrate his head:  
Just at that point of time, if fame not lie,  
On his left hand twelve reverend owls did fly.  
So Romulus, 'tis sung, by Tiber's brook,.....130  
Presage of sway from twice six vultures took.<sup>61</sup>  
Th'admiring throug loud acclamations make,  
And omens of his future empire take.  
The sire then shook the honours of his head,  
And from his brows damps of oblivion shed  
Full on the filial dullness:<sup>62</sup> long he stood,  
Repelling from his breast the raging god;  
At length burst out in this prophetic mood:  
Heavens bless my son, from Ireland let him reign  
To far Barbadoes on the Western main;.....140  
Of his dominion may no end be known,  
And greater than his father's be his throne.  
Beyond love's kingdom<sup>63</sup> let him stretch his pen:  
He paus'd, and all the people cry'd Amen.  
Then thus, continu'd he, my son advance  
Still in new impudence, new ignorance.



Success let other teach, learn thou from me

Pangs without birth, and fruitless industry.

Let Virtuosos<sup>64</sup> in five years be writ;

Yet not one thought accuse thy toil of wit.....150

Let gentle George<sup>65</sup> in triumph tread the stage,

Make Dorimant betray, and Loveit rage;

Let Cully, Cockwood, Fopling,<sup>66</sup> charm the pit,

And in their folly show the writer's wit.

Yet still thy fools shall stand in thy defence,

And justify their author's want of sense.

Let 'em be all by thy own model made

Of dullness, and desire no foreign aid:

That they to future ages may be known,

Not copies drawn, but issue of thy own.....160

!Nay let thy men of wit too be the same,

All full of thee, and differing but in name;

But let no alien Sedley<sup>67</sup> interpose

To lard with wit thy hungry Epsom<sup>68</sup> prose.

And when false flowers of rhetoric thou would'st cull,

Trust Nature, do not labour to be dull;

But write thy best, and top; and in each line,

Sir Formal's oratory<sup>69</sup> will be thine.



Sir Formal, though unsought, attends thy quill,  
And does thy Northern Dedications<sup>70</sup> fill.....170  
Nor let false friends seduce thy mind to fame,  
By arrogating Jonson's hostile name.<sup>71</sup>  
Let Father Flecknoe fire thy mind with praise,  
And Uncle Ogleby<sup>72</sup> thy envy raise.  
Thou art my blood, where Jonson has no part:  
What share have we in Nature or in Art?  
Where did his wit on learning fix a brand,  
And rail at arts he did not understand?  
Where made he love in Prince Nicander's<sup>73</sup> vein,  
Or swept the dust in Psyche's humble strain?.....180  
Where sold he bargains, whip-stitch, kiss my arse,<sup>74</sup>  
Promis'd a play and dwindled to a farce?  
When did his muse from Fletcher scenes purloin,  
As thou whole Eth'ridge<sup>75</sup> dost transfuse to thine?  
But so transfus'd as oil on waters flow,  
His always floats above, thine sinks below.  
This is thy province, this thy wondrous way,  
New humours to invent for each new play:  
This is that boasted bias of thy mind,<sup>76</sup>  
By which one way, to dullness, 'tis inclin'd.....190



Which makes thy writings lean on one side still,

And in all changes that way bends thy will.

Nor let thy mountain belly make pretence

Of likeness:77 thine's a tympany78 of sense.

A tun79 of man in thy large bulk is writ,

But sure thou 'rt but a kilderkin80 of wit.

Like mine thy gentle numbers81 feebly creep,

Thy Tragic Muse gives smiles, thy Comic sleep.82

With whate'er gall thou sett'st thy self to write,

Thy inoffensive satires never bite.....200

In thy felonious heart, though venom lies,

It does but touch thy Irish pen, and dies.

Thy genius calls thee not to purchase fame

In keen iambics83, but mild anagram:

Leave writing plays, and choose for thy command

Some peaceful province in acrostic land.

There thou may'st wings display and altars raise,84

And torture one poor word ten thousand ways.

Or if thou would'st thy different talents suit,

Set thy own songs, and sing them to thy lute.....210

He said, but his last words were scarcely heard,

For Bruce and Longvil85 had a trap prepar'd,



And down they sent the yet declaiming bard.

Sinking he left his drugget robe behind,

Born upwards by a subterranean wind.

The mantle fell to the young prophet's part,

With double portion of his father's art.

### Notes

1.....Flecknoe: Richard Flecknoe. (See Background, above.)

2.....like . . . empire: Allusion to Augustus Caesar (63 BC-AD 14), born Gaius Octavius and adopted by Julius Caesar. He became one of three rulers of Rome in 43 BC and emperor of Rome in 27 BC, ruling until his death.

3.....issue: children; heirs.

4.....succession of the state: The person who would succeed as king.

5.....Shadwell: Thomas Shadwell. (See Background, above.)

6.....wit: Intelligence; creativity; writing ability.

7.....night: Lack of brilliance; stupidity.

8.....goodly fabric: Fat body.

9.....Heywood: John Heywood (1497-1575), English author of interludes, which were humorous, witty, or moralistic dialogues recited on a stage before or after a play or during an intermission. Heywood was a pioneer in turning the abstractions of morality plays into real characters, as in *The Mery Play betwene Johan Johan the Husbande, Tyb the Wyfe, and Syr Johan the Preest*, printed in 1533.

10...Shirley: James Shirley (1596-1666), a minor English playwright.

11...tautology: Redundancy, needless repetition.

12...Norwich: Seat of Norfolk County in eastern England.



13...drugget: Woolen or partly woolen fabric used to make clothing.

14...lute: Stringed instrument.

15...whilom: Formerly; at one time; at an earlier time.

16...in . . . toss'd: A phrase that appears in a 1676 Shadwell play entitled *The Virtuoso*.

17...Arion: Legendary poet and musician of ancient Greece. While on a sea voyage, he learned that sailors on the ship planned to rob and kill him. Resigned to his fate, he sang a song to the accompaniment of his lyre, then jumped overboard. But a dolphin enthralled with his music saved him and carried him to Corinth, Greece.

18...Pissing-Alley: In Dryden's time, any of several London streets where people urinated.

19...toast: Food waste thrown into the river.

20...'threshing hand: Hand used to beat out the rhythms of verse in the same way that one would beat (thresh) grain from husks.

21...St. André: French choreographer.

22...feet: In versification, a metric measure such as an iamb or a trochee.

23...Psyche: Opera libretto (1675) written by Shadwell. The story is based on the ancient myth of Cupid and Psyche, which is as follows. Psyche is a young woman so beautiful that the goddess of love, Venus, becomes jealous. She sends her son, Cupid, to earth to use one of his arrows to make her fall in love with a horribly ugly man. Cupid, invisible to human eyes, enters her chamber while she is sleeping. When she awakens, he accidentally pricks his skin instead of hers, causing him to fall in love with her. He then houses her in a palace as his wife but sleeps with her only in the darkness of night. He tells her she must never light a candle, for he does not wish to reveal his identity right away. Later, her sisters give her bad advice. After telling her that her mystery man is really a serpent, they advise her to light a lamp while he is sleeping, then kill him with a knife. After lighting the lamp, she sees Cupid for the first time and accidentally scratches



herself with one of his arrows. Falling madly in love with him, she kisses him. Angry that she has disobeyed his instructions, he leaves her. While searching for him, she encounters Ceres, the goddess of agriculture and fertility. The great deity tells Psyche that she has no chance of finding Cupid unless she petitions Venus, the goddess who sent him to Psyche in the first place. When Psyche enters a temple dedicated to Venus, the goddess gives her a series of seemingly impossible tasks to perform. But with the help of those who pity her—including a river god—she achieves success. Meanwhile, Cupid can no longer endure separation from his beloved and asks Jupiter for help. The king of the gods then persuades her to stop her scheming against Psyche. He also dispatches Mercury to earth to bring Psyche to the abode of the gods. There, Jupiter gives her the food of the gods, making her immortal, and pronounces Cupid and her eternally tied by the bonds of marriage.

24...Singleton: Court musician and singer.

25...Villierius: Character in *The Siege of Rhodes*, a tragicomic opera by William Davenant (1606-1668).

26...Augusta: Fictional name for London. The word august (uh GUST) means to inspire reverence and awe. Dryden uses the name here to support the poem as a mock epic.

27...to fears inclin'd: London was fearful because Catholics were accused (falsely) of plotting to murder the King of England.

28...Barbican: Defensive wall on Aldersgate Street in London.

29...hight. A that means was called.

30...pile: Building or group of buildings.

31...nursery: Allusion to a school for children training to be actors.

32...Maximin: Hero of Dryden's tragedy, *Tyrannic Love*.

33...Fletcher: John Fletcher (1579-1625), renowned playwright in the early seventeenth century.



- 34...buskins: High boots worn by actors in ancient Greek and Roman tragedies. In Dryden's poem, buskins symbolizes stage tragedies.
- 35...Jonson: Ben Jonson (1572-1637), important playwright of the early seventeenth century.
- 36...socks: Low-cut shoes worn by actors in ancient Greek and Roman comedies. In Dryden's poem, socks symbolizes stage comedies.
- 37...Simkin: Clown or simpleton.
- 38...clinches: Puns; ambiguities.
- 39...Panton: Thomas Panton, a well-known punster.
- 40...Decker: Thomas Dekker (1572-1632), English playwright and prose pamphleteer.
- 41...Miser: The Miser, a 1672 stag comedy by Shadwell.
- 42...Humorists: The Humorists, a 1671 stage comedy by Shadwell.
- 43...Raymond: Character in The Humorists. (See No. 42).
- 44...Bruce: Character in Shadwell's The Virtuoso (1676).
- 45...limbs: Books and parts of books (covers, pages).
- 46...pies: Bakers used book pages under pie crusts (as we would use paper towels or napkins).
- 47...reliques . . . bum: Book pages used as toilet paper. Bum refers to the buttocks.
- 48...Ogleby: John Ogilby (1600-1675), British printer, translator, and mediocre poet.
- 49...Bilk'd stationers: Book dealers unable to sell the works of Shadwell.
- 50...yeoman: Law officer.



51...Herringman: Henry Herringman (1628–1704), London publisher and bookseller. He published works by both Dryden and Shadwell.

52...hoary prince: The elderly king, Flecknoe.

53...Ascanius: Son of Aeneas, the hero of Virgil's Aeneid. After his father died, Ascanius inherited his father's kingdom. Dryden refers to Shadwell as Ascanius to make

the point that Shadwell, like Ascanius, will succeed his father.

54...Hannibal: Carthaginian general famous for waging war against Rome with elephants. When he was a boy, he was taught to hate Rome.

55...priest: The real-life Flecknoe was said to be a priest.

56...sinister: Left.

57...ball: When a king of England was crowned, he received an orb (along with a scepter) as a symbol of his power.

58...Love's Kingdom: A 1664 play by Richard Flecknoe.

59...Psyche: Shadwell fathered (wrote) Psyche. (See No. 23.)

60...poppies: Poppies contain seeds from which opium, an addictive drug, is made. Shadwell was said to be addicted to opium.

61...On his left . . . vultures took: According to ancient Roman myth, twelve vultures appeared to Romulus, the legendary co-founder of ancient Rome, to sanction his selection for the site of the city. Dryden mocks Shadwell by writing that his owls can be compared to the vultures of Romulus.

62...from . . . dullness: The old king (Flecknoe) passed on to his son (Shadwell, or Mac Flecknoe) his dullness.

63...love's kingdom: See No. 58.

64...Virtuosos: The Virtuoso, a 1676 play by Shadwell.



- 65...gentle George: George Etherege (1635-1691). English writer of stage comedies.
- 66...Dorimant . . . Fopling: Dorimant, Loveit, Cully, Cockwood, and Fopling were all characters in plays of George Etherege. (See No. 65.)
- 67...Sedley: Sir Charles Sedley (1639-1701). English playwright. He wrote the prologue for Shadwell's 1673 play Epsom Wells.
- 68...Epsom: Epsom Wells, a play Shadwell staged in 1672.
- 69...Sir Formal's oratory: Pompous oratory of Sir Formal Trifle, a character in Shadwell's *The Virtuoso*.
- 70...Northern Dedications: Shadwell dedicated some of his plays to the Duke of Newcastle. Newcastle (in full, Newcastle upon Tyne) is in northern England near the North Sea.
- 71...Nor . . . name: Don't let false friends make you think that you are carrying on in the tradition of Ben Jonson. (Shadwell thought that he was another Jonson, but Jonson was by far the superior writer.
- 72...Uncle Ogleby: See No. 48.
- 73...Prince Nicander: Character in Shadwell's *Psyche*.
- 74...Where . . . arse: Where did he [Jonson] write such phrases as whip-stitch and kiss my arse? These phrases are spoken by Sir Samuel Hearty in Shadwell's *The Virtuoso*.
- 75...Eth'ridge: See Note 65.
- 76...new . . . mind: Shadwell writes the following in the epilogue of his play, *The Humorists*: "A humor is a bias of the mind."
- 77...nor . . . likeness: Don't compare your large belly to Jonson's.
- 78...tympany: Swelling.
- 79...tun: lark cask for beer, ale, or wine.



80...kilderkin: Cask; unit of measure equal to 18 imperial gallons.

81...gentle numbers: Verses; lines of verse.

82...Tragic . . . sleep: The tragic scenes make people laugh; the scenes that are supposed to be funny put them to sleep.

83...iambics: In versification, an iamb is a metric foot consisting of an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable. For a complete discussion of meter in poetry and verse, [click here](#).

84...thou . . . display: In some plays in the Dryden-Shadwell era, authors arranged short and long lines of verse to resemble the shape of objects such as wings or altars.

85...Bruce and Longvil: Characters in Shadwell's *The Virtuoso*. They arrange for Sir Formal Trifle (see No. 69) to fall through a trap door while he is giving a speech.

### **Tone**

The tone of the poem is mischievous and mocking.

### **Theme**

Dryden's purpose in writing "Mac Flecknoe" was to expose Shadwell as a mediocre writer—and to get even for Shadwell's offenses against him. Dryden lampoons Shadwell mercilessly, although he avoids sarcasm and harangue. Instead, Dryden uses the genius of his wit, razor sharp, to expose Shadwell's writing as humdrum and uninspired. Early in the poem, Dryden uses hyperbole to stress the dimness of Shadwell's imagination and creativity.

Shadwell never deviates into sense.

Some beams of wit on other souls may fall.

Strike through and make a lucid interval:

But Shadwell's genuine night admits no ray,



His rising fogs prevail upon the day (lines 20-24)

Shadwell enjoyed a goodly measure of popularity in his day, not infrequently attracting crowds to performances of his works. However, over time, his popularity dwindled. Today, his works receive small attention. Time, that winnow of would-be Shakespeares, has blown away Shadwell and left Dryden in full flower.

### End Rhyme

The poem is written entirely in couplets (two successive rhyming lines). The first two lines set the pattern.

All human things are subject to decay.

And, when Fate summons, monarchs must obey:

### Internal Rhyme

Dryden also included occasional internal rhyme in the poem, as in the following lines.

As at the morning toast, that floats along (line 50)

The lute and sword which he in triumph bore (line 58)

All arguments, but most his plays, persuade (line 62)

A watch tower once; but now, so fate ordains (line 68)

Of all the pile an empty name remains (line 69)

### Meter

The meter of the poem is iambic pentameter, as the first line demonstrates.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

All HU..|.man THINGS..|.are SUB..|.ject TO..|.de CAY,.....



## Figures of Speech

Following are examples of figures of speech in the poem. For definitions of figures of speech, see Literary Terms.

### Alliteration

Worn out with business, did at length debate (line 9)

To settle the succession of the State: (line 10)

To reign, and wage immortal war with wit (line 12)

And coarsely clad in Norwich drugget came (line 32)

### Anaphora

Shadwell alone my perfect image bears,

Mature in dullness from his tender years.

Shadwell alone, of all my sons, is he

Who stands confirm'd in full stupidity. (lines 15-18)

So just, so like tautology they fell (line 56)

Where queens are form'd, and future heroes bred:

Where unfledg'd actors learn to laugh and cry.

Where infant punks [prostitutes] their tender voices try (lines 75-77)

### Hyperbole

And torture one poor word ten thousand ways (line 208)

### Irony

From time to time in the poem, Shadwell receives the acclamation of crowds for his matchless stupidity.



### **Metaphor**

- But Shadwell's genuine night admits no ray,
- His rising fogs prevail upon the day (lines 23-24)
- Comparison of Shadwell's intelligence to night and to fog
- Comparison of creativity to a ray of light
- Beyond love's kingdom let him stretch his pen (line 143)
- Comparison of Shadwell's writing to a pen
- And when false flowers of rhetoric thou would'st cull (line 165)
- Comparison of imagery or figures of speech to flowers

### **Personification**

- Now Empress Fame had publisht the renown (line 94)
- Comparison of fame to an empress

### **Simile**

- Thoughtless as monarch oaks, that shade the plain (line 27)
- Comparison of Shadwell's thinking ability to that of monarch oaks

**Study Questions and Writing Topics** •Dryden was a Tory, and Shadwell was a Whig. What was the main difference between these two political parties?

•Shadwell succeeded Dryden as poet laureate of England. Did Shadwell deserve this honor, or did he receive it because of political connections?

•Write an essay comparing and contrasting the writing abilities of Dryden and Shadwell. To prepare yourself, conduct library and Internet research.

•Write a poem of ten lines or more in iambic pentameter (the meter of "Mac Flecknoe"). Use rhyming couplets, as Dryden did.



Passage:

1. The heritage of panegyric is of central importance to a consideration of Dryden's public poetry. This relatively minor genre provides the background for understanding the progress of Dryden's career and the framework for judging individual poems. To demonstrate the various ways in which Dryden's poetry embodies the themes, topics, and values of panegyric, the discussion of his poems is divided into two parts. The present chapter will focus on the tradition of panegyric: Dryden's reassertion of the original, oratorical function of the genre. The next chapter will consider the transformation of panegyric: Dryden's accommodation of panegyric oratory and heroic poetry.

To trace Dryden's career against the background of classical and Renaissance oratory is to recognize, first of all, the ambitious nature of his political poems. To influence power with poetry, Dryden stands between the prince and the people during a period that is bounded at both ends by revolution. Addressing the people on behalf of the prince, Dryden elaborates the theme of restoration, designed to secure popular obedience to the monarch. Addressing the prince on behalf of the people, Dryden emphasizes the theme of limitation, intended to assure restrained and orderly rule. Striving to maintain this poised rhetorical stance, Dryden attempts to reconcile the often-opposed interests of his dual audience. Dryden's special brand of oratory is, in effect, precisely that combination of the demonstrative and deliberative types that defines panegyric. By considering first the poems surrounding the Restoration, then the poems of the reign of James II, we can appreciate and admire Dryden's efforts to find a voice and an argument suitable for an address to both the prince and the people.

Although some steps have already been taken toward an accurate assessment of Dryden's oratory, this aspect of his work has never received the attention it deserves, partly (I think) because of our modern distrust of political oratory. In Mark Van Doren's groundbreaking study of the poetry, for example, the conception of Dryden as poet-orator is presented under the chapter heading "False Lights." After a very brief survey of the connection between oratory and poetry, Van Doren observes: "It was not until Dryden's time, when the inspiration of the Elizabethans had in a way given out, and the full body of modern classical doctrine was being received in its most systematic form from France, that eloquence came to feel completely at home in poetry." "Dryden,"



adds Van Doren, "was peculiarly fitted to lead the rhetorical grand march in English poetry."

**Short and Long Answer Questions:**

1. How does Dryden present his satire through the character of a king?
2. Mac Flecknoe as a mock heroic poem - what does mock heroic mean?
3. Dryden was a Tory, and Shadwell was a Whig. What was the main difference between these two political parties?
4. Shadwell succeeded Dryden as poet laureate of England. Did Shadwell deserve this honor, or did he receive it because of political connections?
5. Write an essay comparing and contrasting the writing abilities of Dryden and Shadwell. To prepare yourself, conduct library and Internet research.
6. Write a poem of ten lines or more in iambic pentameter (the meter of "Mac Flecknoe"). Use rhyming couplets, as Dryden did.
7. Think about Dryden's usage of the epic poetic form. How does this style contribute to the poem's humor and overall success?
8. What is Dryden's best zinger in here? Why do you think so?
9. Clearly this poem is quite bogged down by dated references, specific to the time period in which it was written. But even still, it holds up today. Why might this be, even though many of the references are no longer relevant?
10. In "Mac Flecknoe," Dryden critiques Shadwell's vision of the comedic. How is Dryden's vision of comedy, as encapsulated in "Mac Flecknoe," different, and perhaps more effective, than that of Shadwell?



**Multiple choice question part**

**When is 'Mac Flecknoe' believed to have been written?**

- 1652.
- 1682.
- 1678 or 1679.
- 1700 or 1701.

**1. Whom is the person Dryden is satirically mocking in the poem?**

- Alexander Pope.
- William Shakespeare.
- Thomas Shadwell.
- Ben Jonson.

**2. What is the poetic form of 'Mac Flecknoe'?**

- Haiku.
- Rhyming couplets.
- Unrhymed iambic tetrameter.
- Blank verse.



## UNIT II SECTION B

### An Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard

#### Thomas Gray- The Poet

Thomas Gray, (born Dec. 26, 1716, London--died July 30, 1771, Cambridge, Cambridgeshire, Eng.). English poet whose "An Elegy Written in a Country Church Yard" is one of the best known of English lyric poems. Although his literary output was slight, he was the dominant poetic figure in the mid-18th century and a precursor of the Romantic movement.

Born into a prosperous but unhappy home, Gray was the sole survivor of 12 children of a harsh and violent father and a long-suffering mother, who operated a millinery business to educate him. A delicate and studious boy, he was sent to Eton in 1725 at the age of eight. There he formed a "Quadruple Alliance" with three other boys who liked poetry and classics and disliked rowdy sports and the Hogarthian manners of the period. They were Horace Walpole, the son of the prime minister; the precocious poet Richard West, who was closest to Gray; and Thomas Ashton. The style of life Gray developed at Eton, devoted to quiet study, the pleasures of the imagination, and a few understanding friends, was to persist for the rest of his years.

In 1734 he entered Peterhouse, Cambridge, where he began to write Latin verse of considerable merit. He left in 1738 without a degree and set out in 1739 with Walpole on a grand tour of France, Switzerland, and Italy at Sir Robert Walpole's expense. At first all went well, but in 1741 they quarreled—possibly over Gray's preferences for museums and scenery to Walpole's interest in lighter social pursuits—and Gray returned to England. They were reconciled in 1745 on Walpole's initiative and remained somewhat cooler friends for the rest of their lives.

In 1742 Gray settled at Cambridge. That same year West died, an event that affected him profoundly. Gray had begun to write English poems, among which some of the best were "Ode on the Spring," "Sonnet on the Death of Mr. Richard West," "Hymn to Adversity," and "Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College." They revealed his maturity, ease and felicity of expression, wistful melancholy.



and the ability to phrase truisms in striking, quotable lines, such as "where ignorance is bliss, 'Tis folly to be wise." The Eton ode was published in 1747 and again in 1748 along with "Ode on the Spring." They attracted no attention.

It was not until "An Elegy Written in a Country Church Yard," a poem long in the making, was published in 1751 that Gray was recognized. Its success was instantaneous and overwhelming. A dignified elegy in eloquent classical diction celebrating the graves of humble and unknown villagers was, in itself, a novelty. Its theme that the lives of the rich and poor alike "lead but to the grave" was already familiar, but Gray's treatment—which had the effect of suggesting that it was not only the "rude forefathers of the village" he was mourning but the death of all men and of the poet himself—gave the poem its universal appeal. Gray's newfound celebrity did not make the slightest difference in his habits. He remained at Peterhouse until 1756, when, outraged by a prank played on him by students, he moved to Pembroke College. He wrote two Pindaric odes, "The Progress of Poesy" and "The Bard," published in 1757 by Walpole's private Strawberry Hill Press. They were criticized, not without reason, for obscurity, and in disappointment, Gray virtually ceased to write. He was offered the laureateship in 1757 but declined it. He buried himself in his studies of Celtic and Scandinavian antiquities and became increasingly retiring and hypochondriacal. In his last years his peace was disrupted by his friendship with a young Swiss nobleman, Charles Victor de Bonstetten, for whom he conceived a romantic devotion, the most profound emotional experience of his life.

Gray died at 55 and was buried in the country churchyard at Stoke Poges, Buckinghamshire, celebrated in his "Elegy."

### **Type of Work**

"Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" is—as the title indicates—an elegy. Such a poem centers on the death of a person or persons and is, therefore, somber in tone. An elegy is lyrical rather than narrative—that is, its primary purpose is to express feelings and insights about its subject rather than to tell a story. Typically, an elegy expresses feelings of loss and sorrow while also praising the deceased and commenting on the meaning of the deceased's time on earth. Gray's poem



reflects on the lives of humble and unheralded people buried in the cemetery of a church.

### Setting

The time is the mid 1700s, about a decade before the Industrial Revolution began in England. The place is the cemetery of a church. Evidence indicates that the church is St. Giles, in the small town of Stoke Poges, Buckinghamshire, in southern England. Gray himself is buried in that cemetery. William Penn, the founder of Pennsylvania, once maintained a manor house at Stoge Poges.

### Years of Composition and Publication

Gray began writing the elegy in 1742, put it aside for a while, and finished it in 1750. Robert Dodsley published the poem in London in 1751. Revised or altered versions of the poem appeared in 1753, 1758, 1768, and 1775. Copies of the various versions are on file in the Thomas Gray Archive at Oxford University.

### Meter and Rhyme Scheme

Gray wrote the poem in four-line stanzas (quatrains). Each line is in iambic pentameter, meaning the following:

- 1..Each line has five pairs of syllables for a total of ten syllables.
- 2..In each pair, the first syllable is unstressed (or unaccented), and the second is stressed (or accented), as in the two lines that open the poem:

The CUR few TOLLS the KNELL of PART ing DAY

The LOW ing HERD wind SLOW ly O'ER the LEA

In each stanza, the first line rhymes with the third and the second line rhymes with the fourth (abab), as follows:

a.....The curfew tolls the knell of parting day,

b.....The lowing herd wind slowly o'er the lea,

a.....The plowman homeward plods his weary way,



b.....And leaves the world to darkness and to me.

### **Stanza Form: Heroic Quatrain**

A stanza with the above-mentioned characteristics—four lines, iambic pentameter, and an abab rhyme scheme—is often referred to as a heroic quatrain. (Quatrain is derived from the Latin word *quattuor*, meaning four.) William Shakespeare and John Dryden had earlier used this stanza form. After Gray's poem became famous, writers and critics also began referring to the heroic quatrain as an elegiac stanza.

### **Complete Poem With Explanatory Notes**

#### **Stanza 1**

1. The curfew tolls the knell of parting day,
2. The lowing herd wind slowly o'er the lea,
3. The plowman homeward plods his weary way,
4. And leaves the world to darkness and to me.

#### **Notes**

(1) Curfew: ringing bell in the evening that reminded people in English towns of Gray's time to put out fires and go to bed. (2) Knell: mournful sound. (3) Parting day: day's end; dying day; twilight; dusk. (4) Lowing: mooing. (5) O'er: contraction for over. (6) Lea: meadow.

#### **Stanza 2**

5. Now fades the glimm'ring landscape on the sight,
6. And all the air a solemn stillness holds,
7. Save where the beetle wheels his droning flight,
8. And drowsy tinklings lull the distant folds.



**Notes**

(1) Line 5: The landscape becomes less and less visible. (2) Sight . . . solemn stillness . . . save: alliteration. (3) Save: except. (4) Beetle: winged insect that occurs in more than 350,000 varieties. One type is the firefly, or lightning bug. (5) Wheels: verb meaning flies in circles. (6) Droning: humming; buzzing; monotonous sound. (7) Drowsy tinklings lull the distant folds: This clause apparently refers to the gentle sounds made by a bell around the neck of a castrated male sheep that leads other sheep. A castrated male sheep is called a wether. Such a sheep with a bell around its neck is called a bellwether. Folds is a noun referring to flocks of sheep. (8) Tinklings: onomatopoeia.

**Stanza 3**

9. Save that from yonder ivy-mantled tow'r
10. The moping owl does to the moon complain
11. Of such, as wand'ring near her secret bow'r,
12. Molest her ancient solitary reign.

**Notes**

(1) Save: except. (2) Yonder: distant; remote. (3) Ivy-mantled: cloaked, dressed, or adorned with ivy. (4) Moping: gloomy; grumbling. (5) Of such: of anything or anybody. (6) Bow'r: bower, an enclosure surrounded by plant growth—in this case, ivy. (7) Molest her ancient solitary reign: bother the owl while it keeps watch over the churchyard and countryside. (8) Her ancient solitary rein: metaphor comparing the owl to a queen.

**Stanza 4**

13. Beneath those rugged elms, that yew-tree's shade,
14. Where heaves the turf in many a mould'ring heap,
15. Each in his narrow cell for ever laid,
16. The rude forefathers of the hamlet sleep.



### Notes

(1) Where heaves the turf: anastrophe, a figure of speech that inverts the normal word order (the turf heaves). (2) Mould'ring: mouldering (British), moldering (American), an adjective meaning decaying, crumbling. (3) Cell: metaphor comparing a grave to a prison cell. (4) Rude: robust; sturdy; hearty; stalwart. (4) Hamlet: village.

### Stanza 5

17. The breezy call of incense-breathing Morn.

18. The swallow twitt'ring from the straw-built shed,

19. The cock's shrill clarion, or the echoing horn,

20. No more shall rouse them from their lowly bed.

### Notes

(1) Breezy call of incense-breathing Morn: wind carrying the pleasant smells of morning, including dewy grass and flowers. Notice that Morn is a metaphor comparing it to a living creature. (It calls and breathes.) (2) Swallow: insect-eating songbird that likes to perch. (3) Clarion: cock-a-doodle-doo. (4) Echoing horn: The words may refer to the sound made by a fox huntsman who blows a copper horn to which pack hounds respond.

### Stanza 6

21. For them no more the blazing hearth shall burn.

22. Or busy housewife ply her evening care:

23. No children run to lisp their sire's return,

24. Or climb his knees the envied kiss to share.



### Notes

(1) hearth . . . housewife . . . her: alliteration. (2) Climb his knees the envied kiss to share: anastrophe, a figure of speech that inverts the normal word order (to share the envied kiss).

### Stanza 7

25. Oft did the harvest to their sickle yield,
26. Their furrow oft the stubborn glebe has broke;
27. How jocund did they drive their team afield!
28. How bow'd the woods beneath their sturdy stroke!

### Notes

(1) Sickle: Harvesting tool with a handle and a crescent-shaped blade. Field hands swing it from right to left to cut down plant growth. (2) Furrow: channel or groove made by a plow for planting seeds. (3) Glebe: earth. (4) Jocund: To maintain the meter, Gray uses an adjective when the syntax call for an adverb, *jocundly*. *Jocund* (pronounced JAHK und) means cheerful.

### Stanza 8

29. Let not Ambition mock their useful toil,
30. Their homely joys, and destiny obscure;
31. Nor Grandeur hear with a disdainful smile
32. The short and simple annals of the poor.

### Notes

(1) Ambition: Personification referring to the desire to succeed or to ambitious people seeking lofty goals. (2) Destiny obscure: the humble fate of the common people; their unheralded deeds. (3) Lines 29-30: anastrophe, a figure of speech



that inverts the normal word order (let not Ambition obscure their destiny and homely joys).

(4) Grandeur: personification referring to people with wealth, social standing, and power. (5) Annals: historical records; story

### Stanza 9

33. The boast of heraldry, the pomp of pow'r,

34. And all that beauty, all that wealth e'er gave,

35. Awaits alike th' inevitable hour.

36. The paths of glory lead but to the grave.

### Notes

(1) Boast of heraldry: Proud talk about the aristocratic or noble roots of one's family; snobbery. Heraldry was a science that traced family lines of royal and noble personages and designed coats of arms for them. (2) Pomp: ceremonies, rituals, and splendid surroundings of nobles and royals. (3) Pomp of pow'r: alliteration. (4) E'er: ever. General meaning of stanza: Every person—no matter how important, powerful, or wealthy—ends up the same, dead.

### Stanza 10

37. Nor you, ye proud, impute to these the fault,

38. If Mem'ry o'er their tomb no trophies raise,

39. Where thro' the long-drawn aisle and fretted vault

40. The pealing anthem swells the note of praise.

### Notes

(1) Impute: Assign, ascribe. (2) Mem'ry: Memory, a personification referring to memorials, commemorations, and tributes—including statues, headstones, and



epitaphs—used to preserve the memory of important or privileged people. (3) Where thro' . . . the note of praise: Reference to the interior of a church housing the tombs of important people. Fretted vault refers to a carved or ornamented arched roof or ceiling. (4) Pealing anthem may refer to lofty organ music.

### Stanza 11

41. Can storied urn or animated bust
42. Back to its mansion call the fleeting breath?
43. Can Honour's voice provoke the silent dust,
44. Or Flatt'ry soothe the dull cold ear of Death?

### Notes

(1) Storied urn: Vase adorned with pictures telling a story. Urns have sometimes been used to hold the ashes of a cremated body. (2) Bust: sculpture of the head, shoulders, and chest of a human. (3) Storied urn . . . breath? Can the soul (fleeting breath) be called back to the body (mansion) by the urn or bust back? Notice that urn and bust are personifications that call. (4) Can Honour's . . . Death? Can honor (Honour's voice) attributed to the dead person cause that person (silent dust) to come back to life? Can flattering words (Flatt'ry) about the dead person make death more "bearable"? (5) General meaning of stanza: Lines 41-45 continue the idea begun in Lines 37-40. In other words, can any memorials—such as the trophies mentioned in Line 38, the urn and bust mentioned in Line 41, and personifications (honor and flattery) mentioned in Lines 43 and 44—bring a person back to life or make death less final or fearsome?

### Stanza 12

45. Perhaps in this neglected spot is laid
46. Some heart once pregnant with celestial fire;
47. Hands, that the rod of empire might have sway'd,
48. Or wak'd to ecstasy the living lyre.



### Notes

(1) Pregnant with celestial fire: Full of great ideas, abilities, or goals (celestial fire). (2) Rod of empire: scepter held by a king or an emperor during ceremonies. One of the humble country folk in the cemetery might have become a king or an emperor if he had been given the opportunity. (3) Wak'd . . . lyre: Played beautiful music on a lyre, a stringed instrument. In other words, one of the people in the cemetery could have become a great musician if given the opportunity, "waking up" the notes of the lyre.

### Stanza 13

49. But Knowledge to their eyes her ample page

50. Rich with the spoils of time did ne'er unroll;

51. Chill Penury repress'd their noble rage,

52. And froze the genial current of the soul.

### Notes

(1) Knowledge . . . unroll: Knowledge did not reveal itself to them (their eyes) in books (ample page) rich with treasures of information (spoils of time). (2) Knowledge . . . unroll: Personification and anastrophe a figure of speech that inverts the normal word order (knowledge did ne'er enroll). (3) Chill . . . soul: Poverty (penury) repressed their enthusiasm (rage) and froze the flow (current) of ideas (soul).

### Stanza 14

53. Full many a gem of purest ray serene,

54. The dark unfathom'd caves of ocean bear;

55. Full many a flow'r is born to blush unseen,

56. And waste its sweetness on the desert air.



### Notes

Full . . . air: These may be the most famous lines in the poem. Gray is comparing the humble village people to undiscovered gems in caves at the bottom of the ocean and to undiscovered flowers in the desert.

### Stanza 15

57. Some village-Hampden, that with dauntless breast

58. The little tyrant of his fields withstood;

59. Some mute inglorious Milton here may rest,

60. Some Cromwell, guiltless of his country's blood.

### Notes

(1) John Hampden (1594-1643). Hampden, a Puritan member of Parliament, frequently criticized and opposed the policies of King Charles I. In particular, he opposed a tax imposed by the king to outfit the British navy. Because he believed that only Parliament could impose taxes, he refused to pay 20 shillings in ship money in 1635. Many joined him in his opposition. War broke out between those who supported Parliament and those who supported the king. Hampden was killed in battle in 1643. Gray here is presenting Hampden as a courageous (dauntless) hero who stood against the king (little tyrant). (2) Milton: John Milton (1608-1674), the great English poet and scholar.

### Stanza 16

61. Th' applause of list'ning senates to command,

62. The threats of pain and ruin to despise,

63. To scatter plenty o'er a smiling land,

64. And read their hist'ry in a nation's eyes.



### Notes

The subject and verb of Lines 61-64 are in the first three words of Line 65, their lot forbade. Thus, this stanza says the villagers' way of life (lot) prohibited or prevented them from receiving applause from politicians for good deeds such as alleviating pain and suffering and providing plenty (perhaps food) across the land. These deeds would have been recorded by the appreciating nation.

### Stanza 17

65. Their lot forbade: nor circumscrib'd alone

66. Their growing virtues, but their crimes confin'd;

67. Forbade to wade through slaughter to a throne,

68. And shut the gates of mercy on mankind,

### Notes

General meaning: Their lot in life not only prevented (circumscrib'd) them from doing good deeds (like those mentioned in Stanza 16) but also prevented (confin'd) bad deeds such as killing enemies to gain the throne and refusing to show mercy to people.

### Stanza 18

69. The struggling pangs of conscious truth to hide,

70. To quench the blushes of ingenuous shame,

71. Or heap the shrine of Luxury and Pride

72. With incense kindled at the Muse's flame.

### Notes

(1) General meaning: This stanza continues the idea begun in the previous stanza. saying that the villagers' lot in life also prevented them from hiding truth and shame and from bragging or using pretty or flattering words (incense kindled at



the Muse's flame) to gain luxuries and feed their pride. (2) Muse's flame: an allusion to sister goddesses in Greek and Roman mythology who inspired writers, musicians, historians, dancers, and astronomers. These goddesses were called Muses.

**Stanza 19**

73. Far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife,

74. Their sober wishes never learn'd to stray;

75. Along the cool sequester'd vale of life

76. They kept the noiseless tenor of their way.

**Note**

(1) General meaning: The villagers plodded on faithfully, never straying from their lot in life as common people. (2) Madding: maddening; furious; frenzied. (3) Noiseless tenor of their way: quiet way of life.

**Stanza 20**

77. Yet ev'n these bones from insult to protect,

78. Some frail memorial still erected nigh,

79. With uncouth rhymes and shapeless sculpture deck'd,

80. Implores the passing tribute of a sigh.

**Note**

General meaning: But even these people have gravestones (frail memorial), although they are engraved with simple and uneducated words or decked with humble sculpture. These gravestones elicit a sigh from people who see them.

**Stanza 21**

81. Their name, their years, spelt by th' unletter'd muse,



82. The place of fame and elegy supply;

83. And many a holy text around she strews;

84. That teach the rustic moralist to die.

### Notes

(1) Their . . . supply: Their name and age appear but there are no lofty tributes. (2) Unletter'd muse: Uneducated writer or engraver. (2) Holy text: probably Bible quotations. (3) She: muse. See the second note for Stanza 18. (4) Rustic moralist: pious villager.

### Stanza 22

85. For who to dumb Forgetfulness a prey,

86. This pleasing anxious being e'er resign'd,

87. Left the warm precincts of the cheerful day,

88. Nor cast one longing, ling'ring look behind?

### Notes

General meaning: These humble people, though they were doomed to be forgotten (to dumb Forgetfulness a prey), did not die (did not leave the warm precincts of cheerful day) without looking back with regret and perhaps a desire to linger a little longer .

### Stanza 23

89. On some fond breast the parting soul relies,

90. Some pious drops the closing eye requires;

91. Ev'n from the tomb the voice of Nature cries,

92. Ev'n in our ashes live their wonted fires.



**Notes**

General meaning: The dying person (parting soul) relies on a friend (fond breast) to supply the engraved words (pious drops) on a tombstone. Even from the tomb the spirit of a person cries out for remembrance.

**Stanza 24**

93. For thee [32], who mindful of th' unhonour'd Dead

94. Dost in these lines their artless tale relate:

95. If chance, by lonely contemplation led,

96. Some kindred spirit shall inquire thy fate [33].

**Notes**

(1) For thee . . . relate: Gray appears to be referring to himself. Mindful that the villagers deserve some sort of memorial, he is telling their story (their artless tale) in this elegy (these lines). (2) Lines 95-96: But what about Gray himself? What if someone asks about his fate? Gray provides the answer in the next stanza.

**Stanza 25**

97. Haply some hoary-headed swain may say,

98. "Oft have we seen him at the peep of dawn

99. Brushing with hasty steps the dews away

100. To meet the sun upon the upland lawn.

**Notes**

(1) Haply: Perhaps; by chance; by accident. (2) Hoary-headed swain: Gray-haired country fellow; old man who lives in the region.

**Stanza 26**

101. "There at the foot of yonder nodding beech



102. That wreathes its old fantastic roots so high,

103. His listless length at noontide would he stretch,

104. And pore upon the brook that babbles by.

**Notes**

(1) Nodding: bending: bowing. (2) Listless length: his tired body. (3) Pore upon: Look at; watch.

**Stanza 27**

105. "Hard by yon wood, now smiling as in scorn,

106. Mutt'ring his wayward fancies he would rove,

107. Now drooping, woeful wan, like one forlorn,

108. Or craz'd with care, or cross'd in hopeless love.

**Notes**

(1) Wood, now smiling as in scorn: personification comparing the forest to a person. (2) Wayward fancies: unpredictable, unexpected, or unwanted thoughts; capricious or flighty thoughts. (3) Rove: wander. (4) Craz'd . . . cross'd: alliteration.

**Stanza 28**

109. "One morn I miss'd him on the custom'd hill,

110. Along the heath and near his fav'rite tree;

111. Another came; nor yet beside the rill,

112. Nor up the lawn, nor at the wood was he;

**Notes**

(1) Another came: another morning came. (2) Nor yet: But he still was not. (3) Rill: small stream or brook.



**Stanza 29**

113. "The next with dirges due in sad array  
114. Slow thro' the church-way path we saw him borne.  
115. Approach and read (for thou canst read) the lay,  
116. Grav'd on the stone beneath yon aged thorn."

**Notes**

(1) The next: the next morning. (2) Dirges: funeral songs. (3) Lay: short poem—in this case, the epitaph below.

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**THE EPITAPH**

117. Here rests his head upon the lap of Earth  
118. A youth to Fortune and to Fame unknown.  
119. Fair Science frown'd not on his humble birth,  
120. And Melancholy mark'd him for her own.  
121. Large was his bounty, and his soul sincere,  
122. Heav'n did a recompense as largely send:  
123. He gave to Mis'ry all he had, a tear,  
124. He gain'd from Heav'n ('twas all he wish'd) a friend.  
125. No farther seek his merits to disclose,  
126. Or draw his frailties from their dread abode,  
127. (There they alike in trembling hope repose)  
128. The bosom of his Father and his God.



## Notes

General meaning: Here lies a man of humble birth who did not know fortune or fame but who did become a scholar. Although he was depressed at times, he had a good life, was sensitive to the needs of others, and followed God's laws. Don't try to find out more about his good points or bad points, which are now with him in heaven.

## Themes

### Death: the Great Equalizer

Even the proud and the mighty must one day lie beneath the earth, like the humble men and women now buried in the churchyard, as line 36 notes: The paths of glory lead but to the grave. Lines 41-44 further point out that no grandiose memorials and no flattering words about the deceased can bring him or her back from death.

Can storied urn or animated bust

Back to its mansion call the fleeting breath?

Can Honour's voice provoke the silent dust,

Or Flattery soothe the dull cold ear of Death?

### Missed Opportunities

.Because of poverty or other handicaps, many talented people never receive the opportunities they deserve. The following lines elucidate this theme through metaphors:

Full many a gem of purest ray serene,

The dark unfathom'd caves of ocean bear:



Full many a flow'r is born to blush unseen,

And waste its sweetness on the desert air.

Here, the gem at the bottom of the ocean may represent an undiscovered musician, poet, scientist or philosopher. The flower may likewise stand for a person of great and noble qualities that are "wasted on the desert air." Of course, on another level, the gem and the flower can stand for anything in life that goes unappreciated.

### **Virtue**

In their rural setting, far from the temptations of the cities and the courts of kings, the villagers led virtuous lives, as lines 73-76 point out:

Far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife,

Their sober wishes never learn'd to stray;

Along the cool sequester'd vale of life

They kept the noiseless tenor of their way.

### **Inversion**

For poetic effect, Gray frequently uses inversion (reversal of the normal word order). Following are examples:

Line 6: And all the air a solemn stillness holds (all the air holds a solemn stillness)

Line 14: Where heaves the turf in many a mould'ring heap (Where the turf heaves)

Line 24: Or climb his knees the envied kiss to share. (Or climb his knees to share the envied kiss)

Line 79: With uncouth rhymes and shapeless sculpture deck'd (deck'd with uncouth rhymes and shapeless sculpture)



### **Syncope**

Omitting letters or sounds within a word.

Gray also frequently uses a commonplace poetic device known as syncope, the omission of letters or sounds within a word.

The lowing herd wind slowly o'er the lea (line 2)

Now fades the glimm'ring landscape on the sight (line 5)

Save that from yonder ivy-mantled tow'r (line 9)

The swallow twitt'ring from the straw-built shed (line 18)

### **Figures of Speech**

Following are examples of figures of speech in the poem.

#### **Alliteration**

Repetition of a Consonant Sound

The plowman homeward plods his weary way (line 3)

The cock's shrill clarion, or the echoing horn (line 19)

Nor cast one longiug, ling'ring look behind? (line 88)

Now drooping, woeful wan, like one forlorn (line 107)

Or craz'd with care, or cross'd in hopeless love. (line 108)

#### **Anaphora**

Repetition of a word, phrase, or clause at the beginning of word groups occurring one after the other

And all that beauty, all that wealth e'er gave (line 34)

Their name, their years, spelt by th' unletter'd muse (line 81)



Ev'n from the tomb the voice of Nature cries.

Ev'n in our ashes live their wonted fires. (lines 91-92)

### **Metaphor**

Comparison between unlike things without using like, as, or than

Full many a gem of purest ray serene.

The dark unfathom'd caves of ocean bear:

Full many a flow'r is born to blush unseen,

And waste its sweetness on the desert air. (lines 53-56)

Comparison of the dead village people to gems and flowers

Or heap the shrine of Luxury and Pride

With incense kindled at the Muse's flame. (lines 71-72)

Comparison of flattering words to incense

### **Metonymy**

Use of a word or phrase to suggest a related word or phrase

To scatter plenty o'er a smiling land

Land stands for people.

### **Personification**

A form of metaphor that compares a thing to a person

Let not Ambition mock their useful toil

Their homely joys, and destiny obscure:

Nor Grandeur hear with a disdainful smile

The short and simple annals of the poor. (lines 29-32)



Ambition and Grandeur take on human characteristics.

But Knowledge to their eyes her ample page

Rich with the spoils of time did ne'er unroll (line 49-50)

Notice that Knowledge becomes a person, a female.

Fair Science frown'd not on his humble birth,

And Melancholy mark'd him for her own. (lines 119-120)

Science and Melancholy become persons.

### Assessment of the Poem

Scholars regard "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" as one of the greatest poems in the English language. It weaves structure, rhyme scheme, imagery and message into a brilliant tapestry that confers on Gray everlasting fame. The quality of its poetry and insights reach Shakespearean and Miltonian heights.

### Study Questions and Essay Topics

- Gray was the only one of twelve children who survived childhood. Do you believe the memory of his dead brothers and sisters influenced him in the writing of his poem?
- What was Gray's opinion of high-born persons vis-a-vis the low-born?
- Write an essay that develops the idea expressed in line 36: The paths of glory lead but to the grave.
- Read "Ozymandias," a poem by another English writer, Percy Bysshe Shelley. Then write an essay that compares and contrasts Shelley's idea of posthumous glory with Gray's.
- In an essay, discuss Gray's use of animal and insect imagery in "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard."



•Which of the following adjectives best describes the mood of the elegy: peaceful, gloomy, solemn, desolate, morbid?

### The Bard

The Bard was written between 1755 and 1757; its brief character of Elizabeth Tudor likely owes something to Spenser whose "fairy Fiction," the Bard predicts, will restore the British poetry destroyed with the Welsh bards. Along with Joseph Warton's *Essay on the Genius and Writings of Pope* (1756) Thomas Gray's oft-reprinted Pindaric ode did much to establish the triad of Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton as the central axis of British romantic poetry. The condensation and combination of the three verse characters, in effect merging them into one voice, is but one of many striking effects in Gray's poem.

Headnote: "The following Ode is founded on a Tradition current in Wales, that EDWARD THE FIRST, when he completed the conquest of that country, ordered all the Bards, that fell into his hands, to be put to death" p. 12.

Thomas Gray to William Mason: "There is no faith in man, no, not in a Welchman, and yet Mr. Parry has been here and scratched out such ravishing blind harmony, such tunes of a thousand years old, with names enough to choke you, as have set all this learned body a-dancing, and inspired them with due reverence for Odikle [The Bard], whenever it shall appear. Mr. Parry (you must know) it was that has put Odikle in motion again, and with much exercise it has got a tender tail grown, like Scroddles [Mason], and here it is; if you do not like it, you may kiss it.... I am well aware of many weakly things here, but I hope the end will do. Pray give me your full and true opinion, and that not upon deliberation, but forthwith. Mr. Hurd himself allows that 'lion-port' is not too bold for Queen Elizabeth" May 1757; *Correspondence of Gray and Mason*, ed. John Mitford (1853) 80-82.

William Mason in his notes records that the conclusion gave Gray a great deal of trouble: "I promised the reader, in the 237th page of the *Memoirs*, to give him, in this place, the original argument of this capital Ode, as its author had set it down on one of the pages of his common-place book. It is as follows: 'The army of Edward I. as they march through a deep valley, are suddenly stopped by the appearance of a venerable figure seated on the summit of an inaccessible rock, who, with a voice more than human, reproaches the King with all the misery and



desolation which he had brought on his country: foretells the misfortunes of the Norman race, and with prophetic spirit declares, that all his cruelty shall never extinguish the noble ardour of poetic genius in this island, and that men shall never be wanting to celebrate true virtue and valour in immortal strains, to expose vice and infamous pleasure, and boldly censure tyranny and oppression. His song ended, he precipitates himself from the mountain, and is swallowed up by the river that rolls at its foot.' Fine as the conclusion of this Ode is at present, I think it would have been still finer, if he could have executed it according to this plan: but unhappily for his purpose, instances of English Poets were wanting. Spenser had that enchanting flow of verse which was peculiarly calculated 'to celebrate Virtue and Valour'; but he chose to celebrate them, not literally, but in allegory. Shakespear, who had talents for every thing, was undoubtedly capable 'of exposing Vice and infamous Pleasure'; and the drama was a proper vehicle for his satire: but we do not ever find that he professedly made this his object: nay, we know that, in one inimitable character, he has so contrived as to make vices of the worst kind, such as cowardice, drunkenness, dishonesty, and lewdness, not only laughable, but almost amiable: for with all these sins on his head, who can be so liking Falstaffe? Milton, of all our great Poets, was the only one 'who boldly censured Tyranny and Oppression': but he chose to deliver this censure in poetry, but in prose. Dryden was a mere court parasite to the most infinite of all courts. Pope, with all his laudable detestation of corruption and bribery, was a Tory: and Addison, though a Whig and a fine writer, was unluckily not enough of a Poet for his purpose. On these considerations Mr. Gray was necessitated to change his plan towards the conclusion: Hence we perceive, that in the last epode he praises Spenser only 'for his allegory,' Shakespear 'for his powers of moving the passions,' and Milton 'for his epic excellence.' I remember the Ode lay unfinished by him for a year or two on this very account; and I hardly believe that it would ever have had his last hand but for the circumstance of his hearing Parry play on the Welch Harp at a concert at Cambridge, (see Letter xxv. sect. iv.) which he often declared inspired him with the conclusion" Poems of Gray (1775) 91-92n.

Critical Review: "The subject is exquisitely chosen, and the piece executed by the hand of a master. One of the bards, who escaped this cruel massacre, is exhibited on the brow of a promontory, pronouncing imprecations against Edward and his



posterity. This, we apprehend, is one of the most striking attitudes that ever were encountered" 5 (August 1757) 170.

Monthly Review: "The circumstances of grief and horror in the preparation of the votive web, and the mystic obscurity with which the prophecies are delivered, will give as much pleasure to those who relish this species of composition, as any thing that has hitherto appeared in our language, the Odes of Dryden himself not excepted" 17 (September 1757) 242.

Percival Stockdale: "If the reasoning, and sentiments of a Poem are at all obscure, it's Authour has defeated the aim of Poetry, which is, immediately to affect the mind. It deserves not to be read. But if the subject of a Poem is obscure, or not generally known, or not interesting, and if it abounds with allusions, and facts of this improper, and uninteresting character, the writer who chuses the subject, and introduces those improper, and unaffecting allusions, and facts, betrays a great want of poetical judgment, and taste. Mr. Gray had a vitiated fondness for such insipid fable, narrative, and references" in *An Inquiry into the Nature, and Genuine Laws of Poetry* (1778) 102-03.

Richard Graves: "A new aera or school of poetry seems to have commenced with Mr. Gray, as different from the simplicity of Addison, Pope, and Parnel, as Pindar's or Horace's Odes from Homer or Virgil; and, as the sublime, which is the characteristic of Gray, often borders on obscurity, some passages in his poems might, perhaps, be interpreted according to the inclination of the reader" *Lucubrations* (1786) 218n.

Anna Seward to Francis Noel Clarke Mundy: "So your learned pedant asserted, that nothing could be more absurd than the idea, in Gray's Welch Bard, that the victorious army of Edward were alarmed, and that one of it chiefs stood entranced, at the voice of an old man from a rock. He who could talk thus of Gray's Old Man, must have an imagination dull as that of an old woman, whose youth had been occupied in making pies and puddings, — and nursing rickety children. He an admirer of Shakespeare! Whip me such critics, and such admirers, round Parnassus, O ye muses!" 10 October 1787; *Letters*, ed. Scott (1811) 1:342.

Edward Gardner: "Another excellence observable in Gray, is his judicious use of Alliteration. Johnson snarls at this art, as detracting from sublimity; but our poet



has applied it in such a manner, that it adds to, rather than lessens the force of the idea. Alliteration is skilfully used when it fixes the attention on a striking thought or epithet. 'Ruin seize thee, ruthless King.' Here the emphasis and the alliteration fall together, and point out the cause and the occasion of it; and many more such instances might be produced" in "The Poetry of Gray" *Miscellanies, in Prose and Verse* (1798) 1:39-40.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge: "An Author is obscure, when his conceptions are dim and imperfect, and his language incorrect, or unappropriate, or involved. A poem that abounds in allusions, like the Bard of Gray, or one that impersonates high and abstract truths, like Collins's Ode on the poetical character, claims not to be popular — but should be acquitted of obscurity. The deficiency is in the Reader. But this is a charge which every poet, whose imagination is warm and rapid, must expect from his contemporaries. Milton did not escape it; and it was adduced with virulence against Gray and Collins. We now hear no more of it; not that their poems are better understood at present, than they were at their first publication; but their fame is established; and a critic would accuse himself of frigidity or inattention, who should profess not to understand them" preface to *Poems* (1803) ix-x.

William Lisle Bowles: "The bard of Gray must be mentioned as ranking next to Dryden's ode [Alexander's Feast], if it be not superior" note in *Works of Pope* (1806) 1:173n.

Percival Stockdale: "The whole strain, and pictures of the poem deserve our admiration. The concluding stanza (that part of a poem which should always particularly draw forth the attention, and exertion of the poet) is extremely interesting; not only by its peculiar poetical excellence but by the series of elegant, and grand objects, which are brought to our lively, and ardent recollection. The moral, and inexhaustible magick of Spenser; the all-subduing muse of Shakespeare; the empress of the heart of man; the unequalled, and heavenly sublime of Milton; the graceful, and powerful negligence of Dryden, which conquers while it seems to play; the ethereal spirit, and the captivating harmony of Pope, are predicted, and painted in numbers worthy, of the national glory which they anticipate" *Lectures on the truly eminent English Poets* (1807) 2:588-89.



Thomas James Mathias: "He was indeed the inventor, it may be strictly said so, of a new lyrical metre in his own tongue. The peculiar formation of his strophe, antistrophe, and epode was unknown before him; and it could only have been planned and perfected by a master genius, who was equally skilled by long and repeated study, and by transfusion into his own mind, of the lyrick compositions of ancient Greece, and of the higher canzoni of the Tuscan poets 'di maggior carne e suono:' as it is termed in the commanding energy of their language. Antecedent to 'The Progress of Poetry' and to 'The Bard,' no such lyricks had appeared. There is not an ode in the English language which is constructed, like these two compositions, with such power, such majesty, and such sweetness, with such proportioned pauses and just cadences, with such regulated measures of the verse, with such master principles of lyrical art displayed and exemplified, and, at the same time, with such a concealment of the difficulty, which is lost in the softness and uninterrupted flowing of the lines in each stanza with such a musical magick, that every verse in it in succession dwells on the ear, and harmonizes with that which has gone before. If indeed the veil of classical reverence and of pardonable prejudice can be awhile removed, and if with honest unshrinking criticism we consider the subject as exemplified in Greece, and in Italy ancient and modern, and weigh the merits of any single composition of Pindar, of Horace, of Dante, of Petrarch, or of any of their successors, it will fade before that excellence which encompasses, with an incommunicable brightness, THE BARD OF GRAY" Works of Gray, ed. Mathias (1814) 2:607-08.

Richard Lovell Edgeworth and Maria Edgeworth: "This story depends upon nothing more than tradition. — It is a tradition, however, that has furnished a subject for a very fine ode, which, although it is obscure, has obtained a high rank in English poetry, a rank which it has preserved, notwithstanding the criticisms of Doctor Johnson, in his life of Gray. — An author like Johnson, who is himself a poet, should be cautious how he takes to pieces the structure of any work of imagination, which has gained the approbation of the public. His own poetry, is subject to a similar process, and he must be a poet of the very highest powers whose works can bear to be thus scrutinised. — I shall not trouble my young reader with criticisms, but I shall proceed with the poem, requesting indulgence in the arduous task which I have undertaken. It would not be difficult to explain this ode to persons used to the Lyric eccentricities of the ancients, — Lyric poetry is a



certain species of poetry usually sung to the lyre, and in which the boldest flights of imagination, and the greatest irregularities of expression were allowed. It is not easy to make children attend to an explanation of that which they fancy they already understand; nor is it easy, after they have heard the praises lavished upon a poem, to make them perceive that parts of it are inaccurate. — Therefore to attempt to explain Gray's celebrated Bard, is a task much more difficult, than to explain an ordinary poem, which prejudice had neither extolled nor depreciated above or below its merit" Readings in Poetry (1816) 142-44.

Joseph Cradock: "Garrick, it was well known, was a great mimick, and by his imitation at times rendered Johnson absolutely ridiculous. He would, in Johnson's uncouth manner, growl over four lines of Gray's Bard, without articulating many of the words. Once, however, amongst some partial friends, after a supper in Southampton-street, I ventured to assure Garrick that I could give those lines of 'Ruin seize thee, ruthless king,' without articulating any word at all; and, after a trial, this honourable palm was yielded up to me" Literary and Miscellaneous Memoirs (1828) 1:37.

George Saintsbury: "In a letter to West, when the writer was about six-and-twenty, we find it stated with equal dogmatism, truth, and independence of authority that 'the language of the age is never the language of poetry except among the French, whose verse, where the thought or image does not support it, differs nothing from prose,' with a long and valuable citation, illustrating this defence of 'poetic diction,' and no doubt thereby arousing the wrath of Wordsworth. Less developed, but equally important and equally original, is the subsequent description of our language as not being 'a settled thing' like the French. Gray, indeed, makes this with explicit reference only to the revival of archaisms, which he defends; but, as we see from other places as well as by natural deduction, it extends to reasonable neologisms also. In this respect Gray is with all the best original writers from Chaucer and Langland downwards, but against a respectably mistaken body of critics who would fain not merely introduce the caste system into English, but, like Sir Boyle Roche, make it hereditary in this caste not to have any children" History of English Criticism (1911) 249-50.



**The Poem – The Bard**

l. 1. "Ruin seize thee, ruthless King!

Confusion on thy banners wait,

Though fann'd by Conquest's crimson wing

They mock the air with idle state!

Helm, nor Hauberk's twisted mail,

Nor even thy virtues, Tyrant, shall avail

To save thy secret soul from nightly fears,

From Cambria's curse, from Cambria's tears!"

Such were the sounds, that o'er the crested pride

Of the first Edward scatter'd wild dismay,

As down the steep of Snowdon's shaggy side

He wound with toilsome march his long array.

Stout Glo'ster stood aghast in speechless trance;

To arms! cried Mortimer, and couch'd his quivering lance.

l. 2.

On a rock, whose haughty brow

Frowns o'er old Conway's foaming flood,

Robed in the sable garb of woe,

With haggard eyes the Poet stood;

(Loose his beard, and hoary hair

Stream'd, like a meteor, to the troubled air)



And, with a Master's hand and Prophet's fire,  
Struck the deep sorrows of his lyre.

"Hark, how each giant-oak, and desert cave,  
Sighs to the torrent's awful voice beneath!  
O'er thee, oh King! their hundred arms they wave,  
Revenge on thee in hoarser murmurs breathe;  
Vocal no more, since Cambria's fatal day,  
To high-born Hoel's harp, or soft Llewellyn's lay.

1. 3.

"Cold is Cadwallo's tongue,  
That hush'd the stormy main:  
Brave Urien sleeps upon his craggy bed:  
Mountains, ye mourn in vain  
Modred, whose magic song  
Made huge Plinlimmon bow his cloud-top'd head.  
On dreary Arvon's shore they lie,  
Smear'd with gore, and ghastly pale:  
Far, far aloof th' affrighted ravens sail;  
The famish'd Eagle screams, and passes by.  
Dear lost companions of my tuneful art,  
Dear, as the light, that visits these sad eyes,  
Dear, as the ruddy drops that warm my heart,



Ye died amidst your dying country's cries—

No more I weep. They do not sleep.

On yonder cliffs, a griesly band,

I see them sit, they linger yet,

Avengers of their native land:

With me in dreadful harmony they join,

And weave with bloody hands the tissue of thy line.

II. 1.

"Weave the warp, and weave the woof,

The winding-sheet of Edward's race.

Give ample room, and verge enough

The characters of hell to trace.

Mark the year, and mark the night,

When Severn shall re-echo with affright

The shrieks of death, thro' Berkley's roofs that ring,

Shrieks of an agonizing King!

She-Wolf of France, with unrelenting fangs,

That tear'st the bowels of thy mangled Mate,

From thee be born, who o'er thy country hangs

The scourge of Heav'n. What terrors round him wait!

Amazement in his van, with Flight combined,

And sorrow's faded form, and solitude behind.



II. 2.

"Mighty Victor, mighty Lord,  
Low on his funeral couch he lies!  
No pitying heart, no eye, afford  
A tear to grace his obsequies,  
Is the sable Warriour fled?  
Thy son is gone. He rests among the Dead.  
The Swarm, that in thy noon-tide beam were born?  
Gone to salute the rising Morn.  
Fair laughs the Morn, and soft the Zephyr blows,  
While proudly riding o'er the azure realm  
In gallant trim the gilded Vessel goes;  
Youth on the prow, and Pleasure at the helm:  
Regardless of the sweeping Whirlwind's sway,  
That, hush'd in grim repose, expects his evening-prey.

II. 3.

"Fill high the sparkling bowl,  
The rich repast prepare,  
Reft of a crown, he yet may share the feast:  
Close by the regal chair  
Fell Thirst and Famine scowl  
A baleful smile upon their baffled Guest.



Heard ye the din of battle bray,  
Lance to lance, and horse to horse?  
Long Years of havock urge their destined course,  
And thro' the kindred squadrons mow their way.  
Ye Towers of Julius, London's lasting shame,  
With many a foul and midnight murder fed,  
Revere his Consort's faith, his Father's fame,  
And spare the meek Usurper's holy head.  
Above, below, the rose of snow,  
Twined with her blushing foe, we spread:  
The bristled Boar in infant-gore  
Wallows beneath the thorny shade.  
Now, Brothers, bending o'er th' accursed loom,  
Stamp we our vengeance deep, and ratify his doom.

III. 1.

"Edward, lo! to sudden fate  
(Weave we the woof. The thread is spun.)  
Half of thy heart we consecrate.  
(The web is wove. The work is done.)'  
Stay, oh stay! nor thus forlorn  
Leave me unblest'd, unpitied, here to mourn:  
In yon bright track, that fires the western skies,



They melt, they vanish from my eyes.  
But oh! what solemn scenes on Snowdon's height  
Descending slow their glittering skirts unroll?  
Ye unborn Ages, crowd not on my soul!  
No more our long-lost Arthur we bewail.  
All-hail, ye genuine Kings, Britannia's Issue, hail!

III. 2.

"Girt with many a Baron bold  
Sublime their starry fronts they rear;  
And gorgeous Dames, and Statesmen old  
In bearded majesty, appear.  
In the midst a Form divine!  
Her eye proclaims her of the Briton-Line;  
Her lyon-port, her awe-commanding face.  
Attemper'd sweet to virgin-grace.  
What strings symphonious tremble in the air,  
What strains of vocal transport round her play!  
Hear from the grave, great Taliessin, hear;  
They breathe a soul to animate thy clay.  
Bright Rapture calls, and, soaring, as she sings,  
Waves in the eye of Heav'n her many-colour'd wings.



III. 3.

"The verse adorn again  
Fierce War, and faithful Love,  
And Truth severe, by fairy Fiction drest.  
In buskin'd measures move  
Pale Grief, and pleasing Pain,  
With Horror, Tyrant of the throbbing breast.  
A Voice, as of the Cherub-Choir,  
Gales from blooming Eden bear:  
And distant warblings lessen on my ear,  
That lost in long futurity expire.  
Fond impious Man, think'st thou yon sanguine cloud,  
Rais'd by thy breath, has quench'd the Orb of day?  
To-morrow he repairs the golden flood,  
And warms the nations with redoubled ray.  
Enough for me: with joy I see  
The different doom our Fates assign.  
Be thine Despair and scept'red Care:  
To triumph, or to lie, are mine."  
He spoke, and headlong, from the mountain's height  
Deep in the roaring tide he plung'd to endless night.

[pp. 13-21]



### Gray's annotations

4-Mocking the air with colours idly spread.

Shakespear's King John. [V. i. 72]

5-The Hauberk was a texture of steel ringlets, or rings interwoven, forming a coat of mail, that sate close to the body, and adapted itself to every motion.

9— [By] The crested adder's pride.

Dryden's Indian Queen. [III. i. 84]

11-Snowdon was a name given by the Saxons to that mountainous tract, which the Welch themselves call Craigian-eryri: it included all the highlands of Caernarvonshire and Merionethshire, as far east as the river Conway. R. Hygden[,] speaking of the castle of Conway built by King Edward the first, says, "Ad ortum amnis Conway ad clivum montis Eryry [At the source of the River Conway on the slope of Mt. Eryry];" and Matthew of Westminster, (ad ann. 1283.) "Apud Aberconway ad pedes montis Snowdoniae fecit erigi castrum forte [Near (or at) Aberconway at the foot of Mt. Snowdon, he caused a fortified camp to be constructed]."

13-Gilbert de Clare, surnamed the Red, Earl of Gloucester and Hertford, son-in-law to King Edward.

14-Edmond de Mortimer, Lord of Wigmore. They both were Lords-Marchers, whose lands lay on the borders of Wales, and probably accompanied the King in this expedition.

18-[... haggard, wch conveys to you the the Idea of a Witch, is indeed only a metaphor taken from an unreclaim'd Hawk, wch is called a Haggard, & looks wild & farouche & jealous of its liberty.' Letter to Wharton, 21 Aug. 1755, T & W no. 205.]

19-The image was taken from a well-known picture of Raphael, representing the Supreme Being in the vision of Ezekiel: there are two of these paintings (both believed original), one at Florence, the other at Paris.



20-Shone, like a meteor, streaming to the wind.

Milton's *Paradise Lost*. [i. 537]

35-The shores of Caernarvonshire opposite to the isle of Anglesey.

38-Cambden and others observe, that eagles used annually to build their aerie among the rocks of Snowdon, which from thence (as some think) were named by the Welch Craigan-eryri, or the crags of the eagles. At this day (I am told) the highest point of Snowdon is called the eagle's nest. That bird is certainly no stranger to this island, as the Scots, and the people of Cumberland, Westmoreland, &c. can testify: it even has built its nest in the Peak of Derbyshire. [See Willoughby's *Ornithol.* published by Ray.] [John Ray (1627-1705) published (1676) and translated (London, 1678) the *Ornithologia* of his patron Francis Willughby (1635-72).]

40-As dear to me as are the ruddy drops,

That visit my sad heart—

Shakesp. *Jul. Caesar*. [II. i. 289-90]

47-See the Norwegian Ode, that follows. [Fatal Sisters]

54-Edward the Second, cruelly butchered in Berkley-Castle [in 1327 near the Severn River in western England].

57-Isabel of France, Edward the Second's adulterous Queen.

59-Triumphs of Edward the Third in France.

64-Death of that King, abandoned by his Children, and even robbed in his last moments by his Courtiers and his Mistress [Alice Perrers, in 1377].

67-Edward, the Black Prince, dead some time before his Father [in 1376].

71-Magnificence of Richard the Second's reign. See Froissard, and other contemporary Writers.



77-Richard the Second, (as we are told by Archbishop Scroop and the confederate Lords in their manifesto, by Thomas of Walsingham, and all the older Writers)[.] was starved to death [in 1400]. The story of his assassination by Sir Piers of Exon, is of much later date.

83-Ruinous civil wars of York and Lancaster.

87-Henry the Sixth, George Duke of Clarence, Edward the Fifth, Richard Duke of York, &c. believed to be murdered secretly in the Tower of London. The oldest part of that structure is vulgarly attributed to Julius Caesar.

89-[Consort] Margaret of Anjou, a woman of heroic spirit, who struggled hard to save her Husband and her Crown.

[Father] Henry the Fifth.

90-Henry the Sixth very near being canonized. The line of Lancaster had no right of inheritance to the Crown.

91-The white and red roses, devices of York and Lancaster [presumably woven above and below on the loom].

93-The silver Boar was the badge of Richard the Third; whence he was usually known in his own time by the name of the Boar.

99-Eleanor of Castile died a few years after the conquest of Wales. The heroic proof she gave of her affection for her Lord [she is supposed to have sucked the poison from a wound Edward I received] is well known. The monuments of his regret, and sorrow for the loss of her, are still to be seen at Northampton, Geddington, Waltham, and other places.

109-It was the common belief of the Welch nation, that King Arthur was still alive in Fairy-Land, and should return again to reign over Britain.

110-Both Merlin [Myrddin] and Taliessin had prophesied, that the Welch should regain their sovereignty over this island; which seemed to be accomplished in the House of Tudor [1768].

Accession of the House of Tudor [1757].



117-Speed relating an audience given by Queen Elizabeth to Paul Dzialinski, Ambassadour of Poland, says, 'And thus she, lion-like rising, daunted the malapert Orator no less with her stately port and majestical deporture, than with the tartnesse of her princelie checkes.' [John Speed (1552-1629) published his *History of Great Britaine ... to ... King James in 1611.*]

121-Taliessin, Chief of the Bards, flourished in the VIth Century. His works are still preserved, and his memory held in high veneration among his Countrymen. [His Book exists in only a thirteenth-century version and many of the poems in it may not be by Taliessin.]

126-Fierce wars and faithful loves shall moralize my song.

Spenser's *Proëme to the Fairy Queen* [l. 9].

128-Shakespear.

131-Milton.

133-The succession of Poets after Milton's time.

. Gray.

### **The Progress of Poesy.**

On 26 December, 1754, was completed the ode entitled *The Progress of Poesy*; it had been nearly finished two years before. It was not published until 1759, when Walpole secured it for the Strawberry hill press, together with *The Bard*; the motto [char] from Pindar belongs to them both.

Gray did not attach any great value to the rule of strophe and antistrophe, but he strongly objected to the merely irregular stanzas which Cowley introduced. It was probably Congreve who first wrote a real pindaric ode; and, whatever the value of his *Ode to the Queen*, it did something, as Mason points out, to obviate Gray's objection to this form. It was written in short stanzas, and the recurrence of the same metre was more recognisable to the ear than when it was separated by a long interval from its counterpart.



In Gray's time, the muse was always making the grand tour. If the title of Collins's Ode to Simplicity were not misleading, we should find in it an embryo and from Italy to England. The clue to the mystery of the title is found when we discover that, to Collins, "simplicity" is "nature," as Pope understood the word—nature identified with Homer, and with all her great poetic interpreters, who idealise but do not distort her. These pilgrimages of the muse were started by Thomson, who, in his Liberty, chose her as his travelling companion, and brought her home intolerably dull, and, not long before Gray's death, by Goldsmith in his Traveller.

The most easy way of criticising *The Progress of Poesy* and *The Bard* is to start by criticising their critics, beginning with Francklin, regius professor of Greek at Cambridge, who mistook the "Aeolian lyre" invoked in the first line of *The Progress* for the instrument invented by Oswald, and objected that "such an instrument as the Aeolian harp, which is altogether uncertain and irregular must be very ill adapted to the dance which is one continued regular movement." Garrick, who spoke from professional knowledge, grasped the truth better, and said that Gray was the only poet who understood dancing. His original in the place which he has in mind is a line of Homer (*Odyss.*, bk. VIII, l. 265), but he borrows without acknowledgment the word "many-twinkling" from Thomson (*Spring*, l. 158) who uses it of the leaves of the aspen. The poem begins appropriately with an imitation of Horace's description of Pindar,

In profound, unmeasurable song

The deep-mouth'd Pindar, foaming, pours along.

This beautiful poem is marred by a personal reference at the end, as in the case, to which we have already referred, of the *Elegy*.

Between *The Progress of Poesy* and *The Bard* comes the Fragment of an Ode found in the MS at Pembroke. It is without a title: that which it now bears, On the pleasure arising from Vicissitude, is probably due to Mason, who attempted to complete the poem and excelled himself in infelicity, filling up the last stanza as we have it, thus:



To these, if Hebe's self should bring  
The purest cup from Pleasure's spring  
Say, can they taste the flavour high  
Of sober, simple, genuine Joy? 19

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Note 18. Subsequently the words that follow in Pindar, [char], were added, when Gray found explanatory notes were needed. [ back ]

Note 19. For another stanza he is indebted to a suggestion in Gray's pocket-book, but has made a poor use of it. [ back ]

Note 20. Gray almost directly imitates here Gresset, a favourite poet with him (Surma convalescence). [ back ]

**"The Progress of Poesy. A Pindaric Ode"**

Λων' ντα συνετο' σιν' Λς

δ' τ' π' ν' μηνέων χατίζει.

Pindar, Olymp[ian Odes]. II. [85]

1. 1 Awake, Aeolian lyre, awake,
- 2 And give to rapture all thy trembling strings.
- 3 From Helicon's harmonious springs
- 4 A thousand rills their mazy progress take:
- 5 The laughing flowers, that round them blow,
- 6 Drink life and fragrance as they flow.



- 7 Now the rich stream of music winds along,  
8 Deep, majestic, smooth, and strong,  
9 Through verdant vales and Ceres' golden reign:  
10 Now rowling down the steep amain,  
11 Headlong, impetuous, see it pour:  
12 The rocks and nodding groves rebellow to the roar.
- I. 2. 13 Oh! Sovereign of the willing soul,  
14 Parent of sweet and solemn-breathing airs,  
15 Enchanting shell! the sullen Cares  
16 And frantic Passions hear thy soft control.  
17 On Thracia's hills the Lord of War,  
18 Has curbed the fury of his car,  
19 And dropped his thirsty lance at thy command.  
20 Perching on the sceptered hand  
21 Of Jove, thy magic lulls the feathered king  
22 With ruffled plumes and flagging wing:  
23 Quenched in dark clouds of slumber lie



24 The terror of his beak, and lightnings of his eye.

1. 3. 25 Thee the voice, the dance, obey,

26 Tempered to thy warbled lay.

27 O'er Idalia's velvet-green

28 The rosy-crowned Loves are seen

29 On Cytherea's day

30 With antic Sports and blue-eyed Pleasures,

31 Frisking light in frolic measures;

32 Now pursuing, now retreating.

33 Now in circling troops they meet:

34 To brisk notes in cadence beating

35 Glance their many-twinkling feet.

36 Slow melting strains their queen's approach declare:

37 Where'er she turns the Graces homage pay.

38 With arms sublime, that float upon the air,

39 In gliding state she wins her easy way:

40 O'er her warm cheek and rising bosom move



41 The bloom of young desire and purple light of love.

II. 1. 42 Man's feeble race what ills await,

43 Labour, and penury, the racks of pain,

44 Disease, and sorrow's weeping train,

45 And death, sad refuge from the storms of fate!

46 The fond complaint, my song, disprove,

47 And justify the laws of Jove.

48 Say, has he given in vain the heavenly Muse?

49 Night, and all her sickly dews,

50 Her spectres wan, and birds of boding cry,

51 He gives to range the dreary sky:

52 Till down the eastern cliffs afar

53 Hyperion's march they spy, and glittering shafts of war.

II. 2. 54 In climes beyond the solar road,

55 Where shaggy forms o'er ice-built mountains roam,

56 The Muse has broke the twilight-gloom



- 57 To cheer the shivering native's dull abode.  
58 And oft, beneath the odorous shade  
59 Of Chile's boundless forests laid,  
60 She deigns to hear the savage youth repeat  
61 In loose numbers wildly sweet  
62 Their feather-cinctured chiefs, and dusky loves.  
63 Her track, where'er the goddess roves,  
64 Glory pursue, and generous Shame,  
65 The unconquerable Mind, and Freedom's holy flame.
- II. 3. 66 Woods that wave o'er Delphi's steep,  
67 Isles that crown the Aegean deep,  
68 Fields that cool Ilissus laves,  
69 Or where Maeander's amber waves  
70 In lingering lab'rins ths creep,  
71 How do your tuneful echoes languish,  
72 Mute, but to the voice of anguish?  
73 Where each old poetic mountain



- 74 Inspiration breathed around:  
75 Every shade and hallowed fountain  
76 Murmured deep a solemn sound:  
77 Till the sad Nine in Greece's evil hour  
78 Left their Parnassus for the Latian plains.  
79 Alike they scorn the pomp of tyrant-power,  
80 And coward Vice that revels in her chains.  
81 When Latium had her lofty spirit lost,  
82 They sought, oh Albion! next thy sea-encircled coast.
- III. 1. 83 Far from the sun and summer-gale,  
84 In thy green lap was Nature's darling laid,  
85 What time, where lucid Avon strayed,  
86 To him the mighty Mother did unveil  
87 Her awful face: the dauntless child  
88 Stretched forth his little arms and smiled.  
89 'This pencil take,' (she said) 'whose colours clear  
90 Richly paint the vernal year:



91 Thine too these golden keys, immortal boy!

92 This can unlock the gates of joy;

93 Of horror that, and thrilling fears,

94 Or ope the sacred source of sympathetic tears.'

III. 2. 95 Nor second he, that rode sublime

96 Upon the seraph-wings of Ecstasy,

97 The secrets of the abyss to spy.

98 He passed the flaming bounds of place and time:

99 The living throne, the sapphire-blaze,

100 Where angels tremble while they gaze,

101 He saw; but blasted with excess of light,

102 Closed his eyes in endless night.

103 Behold, where Dryden's less presumptuous car,

104 Wide o'er the fields of glory bear

105 Two coursers of ethereal race,

106 With necks in thunder clothed, and long-resounding pace.



III. 3. 107 Hark, his hands the lyre explore!

108 Bright-eyed Fancy hovering o'er

109 Scatters from her pictured urn

110 Thoughts that breathe, and words that burn.

111 But ah! 'tis heard no more—

112 Oh! lyre divine, what daring spirit

113 Wakes thee now? Though he inherit

114 Nor the pride, nor ample pinion,

115 That the Theban eagle bear

116 Sailing with supreme dominion

117 Through the azure deep of air:

118 Yet oft before his infant eyes would run

119 Such forms, as glitter in the Muse's ray

120 With orient hues, unborrowed of the sun:

121 Yet shall he mount, and keep his distant way

122 Beyond the limits of a vulgar fate,

123 Beneath the Good how far— but far above the Great.



### Explanation

1-Awake [up], my glory: awake, lute and harp.

David's Psalms. [Prayer Book version, lvii. 9]

Pindar styles his own poetry with its musical accompaniments, [Greek sentence (omitted), translation:], Aeolian song, Aeolian strings, the breath of the Aeolian flute.

3-The subject and simile, as usual with Pindar, are united. The various sources of poetry, which gives life and lustre to all it touches, are here described; its quiet majestic progress enriching every subject (otherwise dry and barren) with a pomp of diction and luxuriant harmony of numbers; and its more rapid and irresistible course, when swoln and hurried away by the conflict of tumultuous passion .

13-Power of harmony to calm the turbulent sallies of the soul. The thoughts are borrowed from the first Pythian of Pindar. [See note to l. 20.]

20-This is a weak imitation of some incomparable lines in the same Ode. [Pindar, Pythian Ode I, 1-12.]

25-Power of harmony to produce all the graces of motion in the body.

35-[Greek line (omitted)] [He (Odysseus) gazed at the quick twinkling of (the dancers') feet; and he wondered in his heart.]

Homer. Od[yssey]. O. [viii. 265]

41-[Greek line (omitted)] [And on his rose-red cheeks there gleams the light of love.]

Phrynichus, apud Athenaeum. [Deipnosophistae, xiii. 604a]

[Modern texts give the line as follows: Greek line (omitted).]

42-To compensate the real and imaginary ills of life, the Muse was given to Mankind by the same Providence that sends the Day by its chearful presence to dispel the gloom and terrors of the Night.



52-Or seen the Morning's well-appointed Star

Come marching up the eastern hills afar.

Cowley. [Brutus, an Ode, st. 4]

54-Extensive influence of poetic Genius over the remotest and most uncivilized nations: its connection with liberty, and the virtues that naturally attend on it. [See the Erse, Norwegian, and Welch Fragments, the Lapland and American songs.]

[solar road]

"Extra anni solisque vias—" [Beyond the paths of the year and the sun—]

Virgil. [Aeneid, vi. 796]

"Tutta lontana dal camin del sole." [Quite far from the road of the sun.]

Petrarch, Canzon 2. [Canzoniere, 'Canzone II', l. 48]

66-Progress of Poetry from Greece to Italy, and from Italy to England. Chaucer was not unacquainted with the writings of Dante or of Petrarch. The Earl of Surrey and Sir Tho. Wyatt had travelled in Italy, and formed their taste there; Spenser imitated the Italian writers; Milton improved on them: but this School expired soon after the Restoration, and a new one arose on the French model, which has subsisted ever since.

84-[Nature's Darling] Shakespear.

95-[He] Milton.

98-"—flammantia moenia mundi." [—the flaming ramparts of the world].

Lucretius. [De Rerum Natura, i. 74]

99-For the spirit of the living creature was in the wheels - And above the firmament, that was over their heads, was the likeness of a throne, as the



appearance of a sapphire-stone. - This was the appearance [of the likeness] of the glory of the Lord.

Ezekiel i. 20, 26, 28.

102-[Greek line (omitted)] [(the Muse) took away (his) eyes, but she gave (him the gift of) sweet song].

Homer. Od[yssey, viii. 64].

105-Meant to express the stately march and sounding energy of Dryden's rhimes.

106-Hast thou cloathed his neck with thunder?

Job. [xxxix. 19]

110-Words, that weep, and tears, that speak.

Cowley. ["The Prophet" in The Mistress, line 20]

111-We have had in our language no other odes of the sublime kind, than that of Dryden on St. Cecilia's day: for Cowley (who had his merit) yet wanted judgment, style, and harmony, for such a task. That of Pope is not worthy of so great a man. Mr. Mason indeed of late days has touched the true chords, and with a masterly hand, in some of his Choruses, - above all in the last of Caractacus,

Hark! heard ye not yon footstep dread? &c.

115-[Greek line (omitted)] [against the god-like bird of Zeus].

[Pindar] Olymp. 2. [88]

Pindar compares himself to that bird, and his enemies to ravens that croak and clamour in vain below, while it pursues its flight, regardless of their noise.



### UNIT III

#### **THE RIVALS** by Richard Brinsley Sheridan

#### **THE AUTHOR**

Richard Brinsley Sheridan (1751-1816) was born in Dublin to a mother who was a playwright and a father who was an actor. He thus came by his talents honestly, though he far exceeded the modest accomplishments of his parents. Already one of the most brilliant and witty dramatists of the English stage before the age of thirty, he gave up his writing and went on to become the owner and producer of the Drury Lane theater, a well-regarded Whig member of the English Parliament, and a popular man-about-town.

Despite his family's poverty, he attended Harrow, a famous prep school, though he appears to have been unhappy there, largely because the rich boys at the school looked down on him because of his humble origins. The bitter taste of his school years drove his later ambitions, both for literary and political success and for acceptance in the highest strata of society. He used his profits from his writing to buy the theater and his profits from the theater to finance his political career and socially-active lifestyle.

Sheridan was a tireless lover and a man who, no matter how much he earned, always managed to spend more. In 1772, he married a lovely young singer named Elizabeth Ann Linley; she had already, before her twentieth birthday, attracted the attention of several wealthy suitors twice her age, but she and Sheridan eloped to France without the knowledge or permission of either set of parents. Though she loved him deeply, he was not a one-woman sort of man, and his constant infidelities led to a temporary separation in 1790. She died of tuberculosis shortly thereafter, and Sheridan married Hester Jane Ogle, a girl half his age, three years later, though again he was frequently unfaithful to his long-suffering wife.

As a writer, Sheridan leaped to the attention of the theater-going public in 1775, when *The Rivals* and *The Duenna*, a light opera, reached the stage. In 1777 he produced his most famous comedy, *The School for Scandal*. After the debut of *The Critic* in 1779, he gave up writing and turned to producing, politics, and high living. As a result of a complete inability to handle money or follow a budget, a



lifestyle that far exceeded his income, and lifelong bouts of drunkenness and debauchery, when Sheridan lost his seat in Parliament, he was left as a sick old man, carted off to the poorhouse by the local constabulary. His second wife stayed by his side to the end, and he died in poverty in July of 1816, but was buried with honors in Westminster Abbey.

The Rivals is a comedy of manners, a farce of mistaken identity that has much in common with Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer*, which came out two years earlier. Like Goldsmith's comedy, a main character masquerades as someone of a lower class to gain romantic advantage, the young lovers must overcome the interference of a country bumpkin and an elderly rich aunt, and a second couple provides a subplot and foil to the main romance. Perhaps the most memorable character in *The Rivals* is the elderly aunt, Mrs. Malaprop, who consistently butchers the English language, taking her name from the solecism in which she so frequently engages. After the first performance of *The Rivals*, it was panned by the critics, and Sheridan hastily revised it in less than two weeks, shortening it by over an hour, making some of the characters more sympathetic, and cleaning up the language, after which it was praised enthusiastically.

### MAJOR CHARACTERS

- Sir Anthony Absolute - A wealthy country gentleman who assumes that those around him will naturally obey his wishes, he has a terrible temper but is also quick to forgive.
- Captain Jack Absolute - Sir Anthony's son, he is enamored of Lydia Languish, and has disguised himself as Ensign Beverley in order to win her hand. Despite the revelation of his deception, he and Lydia wind up together.
- Fag - Jack "gentleman's gentleman," he often carries messages and transmits information.
- Julia Melville - Sir Anthony's ward and Lydia's cousin, she is in love with Faulkland. She is easily the most sensible of the four young lovers in the story.
- Mrs. Malaprop - Elderly aunt of Lydia who controls her fortune, she butchers the English language in accordance with her name.



- Lydia Languish - Mrs. Malaprop's niece, she is a hopeless romantic as a result of her obsession with romance novels. She longs to fall in love with a poor man like Ensign Beverley, elope, and be deprived of her inheritance for love, and is terribly disappointed when she finds out that Jack is wealthy, and that their elders approve of the match.
- Lucy - Mrs. Malaprop's maid, she is adept at playing all sides against the middle for her own benefit. Her willingness to spread the information she knows for pecuniary advantage helps drive the plot.
- Faulkland - A friend of Jack Absolute, he is in love with Julia Melville. He is a melancholy lover who is only happy when he is miserable, and is constantly convincing himself that Julia doesn't really love him and taking her words in the worst possible light. She nonetheless forgives him in the end, and they get together.
- Bob Acres - A country simpleton who tries to rise in the world by offering himself as a suitor to Lydia, he never has a chance, and is manipulated into a duel he doesn't want by Sir Lucius. He ultimately gives up any claim on Lydia and gladly foregoes the duel.
- David - Bob Acres' servant, he is a cowardly country bumpkin.
- Sir Lucius O'Trigger - An Irish nobleman with a hair-trigger temper who loves to fight duels and encourage others to do the same, he is involved in an anonymous romance by letter with a woman who he thinks is Lydia, but in reality is Mrs. Malaprop. When he finds out he has been deceived, he gladly gives up Lydia to Jack, but refuses to pursue a romance with Mrs. Malaprop.

#### NOTABLE QUOTATIONS

"But you know I lose most of my fortune if I marry without my aunt's consent, till of age; and that is what I have determined to do, ever since I knew the penalty. Nor could I love the man who would wish to wait a day for the alternative."  
(Lydia Languish, lii)



"Obligation! why a water spaniel would have done as much! Well, I should never think of giving my heart to a man because he could swim!" (Lydia Languish, Iii)

"Thought does not become a young woman." (Mrs. Malaprop, Iii)

"It is not to be wondered at, ma'am - all this is the natural consequence of teaching girls to read. Had I a thousand daughters, by Heaven! - I'd as soon have them taught the black art as their alphabet." (Sir Anthony Absolute, Iii)

"Why what difference does that make? ... If you have the estate, you must take it with the live stock on it, as it stands." (Sir Anthony Absolute, Iii)

"Ah! my soul, what a life will we then live! Love shall be our idol and support! we will worship him with a monastic strictness; abjuring all worldly toys, to center every thought and action there. Proud of calamity, we will enjoy the wreck of wealth; while the surrounding gloom of adversity shall make the flame of our pure love show doubly bright." (Jack Absolute, IIIiii)

"Oh, there's nothing to be hopes for from her! she's as headstrong as an allegory on the banks of the Nile." (Mrs. Malaprop, IIIiii)

"Now I think he has given you the greatest provocation in the world. Can a man commit a more heinous offense against another than to fall in love with the same woman?" (Lucius O'Trigger, IIIiv)

"What the devil signifies right, when your honor is concerned? Do you think Achilles, or my little Alexander the Great, ever inquired where the right lay? No, by my soul, they drew their broadswords, and they left the lazy sons of peace to settle the justice of it." (Lucius O'Trigger, IIIiv)

ACRES: "Think of that, David - think what it would be to disgrace my ancestors!" DAVID: "Under favor, the surest way of not disgracing them is to keep as long as you can out of their company." (Ivi)

## NOTES

Act I, scene I - The entire play takes place in Bath, a popular vacation spot for the upper classes, in the course of a single day. In the opening scene, Thomas, the



manservant of Sir Anthony Absolute, encounters Fag, gentleman's gentleman to his son, Captain Absolute. Sir Anthony and his retinue have just arrived in Bath, and Fag informs him that Captain Anthony is masquerading as Ensign Beverley in order to win the heart of Lydia Languish, a wealthy young woman who wants to marry for love rather than money and would have no interest in him if she thought he were rich, but that he has to overcome the objections of her wealthy and snobbish aunt Mrs. Malaprop. Thomas then tells Fag that Sir Anthony's ward, Julia Melville, is engaged to be married to Mr. Faulkland.

Act 1, scene 2 - Lydia, who is devoted to sentimental romance novels, has sent her maid Lucy to find some, but Lucy reports that all the book her mistress requested are not to be found, and returns with a poor-quality collection. Soon, Lydia's cousin Julia arrives. The two are best friends, though Julia is somewhat plainer and much more sensible than her cousin. Lydia tells Julia that she is in love with Ensign Beverley, but that her aunt has forbidden her to see him because of an offensive letter she intercepted. Meanwhile, Mrs. Malaprop herself has fallen in love with a gentleman named Sir Lucius O'Trigger, and is corresponding with him by using a pen name. Lydia admits that, in order to pique Beverley's interest, she wrote a letter to herself accusing him of seeing another girl. He hotly denied it, of course, and she had not seen him since. Lydia is determined to marry beneath her social station, and lose her fortune in the process, because that is what romantic heroines do in the novels she reads. She then asks Julia how her romance with Faulkland is going, and Julia, while acknowledging that he is definitely a slow mover and that she has not informed him of their presence in Bath, then goes on to praise the quality of his character, in addition to the fact that he saved her life in a boating accident. Sir Anthony and Mrs. Malaprop then arrive, and Julia beats a hasty retreat to avoid having to listen to Lydia's aunt who constantly butchers the King's English, while Lydia quickly hides her romance novels. Mrs. Malaprop scold Lydia for not seeking her consent for marriage, and Lydia insists she will never do so. She then sends Lydia to her room. Mrs. Malaprop and Sir Anthony then engage in a conversation about how horrible it is for girls to be educated, and affirm that libraries are the seed-bed of all evil. Sir Anthony has proposed an engagement between Lydia and his son Jack (Captain Absolute), not realizing that his son is already wooing the young lady in the character of Ensign Beverley. Mrs. Malaprop agrees to the arrangement, and says



that she will send away Bob Acres, a young bumpkin who had shown interest in Lydia. Sir Anthony says he will beat his son if necessary to get him to agree, and proposes that Mrs. Malaprop starve Lydia for a few days if necessary to gain her consent. Mrs. Malaprop sends Lucy with a letter for Lucius O'Trigger. After everyone else has left, Lucy schemes as to how she might enrich herself by betraying everyone's secrets to everyone else. She has taken money for helping the Lydia and Beverley get together, intends to betray them to Mrs. Malaprop when the inducement is right, has taken money from Bob Acres to deliver letters that never reached their destination, and has convinced O'Trigger that he is wooing Lydia rather than her elderly aunt.

Act II, scene 1 - In Captain Absolute's rented quarters, Fag is telling him of his father's arrival in Bath. Fag assures him that he lied about his reason for being there, but in the process lies to

his master about his conversation with Thomas. Jack discovers that Faulkland is upstairs changing, but is not yet aware of Sir Anthony and Julia's arrival. Faulkland comes down, moping about in his love for Julia, and encourages Jack to reveal his true identity to Lydia and gain the consent of his father and her aunt. Jack has no doubt that he could pull it off, but suspects that Lydia would want nothing to do with something so routine as a normal arranged marriage, public wedding, and inherited fortune. Faulkland, meanwhile, worries about the state of Julia's health, and becomes ecstatic when Jack tells him that she is not only in perfect health, but also in Bath. Bob Acres then arrives; he hates Ensign Beverley, his rival for Lydia's affections, but is quite friendly with Jack Absolute, not realizing that the two are the same man. Acres is a dim-witted country boy trying very hard to impress his social betters. Having been introduced to Faulkland, he assures him that Julia is in good health and quite happy. Faulkland, of course, then becomes depressed because she has been happy, singing and dancing while separated from him, and gets Jack to confirm that he has been anything but the life of the party while separated from his dear Julia. Faulkland leaves in despair. Bob then speaks of his love for Lydia, and tells Jack how he hopes she will be impressed by his new genteel manners and dress; Jack humors him, barely avoiding cracking a smile. Bob then leaves, and Sir Anthony arrives. He announces to Jack that he intends to give him his inheritance within two weeks - a substantial estate, and that he has arranged a good marriage for him. Jack refuses



questions the sincerity of her love for him, since true love will consider the loved one the fairest of all. The conversation continues, with Faulkland deliberately putting the worst possible construction on every assertion of love Julia makes. She finally breaks down and runs from the room in tears. Faulkland then alternately accuses himself of cruelty and Julia of coquetry and inconstancy, then leaves the house in despair.

Act III, scene 3 - In Mrs. Malaprop's drawing room, Jack brings a letter of introduction from his father. Jack flatters her outrageously, about which she is inordinately pleased, but informs him that her niece has attached her affections to a beggarly ensign. Jack insists that he does not consider this an insurmountable problem, but Mrs. Malaprop then brings out a recent letter from Beverley, which she has intercepted. She asks Jack to read the letter, in which he describes Lydia's aunt as "an old she-dragon ... [who] deck[s] her chat with hard words which she doesn't understand." Jack sympathizes with the old lady, and suggests that she allow Lydia to continue corresponding with Beverley, even to the point of planning an elopement, at which time Jack will step in, apprehend the scoundrel, and make off with Lydia himself. Mrs. Malaprop, of course, thinks this is a wonderful idea. She then calls Lydia downstairs; Jack, fearing that to reveal himself is to lose Lydia's affections, decides to see if she recognizes him in his captain's garb. Lydia enters, complaining of her trials in having to meet with one who is not her true love. When Jack turns, she recognizes him as the man she knows as Beverley, but he quiets her by telling her that he has fooled her aunt by passing himself off as Captain Absolute. They exchange flourishes of flowery love language, in which Jack is obviously insincere, knowing that Lydia is a sucker for such talk. Mrs. Malaprop then enters at the side, and Lydia, for her benefit, insults Jack to his face, insisting that she will be true to Beverley and have nothing to do with Captain Absolute. Mrs. Malaprop responds angrily to Lydia, but Jack keeps a stiff upper lip and assures her that he still has hope of winning her over.

Act III, scene 4 - In Bob Acres' rented lodgings. Bob is trying on his new clothes, which he thinks are the latest fashion, but which merely make him look ridiculous - as Sheridan puts it, "half country race-track jockey and half town sharper." When he asks his servant David how he looks, the latter assures him that he looks wonderful, and that the transformation is so complete that the people at home



wouldn't even recognize him; indeed, even his dog wouldn't know him. After David leaves, Bob practices his dancing steps with little or no success. Then Lucius O'Trigger enters, and Bob complains that he has been displaced in his attempts to win Lydia's hand, he assumes by Ensign Beverley. O'Trigger then tells him that the only solution is to fight a duel. Bob works himself into a frenzy of bravado, and sits down to compose a letter challenging Beverley to a duel. He is ready to vent his spleen, but O'Trigger insists that all the niceties should be observed, and he dictates the letter verbatim. He agrees to witness the duel, but tells Bob that he is considering mounting a challenge himself, to a young captain who insulted his Irish heritage (unaware, of course, that both are ready to challenge the same man).

Act IV, scene 1 - When David returns, Bob tells him about the impending duel, and David tries to talk him out of it, echoing the description of honor given by Falstaff in Henry IV, part 1. Bob refuses to be swayed, however, though his voice and manner belie his words, and tells David that he has sent for his good friend Jack Absolute to be the bearer of the letter containing the challenge.

Jack enters, and Bob gives him the letter and asks him to deliver it to Ensign Beverley. Jack agrees to do so, but when Bob asks him to serve as his second in the duel, Jack answers that such a thing would be improper. Bob responds that Sir Lucius will be his second, and Jack wishes him the best. Before he goes, Bob tells Jack to describe him in ferocious terms to the ensign, hoping against hope that Beverley will refuse to fight; Jack leaves, referring to his friend as "Fighting Bob."

Act IV, scene 2 - Meanwhile, in Mrs. Malaprop's drawing room, she and Lydia are having an argument. The aunt is praising Jack, while Lydia as steadfastly praises Beverley. Then Sir Anthony and Jack arrive. Lydia, refusing to see them, turns a chair around to face the wall and sits in it. Jack, in an obvious quandary, tells his father to leave him and Lydia alone; Lydia, facing the wall, wonders why her aunt hasn't noticed that the real Captain Anthony is not the same man who had visited earlier in the day. Sir Anthony refuses to leave, Jack refuses to speak (knowing that Lydia would recognize his voice and the jig would be up), and Lydia, still in a snit, refuses to turn around. The result: stalemate. Jack, trying to resolve the problem, begins speaking in a disguised voice, much to the



consternation of his father. Finally, he whispers to Lydia not to be surprised, but she recognizes his voice, turns joyfully, and identifies him as her Ensign Beverley. Chaos ensues. Jack finally admits the ruse he practices on Lydia, and she sulks because now there will be no romantic elopement. Sir Anthony is proud of his son's cleverness, but Mrs. Malaprop suddenly realized that she was now face to face with the writer of the insulting letter she had intercepted. Sir Anthony begs her to forgive and forget, and she relents and agrees to do so. Sir Anthony and Mrs. Malaprop gaily make their exit, but when Jack turns to Lydia, she is still as cold as ice. She insists that their relationship must end because of his deception, and he cajoles her to no avail. When Sir Anthony and Mrs. Malaprop reenter expecting to find the lovers in one another's arms, they are startled to find them at odds. Lydia stalks angrily out of the room, and Sir Anthony makes the mistake of thinking that she is upset because Jack has made improper advances - an idea that cheers him and makes him remember his own conduct during courtship.

Act IV, scene 3 - Outside, Sir Lucius impatiently awaits Jack's arrival, intending to challenge him to a duel. When Jack arrives, he initiates a quarrel, but Jack is so preoccupied with Lydia's bizarre rejection of him that he pays little attention. Jack has no idea what he is talking about, but distractedly agrees to fight; the time and place are the same set by Bob Acres for fighting Beverley. Sir Lucius walks away just as Faulkland arrives. Jack tells him that Lydia has rejected him, and asks him to serve as his second in the duel with Sir Lucius. Faulkland agrees, meanwhile continuing to bemoan his shattered relationship with Julia. A letter arrives from Julia asking in the gentlest of terms for him to come to her, but he then complains that she forgave him too readily. He determines to use the duel to test her love for him.

Act V, scene 1 - Julia is in her dressing room. Faulkland enters and tells her that he has been drawn into a quarrel and must flee the country immediately. She offers to run away with him and become his wife. He tests her by continuing to come up with new ways to talk her out of it, but she remains steadfast. Faulkland finally admits that he has been testing her and that no such quarrel existed. She is infuriated by his lack of trust (in the original script, she is angry because he proposes that she be his mistress without benefit of marriage), and insists that she can now



never be his, and will never belong to another; she then exits the room with quiet dignity. Faulkland, again in despair, leaves shortly thereafter. Lydia then arrives to speak with Julia, hoping her sensible cousin can talk her out of her anger with Jack Absolute. Julia is clearly upset, but will not tell Lydia the reason for her distress. Lydia tells Julia of the trick Jack has played on her, and Julia admits she knew beforehand what was happening. Lydia continues bemoaning her plight, not even noticing that Julia is suffering as well. Julia then sincerely exhorts Lydia not to let a true lover suffer from her emotional excesses. Mrs. Malaprop, Fag and David then burst in and tell the girls about the impending duels. All leave quickly to try and forestall disaster.

Act V, scene 2 - Jack, on his way to the duel, meets his father, tries to hide, but is unable to conceal himself. Sir Anthony asks where Jack is going, and he says he is going to try to make up with Lydia. Sir Anthony then spots his sword, and Jack insists he is going to appeal to Lydia's romantic illusions by threatening to fall on his sword if she refuses to forgive him. After Jack leaves, David rushes on and tells Sir Anthony about the impending duels. Sir Anthony realizes he has been deceived, and they make for the dueling ground.

Act V, scene 3 - The final scene takes place at King's-Mead-Fields, the dueling ground. Bob Acres and Sir Lucius O'Trigger arrive first, the one apprehensive and the other full of confidence. They are anticipating a fight with pistols, and Bob wants the greatest distance possible, while Sir Lucius brusquely insists that a few feet will do nicely, then asks Bob if he has any last wishes or has made a will "in case of accident." As Jack and Faulkland approach, Bob is in full panic mode, but breathes a sigh of relief when he sees Jack instead of the villain Beverley, whom he has yet to lay eyes on. Sir Lucius turns to Faulkland, addresses him as Beverley, and asks him to choose his weapons. Acres knows Faulkland, and is obviously relieved that Beverley has not put in an appearance. Jack tires to get Faulkland to fight in his stead so that Bob will not be disappointed, but Bob assures him that he need not concern himself. Jack then admits that he is Beverley, and offers to fight if Bob still wants to do so. Acres declines the honor, but offers to serve as Sir Lucius' second in his duel with Jack. They draw swords, but before they can fight, Sir Anthony arrives with David, Mrs. Malaprop, Lydia, and Julia. Sir Anthony asks the reason for the duel, and Jack admits he has no idea. Sir Lucius alludes to some vague insult, but Lydia interrupts, saying that she



is willing to forgive Jack and restore their relationship. Sir Lucius, thinking she has been the source of the love letters he had been receiving, thinks she is in love with him, but Lydia denies it. Jack apologizes for the imaginary slight, Sir Lucius accepts the apology, and Mrs. Malaprop reveals that she was the author of the love letters. Sir Lucius has no interest in Mrs. Malaprop (in the original the two agree to marry), but Julia and Faulkland make up, and all leave happy.

### DETAILED ANALYSIS OF THE PLAY – THE RIVALS

The plays of Sheridan and Goldsmith may not have enjoyed the high literary esteem of those of their Restoration predecessors such as Wycherley and Vanbrugh, but they have held the stage much better. Audiences find the Georgian comedies better crafted, more continuously dramatic, 'as good as a novel in the reading' (Hazlitt) and less insistently lubricious. They are not always, possibly, so easy to discuss in terms of the History of Ideas, and, as a result of Walpole's Licensing Act of 1737, they are compelled to avoid political subjects; but they are just as intimately connected to the life of the fashionable Cities that produced them, and their continuous and frequent revivals over the past two hundred years bears witness to a dramatic vitality that arguably matches that of Shakespeare. No plays have been more frequently revived, indeed, between Shakespeare and the joint appearance of Shaw and Wilde in the 1890s, than Sheridan's two great 'genteel comedies'.

Richard Brinsley Sheridan - The Rivals (1775) From September 2012, OCR will be introducing new set

The contribution of the Anglo-Irish minority (Yeats's 'indomitable Irishry') to the drama in English is staggering. Since Sheridan's time major Protestant Irish dramatists have included Boucicault, Shaw, Wilde, Synge, O'Casey and Beckett; in the eighteenth century there were Congreve, Farquhar, Goldsmith and Sheridan himself. Unlike his contemporary Goldsmith, Sheridan does not seem to crystallise memories of his native Ireland into a bittersweet Eden (as Goldsmith does in his poem *The Deserted Village*). He seems to have left Ireland un sentimentally at the age of eight, never thereafter returning, rising in the English ranks as writer and politician after the model of his great Irish forebear



Edmund Burke. His career resembles an eighteenth and nineteenth century archetype, dubbed by the historian Roy Foster that of the 'Mick on the Make'.

In his preface Sheridan says he did not intend any national reflection in the character of Sir Lucius O'Trigger, the play's single Irishman, though he approaches the contemporary stereotype of the Irish gentleman as impetuous and bloodthirsty, and insanely sensitive to 'jests' at the expense of his country. Sheridan may not have been above dramatic exploitation of his countrymen to further his own career.

Sheridan wrote his first play for Covent Garden, one of the two 'Patent Theatres' that dominated the London scene at this time (the other was Drury Lane). He chose Covent Garden because it had recently had a notable success with Goldsmith's *She Stoops with which The Rivals* had similarities. John Rich had rebuilt the Covent Garden Theatre in 1732, so it was in a comparatively intimate playhouse that Sheridan's play made its debut. The stage and auditorium were only 36.3 metres, front to back, and 19.5 metres wide. As the forestage thrust deep into the seating area, any actor who wished could deliver his lines in the lap of the paying public: no spectator was more than about 17 metres from the stage. The full depth of the performing area was masked by rows of painted scenic flats, which could be pulled back to form (rather stylised) outdoor scenes such as the Act 5 duel on King's-Mead-Fields. Though Drury Lane was rebuilt and enlarged in the 1794, burning down soon after, some smaller Georgian Theatres have survived, such as the 1788 214-seater at Richmond in North Yorkshire.

Virtually all the major players in *The Rivals* had previously taken similar roles in *She Stoops to Conquer*, further demonstrating the intimacy and intensity of the Patent Theatres at this time. Edward Shuter, who created Anthony Absolute, had previously played *Hardcastle* in *She Stoops*: he was good at comic gestures and making long faces, but he was difficult to work with as he ad-libbed when he forgot his lines. A review of the second night of *The Rivals* found him, 'as usual, shamefully imperfect.' Yet despite such imperfection, work in the Patent Theatre at this time was well-paid (some comic actors grossed £1,000 per annum) and opened doors into the corridors of power, as the actress Mary Robinson (1758-1800), (who may have bedded Sheridan) discovered when she became mistress of the Prince of Wales, later George IV.



### Sheridan's Bath- THE PLACE OF ACTION IN THE PLAY

'What kind of place is this Bath?' asks the Coachman in the first scene of *The Rivals*. Bath was, in the later eighteenth century, a more-or-less purpose-built inland resort town for the rich, the aspirant and the shabby-genteel. In contemporary literature it features in Sheridan's *The Rivals*; as an important early staging-post in Smollett's travel-novel *Humphry Clinker* (1771); as the setting for Christopher Anstey's mildly racy poem in heroic couplets, *The New Bath Guide* (1766); and, from a rather later period, it hosts parts of two Jane Austen novels, *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion* (published 1818).

The focus of this up-market holiday-camp was the Roman Baths, now closed to the health-seeker, but then site of a major bathing industry. A character in *The New Bath Guide* is concerned that washing and drinking water are the same: 'while little TABBY was washing her Rump, / The Ladies kept drinking it out of a Pump.' Smollett's Matthew Bramble, admittedly a rather squeamish gentleman, becomes apoplectic at the same thought. He thinks all drinks sold in the Bath pump-room are concocted from 'sweat, and dirt, and dandruff; and the abominable discharges of various kinds, from twenty different diseased bodies' boiled up in the 'kettle' of the King's Bath below.

Sheridan knew Bath well. He had gone there on friendly terms with his father at the age of just twenty, encountering a mixture of beautiful and pretentious ladies, including at the house of one Mrs Miller, a possible original for Mrs Malaprop. Sheridan was cranked by the City into his first literary effusion, a mixture of personal satire and idealised sonnets. One of his lampoons even saw off the elderly lover of a sixteen-year-old professional singer, but to banish a younger suitor he had to fight a pair of duels, the second ending almost fatally. Duelling, as the play demonstrates, was strongly discouraged by Bath's Master of Ceremonies. Many of these incidents from Sheridan's lively career in the City find their way, suitably transposed, into *The Rivals*.



The first act of the play is dominated by Lydia's taste in the contemporary English novel, one of the major recreations at Bath, and for the circulating libraries, which hired out books and charged whacking late-fees, a major source of income. Lydia is clearly an excellent subscriber. The Edwardian critic George H. Nettleton made extensive study of the twenty books listed in Act One Scene Two, concluding that, though some of them are obscure, none has actually been made up by Sheridan. Novels were at this time often written by women, and consumed substantially by them, though Lydia (reflecting her creator's taste) seems to prefer a generally male authorship. Most of her borrowings are sentimental novels, presenting 'nature' (ie sex) in a warm (ie frank) yet 'delicate' style; though there is one exception, a novel called *The Innocent Adultery*, which is as prurient as it scunds.

It is likely, therefore, that Lydia was reading on the Bath stage what her audience were reading off it. The play certainly proved to the taste of Bath theatregoers, outside the Capital the largest and most discerning audience in the country. 'I never saw or heard anything like it,' wrote one eye witness, 'before the actors spoke they began their clapping.' Sheridan's extraordinary career, which would take him from dramatist to theatre manager to Minister of the Crown, had begun.

Another approach to Alysoun of Bath sees her The life of eighteenth century fashionable resorts was all about seeing and being seen: in ballroom, Assembly Room and on the Parades. As *The New Bath Guide* puts it, 'Persons of Taste and true Spirit, I find, / Are fond of attracting the eyes of mankind'. As Anstey's irony hints, this social intercourse was often about surface, not depth. The brothers in Sheridan's other major play *The School for Scandal* are both called 'Surface', despite the fact that one is a hypocrite and the other basically honest. Public life involved elaborate 'surfaces' of hair and clothes. Society ladies pretended to be shepherdesses; the 'quality' took the waters in flannel blankets and beribboned hats; fashionable gatherings meant donning cockades, periwigs, powder, pomatum and stylised skin blemishes. Even fashionable architecture was not quite what it seemed. In Bath John Wood the Elder's *Circus* (1767-74) only presents its iconic neoclassical frontage to the world from one theatrical angle: behind, out of sight, the houses were completed in a bewildering number of styles, with roofs at different heights, and as few or many out-offices as the individual owners preferred. The same is true of his son's *Royal Crescent* (1754-68).



In Sheridan's *The Rivals*, as in the civilization which inspired it, deception abounds. Jack, the leading gent, pretends to be a poor junior officer; his lover believes herself a heroine of romance; Faulkland and Julia both strive to live up to impossible precepts, while Mrs. Malaprop signally fails to convince us she's a linguistic guru.

Sir Lucius seems to want to make the whole world into a battlefield, like those eccentrics Toby and Trim in Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, which their huge model of the Siege of Namur. In short everything in the play walks on literary stilts, and belongs to a world of artifice. All is on show, aware of the effect it is having – in the 1770s *The Rivals* would have been given with the house lights up, the characters speaking to the audience with a confident, direct, intimacy. All Sheridan's signposts as to plot and theme would have been plainly visible. Even his borrowings from and references to the work of earlier dramatists would have been viewed as part of the effect. For Sheridan, like many eighteenth century writers, would not have claimed originality, merely dramatic dexterity and technique. As Hazlitt put it, imitation, both of literature and the fashionable world, was itself for Sheridan a kind of creativity: 'He could imitate with the spirit of an inventor.'

Much of the best Sheridan criticism is collected in *Sheridan: Comedies* (Macmillan Casebook, 1986). Katherine Worth's *Sheridan and Goldsmith* (1992) is also very useful.

### **'fastidious comedy' and 'Laughing comedy'**

In 1773 Goldsmith argued in his essay 'On the Theatre' 'by our being too fastidious, we have banished humour from the stage.' He was complaining about the empty sophistication of a run of plays in the 1760s and 70s that celebrated the moral advantages of 'delicate' feeling, the so-called 'sentimental comedies'. He was getting at plays like Richard Cumberland's *The West Indian* (1771). Cumberland's hero is an obscenely wealthy Jamaican planter who believes in love at first sight and has so far relied on slaves to do everything for him. Arrived among streetwise Londoners, he is overcome by cunning and deception. Yet the plot is kind to him at every turn, everyone listens to his increasingly sentimental sermons, and eventually welcomes him as a paragon of fashionable taste.



Goldsmith thought that Cumberland's writing went much further than merely whitewashing stereotypes, like that of this ignorant, moonstruck 'West Indian' : the dramatist 'drew men as they ought to be, not as they were,' he wrote in his 1774 satire, *Retaliation*. Cumberland's 'gallants are faultless, his women divine, And comedy wonders at being so fine.' It was the duty of the next generation of playwrights, Goldsmith insisted, to cut through this new-fangled refinement and restore traditional realist humour ('Laughing Comedy') to the English stage. Yet the cult of sensibility had, as Peter Thomson, puts it, 'a long reach', and proves a more durable influence on Sheridan's *The Rivals* than might be expected, even if he wished to follow the advice of his fellow-Irishman

### **The cult of sensibility**

The eighteenth century cult of sensibility (or 'sentimentalism') was a corporate design on the part of writer and reader to take feeling seriously, and explore it for its own sake, often with what Faulkland in *The Rivals* calls 'too exquisite nicety'. It began with the little cellular movements of consciousness observed by readers of Richardson's epistolary novel, *Clarissa* (1747-48), expanding to the gusts of empathy demanded by the affecting moments in Sterne's anti-novel *Tristram Shandy* (1760). Sterne consolidated his status as prime mover in the fashion with *A Sentimental Journey* (1768), while Henry Mackenzie wrote a book called *The Man of Feeling* (1771) in which each chapter invites the reader to pipe his or her eye at the designated moment, and another, even more extraordinary, called *Julia de Roubigné* (1773), in which the characters re-enact the tragedy of *Othello*, destroying themselves entirely on the initiative of their superfine sensibilities, without an Iago in sight.

Though the characters of these books, like Faulkland in *The Rivals*, find their 'whole soul' engrossed with the highest motives, much of the empathy projected at human and animal suffering in novels of this genre (dead monks, dead goats) was performative, owing much to affectation. Devotees shuddered with sighs, dripped tears, and were fashionably indisposed (as Faulkland wishes Julia to be) at every reversal of fortune. The cult of sensibility spread to Europe too: in Rousseau's *Julie, or La Nouvelle Eloise* (1761) and Goethe's very influential *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774) with its suicidal lead character. The emergence of this blaze of sensibility immediately before the French Revolution, at the



beginnings of Romanticism, and as a reaction against the high watermark of Enlightenment culture and Empirical philosophy is not an accident. Not surprisingly, as we have seen, by about 1770 sentimentality was all the rage on the English stage as well as in the novel.

Janet Todd's *Sensibility: An Introduction* (1986) is an excellent guide. See also John Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability: The Language of Feeling in the Eighteenth Century* (1988); and John Richetti, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to the Eighteenth Century Novel* (1993).

### **The Rivals as Sentimental Comedy?**

A gauge of how supercharged with sensibility is the atmosphere surrounding the play comes when the blockish Acres is able to instruct us in a new system of 'sentimental swearing', in which every cuss-word is 'genteely' grounded in the exact emotion which generates it. Whenever feasible, as here, the dramatist points out the absurdities inherent in the tradition. Yet, as has often been pointed out, he brandishes what an Edwardian critic called 'the choicest flowers of eighteenth century sentiment' should his play seem momentarily light on philosophic earnestness or threaten to degenerate into mere farce. In short he both wrote as a Man of Sentiment and as a scoffer at current fashion. He had his cake and ate it.

The test-case has always been the Sentimental lover, Faulkland. Is he intended as a satire on or a psychological study of fashionable obsession? It is certainly possible Sheridan based some aspects of the character on his own sensational behaviour some two or three years before writing the play. When he eloped with Elizabeth Linley, he was just twenty, and idealistic as Lydia Languish, hoping to fly with her Beverley. Sheridan followed his Elizabeth all the way to a French convent as her chaste cavalier, before returning home to defend her honour with weapons. Nothing in Faulkland's experience seems quite as grandiloquent as this, though Julia does 'entrust' her 'person' to his honour. Whether or not Faulkland derives from the excesses of his creator, his histrionics have certainly divided the opinions of critics and theatregoers. Writing at the fag-end of the sensibility cult, early in the nineteenth century, Mrs Inchbald considered Faulkland the most 'original' character in the comedy, and his exchange with Julia at the beginning of



Act 5 was particularly commended in an early review, which praised it 'even beyond the pitch of sentimental comedy, and may not improperly be styled metaphysical.' Victorian producers, however, thought Faulkland 'a decided bore', and 'irremediably dated', and did what they could to prune his lines.

He has fought back steadily over the last century. Modern actors tend to play the subtext of his rhetoric with some directness, showing the bizarre but uncontestable emotional logic by which in Act 5 he provokes Julia to rush exasperated from his presence purely out of a desire to spare her any pain. One critic has suggested he be played as an analyst- haunting Woody Allen character, obsessively raking over his emotions. For almost everything Faulkland says proceeds from a humanist conviction that in a Godless universe we can only turn to our Other Self for support. As Matthew Arnold puts it: 'Ah, Love, let us be true to one another!'; or as Faulkland puts it himself: 'The mutual tear that steals down the cheek of parting lovers is a compact, that no smile shall live there till they meet again.'

But if, on balance, theatre history urges us to take Faulkland's psychobabble seriously, it suggests that Lydia's excesses should be viewed rather as satirising the sensibility cult. Her romantic conception of moonlit elopement, heroic tests to determine her lover's true nature (an assignation in a freezing January garden) and sense, like the heroine of Charlotte Lennox's wonderful 1752 novel *The Female Quixote*, of always being the most important person in her own life, all owe a good deal to self-seeking idealism. Yet her misguided fulsomeness about romance need not necessarily deflate her into a selfish schoolgirl, who needs to learn the difference between novels and life. Lydia's fantasies in Act 5 comprise some of the finest writing in the play, and if it is the sentimental tradition that ironically propels them, then power to it. The great tradition of English romantic comedy, whether 'laughing' or 'sentimental', has always recognised that dreams and ideals are powerful factors of reality, and cannot simply be extinguished without significant imaginative cost. The heroines of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* come to view things this way, as does the heroine of Austen's Bath-set *Northanger Abbey* who is herself, like Lydia, surfeited on late eighteenth century novels.



### **The Rivals as a Comedy of Manners**

The Comedy of Manners which had its seed sown in Ben Jonson's Comedy of Humors flourished in full bloom at the hands of the Restoration dramatists. They exploited this particular genre of comedy to study and imitate in a vein of humor and satire, the social mannerisms, conventions and artificiality of their particular age and society through delightful observation and witty commentaries on the prevalent temper, follies and external details of the life of certain men and women who were the stereo-types of their depicted society.

R.B. Sheridan's "The Rivals" is a perfect Comedy of Manners in the way it holds a mirror to social life, modes and manners of the artificial, fashionable community of the 18th Century English society by making Bath, a health resort in England the center of the action of the play. Through the characters of his play, Sheridan depicts in a very entertaining manner the gay and easy lives of the well to do people of his age that were full of intrigues, gossips, scandals, flirtations, frivolity and without any raging cares or serious problems of livelihood. Almost all the characters of the play are entangled in love affairs and have nothing more important to do than to pay social visits, learn fashionable dances, devour romances and fight duels. The country landlords like Bob Acres came to Bath to ape the latest fashions and hair-styles. Lydia Languish represents all those girls at Bath who filled their idle days with cheap romances and dreams of romantic elopements. Mrs. Malaprop is an amusing representation of the provincial ladies who tried desperately to live up the smartness of the fashionable city of bath. Moreover, Rivals is also filled with references to the circulating libraries of the 18th century society that were the fond resorts and romantic haunts of sentimental girls. The orthodox view on female education prevalent at that time also comes to the fore through the conversations of Sir Anthony Absolute and Mrs. Malaprop in Act.1Sc.2. It is true that the purview of Sheridan's social life is very limited but this is in conformation with the tenets of a typical comedy of manners that focuses on a narrow slice of the society.



The plot of the Rivals just like that of any other Comedy of Manners is slight and built on the common stock devices of concealment, cross purposes, mistaken identity, tyrannical parents who threatened to disown upon disobedience and so on. The dramatic effect owes not so much to the plot but is based on the weaving of finely conceived highly theatrical situations into a composite whole and well sustained dramatic suspense.

The characters of Rivals are mostly type characters in keeping with the tradition of Comedy of manners. Mrs. Malaprop with her "nice derangements of epitaphs", Lydia Languish with her singular taste, Sir Anthony Absolute with his "absolute temper", Bob Acres with his foppery and foolish bravado and Sir Lucius with idiotic chivalry are nothing but Sheridan's delightful caricatures of some of the human deformities common to the people of his age.

Apart from all this, Rivals like a true comedy of manners is filled to the brim with wit and intellect. The play is packed with witty repartees of wit and funny conversations that add to the fun and mirth of the play in an abundant measure. This flash of wit is especially noticeable in the conversation between Fag and his master captain Absolute in Act2.Sc.1 about the particulars of quality lying and also in Act3.Sc3 where Captain Absolute deceives Mrs. Malaprop and Lydia through his amusing double identity in the play

Lastly, beneath the light scenes and gay inventions in Rivals, lies a mild stroke of satire which forms the intellectual aspect of Comedy of Manners. Through the Julia-Faulkland episode Sheridan has caricatured the sentimentality of the age that had also gripped the theaters. Lydia's temperament in the play and her preference of elopement and scandals is actually a satire on the sensational loving youth of the time. Sheridan laughs at the obsession with contemporary fashion through Bob Acres and the Act5Sc3 is delightful satire on dueling.

Owing to the true and intriguing picture of 18th Century life of Bath painted by Sheridan along with the diverting type-characters, slight but theatrical plot, abundance of wit and mirth and the clever touch of satire, Rivals holds its appeal even in today's times as one of the best Comedy of Manners.

**Mrs. Malaprop's Character: as a caricature of Sheridan's age**



It has been very rightly opined by Mrs. Olyphant that in Sheridan, "the gift of innocent ridicule and the quick embodiment of the ludicrous without malice reaches to such heights of excellence as have given his nonsense a sort of immortality". The truth of this comment finds perfect reflection in Sheridan's famous and much loved creation, Mrs. Malaprop who with her parade of ridiculous pedantry, vulgar sociability, laughable passion and most importantly, her 'nice derangements of epitaphs' is perhaps the best embodiment of the ludicrous but it is this very virtue of nonsense that makes her an immortal creation in history of English humorous literature and makes her stand out as a marvel of Sheridan's theatrical art. She is the humorous aunt of the play's heroine Miss Lydia Languish, who gets caught up in the schemes and dreams of young lovers and with her misapplied words and mannerisms remains from the very start to the end a grand comical entertainment and the source of much fun and farce.

Mrs. Malaprop is actually Sheridan's delightful caricature of the provincial ladies of his age who desperately tried to up to live up the smartness and fashion of the city. The essence of this character's caricature lies in her language and how her select words are, as Julia puts them – "ingeniously misapplied without being mispronounced". She fancies her "oracular tongue" and "nice derangements of epitaphs" as her very prized attribute without the slightest idea of the absurdity in her language arising out of her notorious misuse of words and phrases. The peculiar mistakes of this humorous aunt with which she brightens the play with a comical fire are known as malapropisms which have passed into the rules of rhetoric. Here are some of her enjoyable mis-uses of words: "She's as headstrong as an allegory (alligator) on the banks of the Nile", "I'm quite analyzed (paralyzed) for my part", "Oh! It gives me the hydrostatics (Hysterics) to such a degree!" and so on.

Not only this, she attempts enthusiastically to impose her superiority and wisdom on others by propagating her own theories but in doing so ends up making herself a pure clownish figure since all her knowledge is half-baked and inappropriately applied. Throughout the play she gives a large catalogue of all the things that do not 'befit a young woman' such as violent memories, preference and aversion, caparsons (comparisons) and what not. In her unshrinking language she lectures on education of women before Sir Anthony and never suspects that her words act as a raillery to her own self – "But above all Sir Anthony she should be a Mistress



of Orthodoxy that she might not mis-spell and mis-pronounce words so shamefully as girls usually do and likewise that she might reprehend the true meaning of what she is saying".

Mrs. Malaprop's vanity makes her open to flatteries and pretend admiration which is why she readily brands Captain Absolute as the "The pineapple (pinnaele) of politeness" when he says kind words to her 'elegant manners' and 'unaffected learning'.

In the romantic love of Lydia and Beverly, Mrs. Malaprop plays the part of a watch dog or as Ensign Beverly writes to his lady-love, a "she dragon" but her vigilance only uncovers her continued dullness and her strictures only reveals her ignorance and vulgarity. However, she is hardly the villain in the love-story of the romantic pair but can be best viewed as an old weather beaten lady with egoistic ideas and outdated prejudices and nothing of serious or sober understanding.

Much of the fun in *The Rivals* lies in the odd story of Mrs. Malaprop's love where this old wrinkled lady poses herself as teenaged Delia and carries on a love correspondence with an Irish Knight. The whole love affair is a drollery and when her true identity is revealed and every man rejects her she very dismally ejaculates - "Men are all barbarians".

The figure of Mrs. Malaprop is not entirely a Sheridan innovation and its seeds can be found in Mrs. Slipshod of Fielding's *Joseph Andrews* and Tabitha Bramble of Smollett's *Humphrey Clinker*. However, her character can be perceived without any reference to any source or predecessor and in its conception Sheridan has indeed achieved a rare work of comic art. Without this 'Mistress of language' as Sir Lucius calls his Delia, this play would have lost much of its charm and spark; much of its farcical liveliness and comic

### **Social Distance**

The first act is sandwiched between apparently inconsequential short scenes involving servants. At curtain-up Fag patronises Sir Antony's 'Coachman'. It is disconcerting how in the know he is, identifying most of the chief issues, characters and relationships of the play. In an upwardly mobile society like eighteenth century Bath everyone makes what use they can of the trappings of



fashionable life. As one critic puts it: 'Fag wears his master's wit like his lace, at second hand.' The lady's maid Lucy, whose soliloquy (a servant soliloquising?) closes the act, has just as close tabs on the lives and needs of the play's female characters, and is just as prepared to exploit them for profit, pitting them one against another if need be.

Thus Sheridan insists from the off that the doings of the privileged are closely watched by pert unscrupulous underlings. There was a 'world above' and a 'world below', and the latter by definition lived off the former. Fag's dealings with his superiors are far from deferential: they are circumspect, even circumlocutory, as if he were consulting his own interests carefully before performing any aspect of his duty.

The actor Lee Lewis, who originated the part, made his career playing such self-interested and self-contained valets.

If Lucy and Fag subvert the class-system by undermining it, Acres' servant David has a different role. This time the master does not exploit the man, but functions as a kind of tutor to him. When, at the beginning of Act 4, 'Fighting Bob' Acres wants to fight a duel to preserve his 'honour', David reminds him of noblesse oblige: there are old retainers and even dumb beasts at the family seat, Clod Hall, to whom he owes a living. David goes on to preach a sermon on the frailty of a gentleman's 'honour'. It sounds like a paraphrase of Sir John Falstaff's 'catechism' on 'honour' before the Battle of Shrewsbury in *The First Part of King Henry IV* 5:1, and it just as effectively punctures genteel hang-ups about reputation, notably those of Sir Lucius, whose 'mansion house and dirty acres' may have slipped through his fingers, but who clings to his 'honour' with violent punctiliousness. Sheridan's servants can be poets just as well as profiteers.

### **Divine Mrs Malaprop**

Malapropism, in which the dramatist makes creative capital out of the ignorant verbal usage of the ignorant or the pretentious, has a long history on the English stage. Shakespeare's most famous exponent of malapropism is the over-promoted Dogberry in *Much Ado About Nothing*, though the self-aggrandising Bottom in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and Mistress Quickly, the brothel-keeper who mourns Falstaff in *Henry V*, are often more creative. Sheridan's Mrs Malaprop, is



not, therefore, an original creation, but, like so much of his work, the consummation of two hundred years of dramatic history. Some scholars have even argued that the germ of the character lies in Mrs Tryfort ('Try-for-it', i.e. le mot juste) in *A Journey to Bath*, a manuscript play by Sheridan's mother, Frances, which certainly anticipates Malaprop's 'contagious countries'. Yet the very extensiveness of the lexicographic territory she mis-maps distinguishes her in degree, if not in kind, from all her forebears. She tramples over the contemporary tourist-industry: 'you have no more feeling than one of the Derbyshire putrefactions' [those limestone formations known as the 'Wonders of the Peak']; over Hamlet: 'an eye, like March, to threaten at command – a Station, like Harry Mercury, new – Something about kissing – on a Hill' [Hamlet's eponym on his father in 3.4]; over psychiatry: 'it gives me the hydrostatics to such a degree'; prophecy (?) 'we will not anticipate the past'; evidence: the 'perpendiculars', and (I think) beards and painters: 'thou barbarous Vandyke'.

Mrs Malaprop differs from production to production more than any other character in the play. The tradition is to make her vulgar (studied ignorance is thus responsible for her mangling of meanings) and elderly, but she works just as well if she is an under-educated social-climber, with youth (or what passes for youth in eighteenth century Bath – her niece, Lydia, is just seventeen) still on her side. In short she can be a portentous establishment figure, or an insecure but ambitious outsider. I once read a review of a production of the play which complained that a particular actress was too young and beautiful to play the role. But the part as Sheridan wrote it lacks clear specification about age and appearance. This is because Mrs Malaprop is conceived at a linguistic rather than a literary level: her mistakes about words are the most significant aspect of her.

All this gives her something in common with Dickens characters, like Mrs Gamp, who live in a world of linguistic fantasy whose purpose is to feed her fertile ego with good references; characters who convince their fans that their fantasy worlds have more substance than the prosaic details of everyday life. Orwell argues that Mrs Harris, an alleged former employer of Mrs Gamp 'who does not exist', is more 'real' than the characters of most novelists. Mrs Malaprop's language, like Mrs Gamp's, seems to operate in a sealed linguistic world, ultimately about and responsible only to itself. In this it seems to me to anticipate not only Dickens, but the Victorian nonsense writing to which his inspiration is linked. Top-notch



Malaprop phrases such as the 'pine-apple of politeness' (teased out from Jack's reference to an 'Orange-Tree') and 'a nice derangement of epitaphs' seem close to the hard-core nonsense of Edward Lear. Possibly another Anglo-Irish writer, and another Victorian, Oscar Wilde, was thinking of Mrs Malaprop when he created Lady Bracknell in *The Importance of Being Earnest*. For Lady Bracknell is another arbitrary centre of linguistic power, who can be portrayed at a variety of ages, and who may simultaneously seem to satirise the society of which she seems faintly to be a part, yet also to transcend it by dint of her glowing absurdity.

Critics who look straightforwardly for satire of eighteenth century society in Mrs Malaprop will, however, be disappointed. Max Beerbohm, perhaps the greatest of all English caricaturists and literary satirists, was so, and concluded as a result her linguistic coinages were artless, arbitrary and meaningless. 'If I spoke of her botanical, vernal humour I should not expect anyone to be amused, and it vexes me to think that Sheridan expected people to be amused by such devices.' It is his loss.

#### **'Women guide the Plot'**

Despite Faulkland's hypersensitivity and Mrs Malaprop's linguistic 'hydrostatics', *The Rivals* is also a play concerned with the robust and practical aspects of the marriage market. As A.N. Kaul writes, 'Sheridan is concerned with nothing less than the problem of a woman's freedom in a society that looks upon women as property and upon marriage as a business transaction'; what Lydia terms 'a mere Smithfield bargain' [after Smithfield, the London meat-market]. Julia was given the teasing lines from the 'Epilogue', which argue:

Man's social happiness all rests on us: Through all the drama – whether d-n'd or not – Love gilds the scene and women guide the plot.

Julia, as played by Mrs Bulkely, was the star of early performances. Despite the obvious subordination of her healthy inner life to Faulkland's cranky one, or possibly even because of it, she was the most even-keeled character in the play, and in the best position to draw attention to this sub-text of gender politics as the final curtain fell.



Lydia's moral authority is less strongly signposted than Julia's, though she does a good deal more than the former in terms of 'guiding the plot'. In some ways she is a tougher, more self-confident version of Jane Austen's Marianne Dashwood in *Sense and Sensibility*, stuffed with sentimental fiction, and not caring very much how she mixes her dreams and desires up with waking reality. Hazlitt thinks her the quintessential product of an eighteenth century boarding-school, a clever girl who has been force-feeding herself for years on hedonistic nonsense.

Yet she is much more certain what she wants than Julia, and much more determined to wring concessions out of her lover, Captain Absolute, than Julia is able to get change out of the narcissistic Faulkland. Her desire to marry someone beneath her has both the charm of romance and the authority of democracy about it; though no-one else takes her progressive political spirit very seriously (after all, an Ensign - now Second Lieutenant - is only one rank beneath a Captain) she does, even to the point of cultivating a feisty 'hoydenesque' demeanour, which contrasts interestingly with Julia's more mannered and sophisticated modes of speech.

Jack, for all his man-of-the-world pragmatism, thinks the world of her imagination ('devilish romantic, and very absurd of course') and is happy to perform the sentimental equivalent of Labours of Hercules for its sake:

How often have I stole forth, in the coldest night in January, and found him in the garden, stuck like a dripping statue! - There would he kneel to me in the snow, and sneeze and cough so pathetically! He shivering with cold, and I with apprehension! And while the freezing blast numb'd our joints, how warmly would he press me to pity his flame, and glow with mutual ardour! - Ah, Julia! That was something like being in love.

The woman's world of *The Rivals* is thus a sophisticated one, here exploring a chaste manifestation of sexual sadism that would not have been unfamiliar, a few years later, to another 'sentimental' writer, the Marquis de Sade. Both girls are literate, articulate and, despite some surface turbulence initiated by their male lovers, reliable human beings. Sir Anthony's view of the circulating library ('an ever-green tree of diabolical knowledge') is too daft to deserve rational consideration, attracting only the garbling concurrence of Mrs Malaprop. Neither



he- nor she-dragon has any effect on female education in the play. Both want words to mean more than the dictionary says (for example, Sir Anthony's absurdly hyperbolic warning to his son 'don't enter the same hemisphere with me'), so they end up meaning nothing ('I'll unget you!')

Lydia's view of words, and books, is altogether more rational. She has some of the best of the new sentimental novels by Sterne and Mackenzie, and some of the most lurid (*The Tears of Sensibility*), mixed with Ovid's more earthy writings on love and sex. She also keeps a stock of sermons and theological works ('Addressed to a Young Lady') on hand to deceive prying chaperones. Her reading of the Letters of Lord Chesterfield is presumably to teach her about, or maybe even to teach her, worldly wisdom and hypocrisy. Dr Johnson said the book recommended 'the manners of a dancing master' and the 'morals of a whore.' Lydia is a young woman to be reckoned with, her feistiness and resourcefulness a taste of things to come.

### ESSAY QUESTIONS

Discuss the following in a five-paragraph essay:

1. Compare and contrast Lydia Languish in Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *The Rivals* with Cecily Cardew in Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*. What particular characteristics are the two playwrights mocking by the ways they portray the two girls? In what ways are they different? How do their characteristics relate to the major themes of the plays?
2. Compare and contrast Mrs. Malaprop in Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *The Rivals* with Lady Bracknell in Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*. What particular characteristics are the two playwrights mocking by the ways they portray the two women? In what ways are they different? How do their characteristics relate to the major themes of the plays?
3. Compare and contrast Lydia Languish in Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *The Rivals* with Don Quixote in Cervantes' great novel. Both characters have been affected by romantic novels. Have they been affected in the same ways? Are the two authors communicating similar evaluations of romances through these



characters? In what significant ways are the characters different, aside from the fact that one is male and the other female?

4. Discuss the complex combination of foils represented by the two young couples in Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *The Rivals*. In what sense are the men foils for each other and the women foils for each other, while within each couple the woman serves as a foil for the man? In what ways does this complicated arrangement enhance the comedy of the play as well as helping to communicate its major themes?

5. Choose one of the two young couples in Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *The Rivals* and discuss what binds them together. What does Jack see in Lydia, or Faulkland in Julia? Why does Lydia love Jack, and Julia love Faulkland? To what extent does the basis for the relationship about which you choose to write help the playwright to communicate the major themes of the story? Be specific.

6. Compare and contrast the pathetic melancholy of Faulkland in Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *The Rivals* with that of Duke Orsino in William Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*. Which is the more believable character? Why? Which playwright is more effective in satirizing the sentimental love of which his lovesick character is an exemplar? Why do you think so?

7. In Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *The Rivals*, the playwright makes numerous allusions to Shakespeare for comic purposes. How do these allusions help to carry forward the themes of the play? What do such tactics assume about the audience that will be viewing the play? Could a playwright today make similar assumptions? Why or why not?

8. Compare and contrast the ideas on honor expressed by David in Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *The Rivals* and Falstaff in William Shakespeare's *Henry IV*, part 1. While both are intended for comic purposes, which, in its underlying purpose in the play, makes the more serious point? Why do you think this is true? Support your conclusion with specifics from both plays.

9. Compare and contrast the scenes in Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *The Rivals* and Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* in which the true identities of



the young men are revealed to their lovers. What are the functions of these scenes in the respective plays? Which do you consider to be the more humorous? Why?

10. Discuss the view of love presented in Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *The Rivals*. How realistic is the picture of love painted by the playwright? Are there any positive examples of love in the play? What is Sheridan attempting to convey by the way he pictures the lovers?

11. Discuss the theme of forgiveness as it appears in Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *The Rivals*. In the various incidents where forgiveness is granted, is it credible? Why is the credibility of forgiveness important to the themes of the story?

12. Discuss the social criticism present in Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *The Rivals*. To what aspects of society does Sheridan most object? How does he use his art to criticize them? Be specific, both in your enumeration of aspects of society subject to criticism and in citing quotations and incidents from the play that carry the weight of that criticism.

13. Compare and contrast the pairs of young couples in Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *The Rivals* and William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Which set of couples is the more credible? Which author constructs the more effective satire of romantic love? Are the answers to the two questions related? Why or why not?

14. In Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, romance novels play a significant role in creating the mindset that ultimately leads Emma Bovary to ruin. Relate this idea of the power of literature to the treatment of the same subject found in Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *The Rivals*. In addition to the comic tone of the latter book, how does Flaubert's treatment of this powerful influence differ from that of Sheridan?

15. Compare and contrast William Shakespeare's *The Merry Wives of Windsor* with Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *The Rivals*. Consider particularly certain parallel characters - the choleric foreigner (Caius and Sir Lucius O'Trigger), the maid who plays both ends against the middle (Mistress Quickly and Lucy), and the malapropism-spouting comic (Mistress Quickly again and Mrs. Malaprop).



To what extent do these characters play the same roles in the two stories and how is the treatment of them different?

16. Compare the language in Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *The School for Scandal* with that in his play *The Rivals*. Which, in your opinion, makes greater demands on the audience? Why do you think so? Include specific quotations from the two plays to support your conclusion.

17. Compare and contrast the characters of Joseph in Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *The School for Scandal* and Jack Absolute in *The Rivals*. Both spend most of the play pretending to be something they are not. Which is the more sympathetic character? Which is more credible? Why? Support your answer with details from the two plays.

18. Compare and contrast the characters of Maria in Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *The School for Scandal* and Lydia Languish in *The Rivals*. Both girls are the objects of the affections of many men. How are they different? Which is more admirable? Do you believe that they will enjoy happy marriages with the men of their choice? Why or why not?

19. Compare and contrast the characters of Lady Sneerwell in Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *The School for Scandal* and Mrs. Malaprop in *The Rivals*. Both are old battle-axes who interfere in the love lives of others and have romantic aspirations themselves. Concentrate on the key features that make them different characters. Does either woman elicit sympathy from the audience? Why or why not?

20. Compare and contrast the characters of Sir Peter in Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *The School for Scandal* and Sir Anthony in *The Rivals*. Which of the two is more of a cartoon figure? Why do you think so? Does this fact add to the humor of the play or detract from its credibility? Why?

21. Oliver Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer* and Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *The Rivals* appeared on the London stage within two years of one another. The two plays have similar plots involving conflicts between parents determined to choose their children's mates and children who have minds of their own on the subject. Compare and contrast the plot devices of mistaken identity used by the



two playwrights, as both Kate Hardcastle and Captain Absolute pretend to be someone else in order to appeal to their chosen mates. Which is in your opinion more credible? Which is more humorous? Why?

### UNIT IV ADDISON'S ESSAYS

A-THE SPECTATOR'S ACCOUNT OF HIMSELF

B-THE VISION OF MIRZA

C-SIR ROGER AT HOME

D-SIR ROGER AT CHURCH

E-WILL WIMBLEE

**Joseph Addison**

**English essayist**

**(1672-1719)**

Introduction

NOBLE English prose, and even noble English essays, had been written long before Addison. But we are justified in regarding Addison and his friend Steele as the founders of the modern English essay and modern English prose ; and the larger share of the achievements was Addisons. It was he, more than any one else, who invented a "middle style," —something between the grave stately diction of formal writing and the free and easy speech of everyday ; a style suited, therefore, for addressing a wide circle of readers on a wide variety of subjects, unpretentious, admirably clear, dignified, but never stilted. This fact makes him



still, as in Dr. Johnsons day, the best model for most of us. It is the "middle style" that is needed in almost all human intercourse—in the writing of essays, novels, histories, sermons, speeches, newspapers, letters and even as a model for conversation, to prevent it sinking into the merely trivial and slipshod, a petty exchange of personal remarks expressed in indifferent English eked out by slang. None can show us better than "the dear parson in the tye-wig" how social intercourse may be bright and sparkling, yet elevated and elevating, with a tendency to increase the happiness of those who take part in it, and to check unworthy thoughts and feelings.

But such influence is often best when it is most unconsciously given and received. It is good to read Addison first because he is full of charm; because we soon come to feel an affection for this silent, keen, kindly spectator of men; because he brings back to us vividly the vanished life of the early eighteenth century; because he created in Sir Roger de Coverley one of the most delightful characters in the whole range of English literature. If we sometimes seem to see the Spectator's eyes-grave, but with a twinkle in them—turned upon our own follies, and are willing to receive a playful rebuke or gentle hint from him, that will be another advantage to add to the rest.

### The Essayist

JOSEPH ADDISON was the eldest son of Lancelot Addison, Dean of Lichfield, and was born at his father's rectory of Milston in Wiltshire, on the 1st day of May 1672. After having passed through several schools, the last of which was the Charter-house, he went to Oxford when he was about fifteen years old. He was first entered of Queen's College, but after two years was elected a scholar of Magdalen College, having, it is said, been recommended by his skill in Latin versification. He took his master's degree in 1693, and held a fellowship from 1699 till 1711.

The eleven years extending from 1693, or his twenty-first year, to 1704, when he was in his thirty-second, may be set down as the first stage of his life as a man of letters. During this period, embracing no profession, and not as yet entangled in official business, he was a student, an observer, and an author; and though the literary works which he then produced are not those on which his permanent



celebrity rests, they gained for him in own day a high reputation. He had at first intended to become a clergyman; but his talents having attracted the attention of leading statemen belonging to the Whig party, he was speedily diverted from his earlier views by the countenance which these men bestowed on him. His first patron (to whom he seems to have been introduced by Congreve) was Charles Montague, afterwards Earl of Halifax, who was himself a dabbler in literature, and a protector of literary men; and he became known afterwards to the accomplished and excellent Somers. While both of them were quite able to estimate justly his literary merits, they had regard mainly to the services which they believed him capable of rendering to the nation or the party; and accordingly they encouraged him to regulate his pursuits with a view to public and official employment. For a considerable time, however, he was left to his own resources, which cannot have been otherwise than scanty.

His first literary efforts were poetical. In 1693 a short poem of his, addressed to Dryden, was inserted in the third volume of that veteran writer's *Miscellanies*. The next volume of this collection contained his translation in tolerable heroic couplets, of "all Virgil's Fourth Georgic, except the story of Aristaeus." Two and a half books of Ovid were afterwards attempted; and to his years of early manhood belonged also his prose essay on Virgil's *Georgics*, a performance which hardly deserved, either for its style or for its critical excellence, the compliment paid it by Dryden, in prefixing it to his own translation of the poem. The most ambitious of those poetical assay-pieces is the *Account of the Greatest English Poets*, dated April 1694, and addressed affectionately to Sacheverell, the poet's fellow-collegian, who afterwards became so notorious in the party-quarrels of the time. This piece, spirited both in language and in versification, is chiefly noticeable as showing that ignorance of old English poetry which was then universal. Addison next, in 1695, published one of those compositions, celebrating contemporary events, and lauding contemporary great men, on which, during the half-century that succeeded the Revolution, there was wasted so much of good writing and of fair poetical ability. His piece, not very meritorious even in its own class, was addressed "To the King," and commemorates the campaign which was distinguished by William's taking of Namur. Much better than the poem itself are the introductory verses to Somers, then lord keeper. This production, perhaps intended as a remembrancer to the writer's patrons, did not at once produce any



obvious effect: and we are left in considerable uncertainty as to the manner in which about this time Addison contrived to support himself. He corresponded with Tonson the book-seller about projected works, one of these being a Translation of Herodotus. It was probably at some later time that he proposed compiling a Dictionary of the English Language. In 1699 a considerable collection of his Latin verses was published at Oxford, in the *Musoe Anglicanoe*. These appear to have interested some foreign scholars; and several of them show curious symptoms of his characteristic humour.

In the same year, his patrons, either having still no office to spare for him, or desiring him to gain peculiarly high qualifications for diplomatic or other important business, provided for him temporarily by a grant, which, though bestowed on a man of great merit and promise, would not pass unquestioned in the present century. He obtained, on the recommendation of Lord Somers, a pension of 300 pounds a year, designed (as Addison himself afterwards said in a memorial addressed to the crown) to enable him "to travel, and qualify himself to serve His Majesty." In the summer of 1699 he crossed into France, where, chiefly for the purpose of learning the language, he remained till the end of 1700; and after this he spent a year in Italy. In Switzerland, on his way home, he was stopped by receiving notice that he was to be appointed envoy to Prince Eugene, then engaged in the war in Italy. But his Whig friends were already tottering in their places; and, March 1702, the death of King William at once drove them from power and put an end to the pension. Indeed Addison asserted that he never received but one year's payment of it, and that all the other expenses of his travels were defrayed by himself. He was able, however, to visit a great part of Germany, and did not reach Holland till the spring of 1703. His prospects were now sufficiently gloomy: he entered into treaty, oftener than once, for an engagement as a traveling tutor; and the correspondence in one of these negotiations has been preserved. Tonson had recommended him as the best person to attend in this character the son of the duke of Somerset, commonly called "The Proud." The duke, a profuse man in matters of pomp, was economical in questions of education. He wished Addison to name the salary he expected; this being declined, he announced, with great dignity, that he would give a hundred guineas a year; Addison accepted the munificent offer, saying, however, that he could not find his account in it otherwise than by relying on his Grace's future patronage;



and his Grace immediately intimated that he would look out for some one else. Towards the end of 1703 which he Addison returned to England.

Works which he composed during his residence on the Continent were the earliest that showed into to have attained maturity of skill and genius. There is good reason for believing that his tragedy of Cato, whatever changes it may afterwards have suffered, was in great part written while he lived in France, that is, when he was about twenty-eight years of age. In the winter of 1701, amidst the stoppages and discomforts of a journey across the Mount Cenis, he composed, wholly or partly, his Letter from Italy, which is by far the best of his poems, if it is not rather the only one among them that at all justifies his claim to the poetical character. It contains some fine touches of description, and is animated by a nekle tone of classical enthusiasm. While in Germany he wrote his Dialogues on Medals, which, however, were not published till after his death. These have much liveliness of style, and something of the gay humour which the author was afterwards to exhibit more strongly; but they show little either of antiquarian learning or of critical ingenuity. In tracing out parallels between passages of the Roman poets and figures or scenes which appear in ancient sculptures, Addison opened the easy course of inquiry which was afterwards prosecuted by Spence, and this, with the apparatus of spirited metrical translations from the classics, gave the work a likeness to his account of his travels. This account, entitled Remarks on Several Parts of Italy, &c, he sent home for publication before his own return. It wants altogether the interest of personal narrative: the author hardly ever appears. The task in which he chiefly busies himself is that of exhibiting the illustrations which the writings of the Latin poets, and the antiquities and scenery of Italy, mutually give and receive. Many of the landscapes are sketched with great liveliness, and there are not a few strokes of arch humour. The statistical information is very meagre; nor are there many observations on society; and politics are no further meddled with than to show the moderate liberality of the writer's own opinions.

With the year 1704 begins a second era in Addison's life, which extends to the summer of 1710, when his age was thirty-eight. This was the first term of his official career; and, though very barren of literary performance, it not only raised him from indigence, but settled definitely his position as a public man. His correspondence shows that, which on the Continent, he had been admitted to



confidential intimacy by diplomatists and men of rank; immediately on his return he was enrolled in the Kitcat Club, and broght thus and otherwise into communication with the gentry of the Whig party. Although all accounts agree in representing him as a shy man, he was at least saved from all risk of making himself disagreeable in society, by his unassuming manners, his extreme caution, and that sedulous desire to oblige, which his satirist Pope exaggerated into a positive fault. His knowledge and ability were esteemed so highly, as to confirm the expectations formerly entertained of his usefulness in public business, and the literary fame he had already acquired soon furnished on occasion for recommending him to public employment. Though the Whigs were out of office, the administration which succeeded them was, in all its earlier changes, of a complexion so mixed and uncertain, that the influence of their leaders was not entirely lost. Not long after Marlborough's great victory at Blenheim, it is said that Godolphin, the lord treasurer, expressed to Lord Halifax a desire to have the great duke's fame extended by a poetical tribute. Halifax seized the opportunity of recommending Addison as the fittest man for the duty; stipulating, we are told, that the service should not be unrewarded, and doubtless satisfying the minister that his protégé possessed other qualifications for office besides dexterity in framing heroic verse. The Campaign, the poem thus written to order, was received with extraordinary applause: and it is probably as good as any that ever was prompted by no more worthy inspiration. It has, indeed, neither the fiery spirit which Dryden threw into occasional pieces of the sort, nor the exquisite polish that would have been given by Pope, if he had stooped to make such uses of his genius; but many of the details are pleasing; and in the famous passage of the Angel, as well as in several others, there is even something of force and imagination.

The consideration covenanted for by the poet's friends was faithfully paid. A vacancy occurred by the death of another celebrated man, John Locke: and in November 1704, Addison was appointed one of the five commissioners of appeal in Excise. The duties of the place must have been as light for him as they had been for his predecessor: for he continued to hold it with all the appointments he subsequently received from the same ministry. But there is no reason for believing that he was more careless than other public servants in his time: and the charge of incompetency as a man of business, which has been brought so positively against



him, cannot possibly be true as to this first period of his official career. Indeed, the specific allegations refer exclusively to the last years of his life; and, if he had not really shown practical ability in the period now in question, it is not easy to see how he, a man destitute alike of wealth, of social or fashionable liveliness, and of family interest, could have been promoted, for several years, from office to office, as he was, till the fall of the administration to which he was attached. In 1706 he became one of the undersecretaries of state, serving first under Hedges, who belonged to the Tory section of the Government, and afterwards under Lord Sunderland, Marlborough's son-in-law, and a zealous follower of Addison's early patron, Somers. The work of this office, however, like that of the commissionership, must often have admitted of performance by deputy. For in 1707, the Whigs having become stronger, Lord Halifax was sent on a mission to the Elector of Hanover; and, besides taking Vanburgh the dramatist with him as king-at-arms, he selected Addison as his secretary. In 1708 he entered Parliament, sitting at first for Lostwithiel, but afterwards for Mlmesbury, which being six times elected, he represented from 1710 till his death. Here unquestionably he did fail. What part he may have taken in the details of business we are not informed; but he was always a silent member, unless it be true that he once attempted to speak and sat down in confusion. In 1709 Lord Wharton, the father of the notorious duke, having been named lord-lieutenant of Ireland, Addison became his secretary, receiving also an appointment as keeper of records. This event happened only about a year and a half before the dismissal of the ministry; and the Irish secretary would seem to have transacted the business of his office chiefly in London. But there are letters showing him to have made himself acceptable to some of the best and most distinguished persons in Dublin; and he escaped without having any quarrel with Swift, his acquaintance with whom had begun some time before. in the literary history of Addison those seven years of official service are almost a blank, till we approach their close. He defended the Government in an anonymous pamphlet on *The Present State of the war*: he united compliments to the all-powerful Marlborough with indifferent attempts at lyrical poetry in his opera of *Rosamond*; and besides furnishing a prologue to Steele's comedy of *The Tender Husband*, he perhaps gave some assistance in the composition of the play. Irish administration, however, allowed it would seem more leisure than might have been expected. During the last few months of his



tenure of office Addison contributed largely to the tattler. But his entrance on this new field does nearly coincide with the beginning of a new section in his history.

Even the coalition-ministry of Godolphin too Whiggish for the taste of Queen Anne; and the Tories, the favourites of the court, gained both in parliamentary power and in popularity out of doors, by a combination of lucky accidents, dexterous management, and divisions and double-dealing among their adversaries. The real failure of the prosecution of Addison's old friend Sacheverell, completed the ruin of the Whigs; and in August 1710 an entire revolution in the ministry had been completed. The Tory administration which succeeded, kept its place till the queen's death in 1714, and Addison was thus left to devote four of the best years of his life, from his thirty-ninth year to his forty-third, to occupations less lucrative than those in which his time had recently been frittered away, but much more conducive to the extension of his own fame, and to the benefit of English literature. Although our information as to his pecuniary affairs is very scanty, we are entitled to believe that he was now independent of literary labour. He speaks, in an extant paper, of having had (but lost) property in the West Indies; and he is understood to have inherited several thousand pounds from a younger brother, who was governor of Madras. In 1711 he purchased, for 10,000 pounds the estate of Bilton, near Rugby, the place which afterwards became the residence of Mr. Apperley, better known by his assumed name of "Nimrod."

During those four years he produced a few political writings. Soon after the fall of the ministry, he contributed five numbers to the Whig Examiner, a paper set up in opposition to the Tory periodical of the same name, which was then conducted by the poet Prior, and afterwards became the vehicle of Swift's most vehement invectives against the party he had once belonged to. These are certainly the most ill-natured of Addison's writings, but they are neither lively nor vigorous. There is more spirit in his allegorical pamphlet, the trial and Conviction of Count Tariff.

But from the autumn of 1710 till the end of 1714 his principal employment was the composition of his celebrated Periodical Essays. The honour of inventing the plan of such compositions, as well as that of first carrying the idea into execution,



belongs to Richard Steele, who had been a schoolfellow of Addison at the Charter-house continued to be on intimate terms with him afterwards, and attached himself with his characteristic ardour to the same political party. When, in April 1709, Steele published the first number of the *Tattler*, Addison was in Dublin, and knew nothing of the design. He is said to have detected his friend's authorship only by recognizing, in one of the early papers, a critical remark which he remembered having himself communicated to Steele. He began to furnish essays in a few weeks, assisted occasionally while he held office, and afterwards wrote oftener than Steele himself. He thus contributed in all, if his literary executor selected his contributions correctly, more than 60 of the 271 essays which the work contains. The *Tattler* exhibited, in more ways than one, symptoms of being an experiment. The projector, imitating the news-sheets in form, thought it prudent to give, in each number, news in addition to the essay; and there was a want, both of unity and of correct finishing, in the putting together of the literary materials. Addison's contributions, in particular, are in many places as lively as anything he ever wrote; and his style, in its more familiar moods at least, had been fully formed before he returned from the Continent. But, as compared with his later pieces, these are only what the painter's loose studies and sketches are to the landscapes which he afterwards constructs out of them. In his invention of incidents and characters, one thought after another is hastily used and hastily dismissed, as if he were putting his own powers to the test, or trying the effect of various kinds of objects on his readers; his most ambitious flights, in the shape of allegories and the like, are stiff and inanimate; and his favourite field of literary criticism is touched so slightly, as to show that he still wanted confidence in the taste and knowledge of the public.

The *Tattler* was dropped at the beginning of 1711, but only to be followed by the *Spectator*, which was begun on the 1st day of March, and appeared every week-day till the 6th day of December 1712. It had then completed the 555 numbers usually collected in its first seven volumes. Addison, now in London and unemployed, co-operated with Steele constantly from the very opening of the series; and the two, contributing almost equally, seem together to have written not very much less than five hundred of the papers. Emboldened by the success of their former adventure, they devoted their whole space to the essays. They relieved



with a confidence which the extraordinary popularity of the work fully justified, on their power of exciting the interest of a wide audience by pictures and reflections drawn from a field which embraced the whole compass of ordinary life and ordinary knowledge, no kind of practical themes being positively excluded except such as were political, and all literary topics being held admissible, for which it seemed possible to command attention from persons of average taste and information. A seeming unity was given to the undertaking, and curiosity and interest awakened on behalf of the conductors, by the happy invention of the Spectator's Club, in which Steele is believed to have drawn all the characters. The figure of Sir Roger de Coverley, however, the best even in the opening group, is the only one that was afterwards elaborately depicted; and Addison was the author of all the papers in which his oddities and amiabilities are so admirably delineated. To him, also, the Spectators owed a very large share of its highest excellences. His wee many, and these the most natural and elegant, if not the most original, of its humorous sketches of human character and social eccentricities, its good-humoured satires on ridiculous features in manners, and on corrupt symptoms in public taste; these topics, however, making up a department in which Steele was fairly on a level with his more famous coadjutor. But Steele had neither learning, nor taste, nor critical acuteness sufficient to qualify him for enriching the series with such literary disquisitions as those which Addison insinuated to often into the lighter matter of his essays, and of which he gave as elaborate specimen in his celebrated and agreeable criticism on Paradise Lost. Still further beyond the powers of Steele were those speculations on the theory of literature and of the processes of thought analogous to it, which, in essays "On the Pleasures of the Imagination," Addison prosecuted, not, indeed, with much of philosophical depth, but with a sagacity and comprehensiveness which we shall undervalue much unless we remember how little of philosophy was to be found in any critical views previously propounded in England. To Addison, further, belong those essays which (most frequently introduced in regular alternation in the papers of Saturday) rise into the region of moral and religious meditation, and tread the elevated ground with a step so graceful as to allure the reader irresistibly to follow; sometimes, as in the "Walk through Westminster Abbey," enlivening solemn thought by gentle sportiveness; sometimes flowing on which an uninterrupted sedateness of didactic eloquence and sometimes shrouding sacred truths in the veil of ingenious allegory, as in the majestic "Vision of Mirza."



While, in a word, the Spectator, if Addison had not taken part in it, would probably have been as lively and humorous as it was, and not less popular in its own day, it would have wanted some of its strongest claims on the respect of posterity, by being at once lower in its moral tone, far less abundant in literary knowledge, and much less vigorous and expanded in thinking. In point of style, again, the two friends resemble each other so closely as to be hardly distinguishable, when both are dealing with familiar objects, and writing in a key not rising above that of conversation. But in the higher tones of thought and composition, Addison showed a mastery of language raising him very decisively, not above Steele only, but above all his contemporaries. Indeed, it may safely be said, that no one, in any age of our literature, has united, so strikingly as he did, the colloquial grace and ease which mark the style of an accomplished gentleman, with the power of soaring into a strain of expression nobly and eloquently dignified.

On the cessation of the Spectator, Steele set on foot the Guardian, which started in March 1713, came to an end in October, with its 175th number. To this series Addison gave 53 papers, being a very frequent writer during the latter half of its progress. None of his essays here aim so high as the best of those in the Spectator; but he often exhibits both his cheerful and well-balanced humour, and his earnest desire to inculcate sound principles of literary judgment. In the last six months of the year 1714, the Spectator received its eighth and last volume; for which Steele appears not to have written at all, and Addison to have contributed 24 of the 80 papers. Most of these form, in the unbroken seriousness both of their topics and of their manner, a contrast to the majority of his essays in the earlier volumes; but several of them, both in this vein and in one less lofty, are among the best known, if not the finest, of all his essays. Such are the "Mountain of Miseries;" the antediluvian novel of "Shallum and Hilpa;" the "Reflections by Moonlight on the Divine Perfections."

In April 1713 Addison brought on the stage, very reluctantly, as we are assured, and can easily believe, his tragedy of Cota. Its success was dazzling; but this issue was mainly owing to the concern which the politicians took in the exhibition. The Whigs hailed it as a brilliant manifesto in favour of constitutional freedom. The Tories echoed the applause, to show themselves enemies of despotism, and professed to find in Julius Caesar a parallel to the formidable Marlborough. Even



with such extrinsic aids, and the advantage derived from the established fame of the author, Cato could never have been esteemed a good dramatic work, unless in an age in which dramatic power and insight were almost extinct. It is poor even in its poetical elements, and is redeemed only by the finely solemn tone of its moral reflection, and the singular refinement and equable smoothness of its diction.

The literary career of Addison might almost be held as closed soon after the death of Queen Anne, which occurred in August 1714, when he had lately completed his 42d year. His own life extended only five years longer, and this closing portion of it offers little that is pleasing or instructive. We see him attaining the summit of his ambition, only to totter for a little and sink into an early grave. We are reminded of his more vigorous days by nothing but a few happy inventions interspersed in political pamphlets, and the gay fancy of a trifling poem of Kneller's portrait of George I.

The lord justices who, previously chosen secretly by the Elector of Hanover, assumed the government on the Queen's demise, were, as a matter of course, the leading Whigs. They appointed Addison to act as their secretary. He next held, for a very short time, his former office under the Irish lord-lieutenant, and, early in 1715, he was made one of the lords of trade. In the course of the same year occurred the first of the only two quarrels with friends, into which the prudent, good-tempered, and modest Addison is said to have ever been betrayed. His adversary on this occasion was Pope, who, only three years before, had received, with an appearance of humble thankfulness, Addison's friendly remarks on his *Essay on Criticism*; but who, though still very young, was already very famous, and beginning to show incessantly his literary jealousies and his personal and party hatreds. Several little misunderstandings had paved the way for a breach, when, at the same time with the first volume of Pope's *Iliad*, there appeared a translation of the first book of the poem, bearing the name of Thomas Tickell. Tickell, in his preface, disclaimed all rivalry with Pope, and declared that he wished only to bespeak favourable attention for his contemplated version of the *Odyssey*. But the simultaneous publication was awkward; and Tickell, though not so good a versifier as Pope, was a dangerous rival, as being a good Greek scholar. Further, he was Addison's under-secretary and confidential friend; and Addison, cautious though he was, does appear to have said (quite truly) that Tickell's translation was more faithful than the other. Pope's anger could not be restrained.



He wrote those famous lines in which he describes Addison under the name of Atticus; and, as if to make reconciliation impossible, he not only circulated these among his friends, but sent a copy to Addison himself. Afterwards, he went so far as to profess a belief that the rival translation was really Addison's own. It is pleasant to observe that, after the insult had been perpetrated, Addison was at the pains, in his *Freeholder*, to express hearty approbation of the *Iliad* of Pope; who, on the contrary, after Addison's death, deliberately printed the striking but malignant lines in the *Epistle to Dr Arbuthnot*. In 1715 there was acted, with little success, the comedy of *The Drummer, or the Haunted House*, which, though it appeared under the name of Steele, was certainly not his, and was probably written in whole or chiefly by Addison. It contributes very little to his fame. From September 1715 to June 1716, he defended the Hanoverian succession, and the proceedings of the Government in regard to the rebellion, in a paper cal'ed the *Freeholder*, which he wrote entirely himself, dropping it with fifty-fifth number. It is much better tempered, not less spirited, and much more able in thinking than his *Examiner*. The finical man of taste does indeed show himself to be sometimes weary of discussing constitutional questions; but he aims many enlivening thrusts at weak points of social life and manners; and the character of the Fox-hunting Squire, who is introduced as the representative of the Jacobites, is drawn with so much humour and force that we regret not being allowed to see more of him.

In August 1716, when he had completed his 44th year, Addison married the Countess-Dowager of Warwick, a widow of fifteen years' standing. She seems to have forfeited her jointure by the marriage, and to have brought her husband nothing but the occupancy of Holland House at Kensington. We know hardly anything positively in regard to the affair, or as to origin or duration of his acquaintance with the lady or her family. But the current assertion that the courtship was a long one is very probably erroneous. There are better grounds for believing the assertion, transmitted from Addison's own time, that the marriage was unhappy. The countess is said to have been proud as well as violent and to have supposed that, in contracting the alliance, she conferred honour instead of receiving it. To the uneasiness caused by domestic discomfort, the most friendly critics of Addison's character have attributed those habits of intemperance, which are said to have grown on him in his later years to such extent as to have broken his health and accelerated his death. His biographer, Miss Aikin, who disbelieves



his alleged want of matrimonial quiet, has called in question, with much ingenuity, the whole story of his sottishness; and it must at any rate be allowed that all the assertions which tend to fix such charges on him in the earlier parts of his life, rest on no evidence that is worthy of credit, and are in themselves highly improbable. Sobriety was not the virtue of the day; and the constant frequenting of coffee-houses, which figures so often in the Spectator and elsewhere, and which was really practiced among literary men as well as others, cannot have had good effects. Addison, however, really appears to have had no genuine relish for this mode of life; and there are curious notices, especially in Steele's correspondence, of his having lodgings out of town, to which he retired for study and composition. But whatever the cause may have been, his health was shattered before he took that which was the last, and certainly the most unwise step, in his ascent to political power.

For a considerable time dissensions had existed in the ministry; and these came to a crisis in April 1717, when those who had been the real chiefs passed into the ranks of the opposition. Townshend was dismissed, and Walpole anticipated dismissal by resignation. There was now formed, under the leadership of General Stanhope and Lord Sunderland, an administration which, as resting on court-influence, was nicknamed the "German ministry." Sunderland, Addison's former superior, became one of the two principal secretaries of state; and Addison himself was appointed as the other. His elevation to such a post had been contemplated on the accession of George L., and prevented, we are told, by his own refusal; and it is asserted, on the authority of Pope, that his acceptance now was owing only to the influence of his wife. Even if there is no ground, as there probably is not, for the allegation of Addison's inefficiency in the details of business, his unfitness for such an office in such circumstance was undeniable and glaring. It was impossible that a Government, whose secretary of state could not open his lips in debate, should long face an opposition headed by Robert Walpole. The decay of Addison's health, too, was going on rapidly, being, we may readily conjecture, precipitated by anxiety, if now worse causes were at work. Ill health was the reason assigned for retirement, in the letter of resignation which he laid before the king in March 1718, eleven months after his appointment. He received a pension of 1500 pound a year.



Not long afterwards the divisions in the Whig party alienated him from his oldest friend. The Peerahe Bill, introduced in February 1719, was attacked, on behalf of the oppositions, in a weekly paper, which was called the Plebeian, and written by Steele. Addison answered it temperately enough in the Old Whig; provocation from the Plebeian brought forth angry retort from the Whig: Steele charged Addison with being so old Whig as to have forgotten his principles; and Addison sneered at Grub Street, and called his friend "Little Dicky." (150-1) How Addison felt after this painful quarrel we are not told directly; but the Old Whig was excluded from that posthumous collection of his works for which his executor Tickell had received from him authority and directions. In that collection was inserted a treatise on the evidences of the faith, entitled *Of the Christian Religion*. Its theological value is very small; but it is pleasant to regard it as the last effort of one who, amid still weaknesses, was a man of real goodness as well as of eminent genius.

The disease under which Addison laboured appears to have been asthma. It became more violent after his retirement from office, and was now accompanied by dropsy. His deathbed was placid and resigned, and comforted by those religious hopes which he had so often suggested to others, and the value of which he is said, in an anecdote of doubtful authority, to have inculcated in a parting interview with his stepson. He died at Holland House on the 17th day of June 1719, six weeks after having completed his 47th year. His body, after lying in state, was interred in the Poet's Corner of Westminster Abbey.

#### A-The Spectator's Account Of Himself

I HAVE observed, that a reader seldom peruses a book with pleasure, till he knows whether the writer of it be a black [dark] or a fair man, of a mild or choleric disposition, married or a bachelor, with other particulars of the like nature, that conduce very much to the right understanding of an author. To gratify this curiosity, which is so natural to a reader, I design this paper and my next as prefatory discourses to my following writings, and shall give some account in them of the several persons that are engaged in this work. As the chief trouble of compiling, digesting, and correcting will fall to my share, I must do myself the justice to open the work with my own history.



I was born to a small hereditary estate, which, according to the tradition of the village where it lies, was bounded by the same hedges and ditches in William the Conqueror's time that it is at present, and has been delivered down from father to son whole and entire, without the loss or acquisition of a single field or meadow, during the space of six hundred years. There runs a story in the family, that when my mother was gone with child of me about three months she dreamt that she was brought to bed of a judge whether this might proceed from a law-suit which was then depending in the family, or my father's being a justice of the peace, I cannot determine; for I am not so vain as to think it presaged any dignity that I should arrive at in my future life, though that was the interpretation which the neighbourhood put upon it.

The gravity of my behaviour at my very first appearance in the world, and all the time that I sucked, seemed to favour my mother's dream: for, as she has often told me, I threw away my rattle before I was two months old, and would not make use of my coral till they had taken away the bells from it.

As for the rest of my infancy, there being nothing in it remarkable, I shall pass it over in silence. I find, that during my non-age, I had the reputation of a very sullen youth, but was always a favourite of my school-master, who used to say, that my parts were solid, and would wear well. I had not been long at the university, before I distinguished myself by a most profound silence: for during the space of eight years, excepting in the public exercises of the college, I scarce uttered the quantity of an hundred words; and indeed do not remember that I ever spoke three sentences together in my whole life. Whilst I was in this learned body, I applied myself with so much diligence to my studies, that there are very few celebrated books, either in the learned or modern tongues, which I am not acquainted with.

Upon the death of my father. I was resolved to travel into foreign countries, and therefore left the university with the character of an odd, unaccountable fellow, that had a great deal of learning, if I would but show it. An insatiable thirst after knowledge carried me into all the countries of Europe in which there was anything new or strange to be seen: nay, to such a degree was my curiosity raised, that having read the controversies of some great men concerning the antiquities of Egypt, I made a voyage to Grand Cairo, on purpose to take the measure of a



pyramid; and as soon as I had set myself right in that particular, returned to my native country with great satisfaction.

I have passed my latter years in this city, where I am frequently seen in most public places, though there are not above half a dozen of my select friends that know me; of whom my next paper shall give a more particular account. There is no place of general resort, wherein I do not often make my appearance; sometimes I am seen thrusting my head into a round of politicians at Will's, and listening with great attention to the narratives that are made in those little circular audiences. Sometimes I smoke a pipe at Child's, and whilst I seem attentive to nothing but the Postman [a newspaper], overhear the conversation of every table in the room. I appear on Sunday nights at St. James's Coffee-house, and sometimes join the little committee of politics in the inner room, as one who comes there to hear and improve. My face is likewise very well known at the Grecian, the Cocoa-Tree, and in the theatres both of Drury Lane and the haymarket. I have been taken for a merchant upon the Exchange for above these ten years, and sometimes pass for a Jew in the assembly of stock-jobbers at Jonathan's: in short, wherever I see a cluster of people, I always mix with them, though I never open my lips but in my own club.

Thus I live in the world rather as a Spectator of mankind than as one of the species; by which means I have made myself a speculative statesman, soldier, merchant, and artisan, without ever meddling with any practical part in life. I am very well versed in the theory of a husband or a father, and can discern the errors in the economy, business, and diversion of others, better than those who are engaged in them; as standers-by discover plots, which are apt to escape those who are in the game. I never espoused any part with violence, and am resolved to observe an exact neutrality between the Whigs and Tories, unless I shall be forced to declare myself by the hostilities of either side. In short I have acted in all the parts of my life as a looker-on, which is the character I intend to preserve in this paper.

I have given the reader just so much of my history and character, as to let him see I am not altogether unqualified for the business I have undertaken. As for other particulars in my life and adventures, I shall insert them in following papers, as I shall see occasion. In the mean time, when I consider how much I have seen, read,



and heard, I begin to blame my own taciturnity; and since I have neither time nor inclination to communicate the fullness of my heart in speech, I am resolved to do it in writing, and to print myself out, if possible, before I die. I have been often told by my friends, that it is pity so many useful discoveries which I have made should be in the possession of a silent man. For this reason, therefore, I shall publish a sheet-full of thoughts every morning, for the benefit of my contemporaries; and if I can any way contribute to the diversion or improvement of the country in which I live, I shall leave it, when I am summoned out of it, with the secret satisfaction of thinking that I have not lived in vain.

There are three very material points which I have not spoken to in this paper; and which, for several important reasons, I must keep to myself, at least for some time: I mean an account of my name, my age, and my lodgings. I must confess, I would gratify my reader in anything that is reasonable; but as for these three particulars, though I am sensible they might tend very much to the embellishment of my paper, I cannot yet come to a resolution of communicating them to the public. They would indeed draw me out of that obscurity which I have enjoyed for many years, and expose me in public places to several salutes and civilities, which have been always very disagreeable to me; for the greatest pain I can suffer is the being talked to, and being stared at. It is for this reason likewise, that I keep my complexion and dress as very great secrets: though it is not impossible, but I may make discoveries of both in the progress of the work I have undertaken. After having been thus particular upon myself, I shall in to-morrow's paper give an account of those gentlemen who are concerned with me in this work ; for, as I have before intimated, a plan of it is laid and concerted (as all other natters of importance are) in a club. However, as my friends have engaged me to stand in the front, those who have a mind to correspond with me, may direct their letters to the SPECTATOR, at Mr. Buckley's, in Little Britain. For I must further acquaint the reader, that though our club meets only on Tuesdays and Thursdays, we have appointed a Committee to sit every night, for the inspection of all such papers as may contribute to the advancement of the public weal.



**Passage:**

1. I was born to a small hereditary estate, which, according to the tradition of the village where it lies, was bounded by the same hedges and ditches in William the Conqueror's time that it is at present, and has been delivered down from father to son whole and entire, without the loss or acquisition of a single field or meadow, during the space of six hundred years. There runs a story in the family, that when my mother was gone with child of me about three months she dreamt that she was brought to bed of a judge whether this might proceed from a law-suit which was then depending in the family, or my father's being a justice of the peace, I cannot determine; for I am not so vain as to think it presaged any dignity that I should arrive at in my future life, though that was the interpretation which the neighbourhood put upon it.

The gravity of my behaviour at my very first appearance in the world, and all the time that I sucked, seemed to favour my mother's dream: for, as she has often told me, I threw away my rattle before I was two months old, and would not make use of my coral till they had taken away the bells from it.

As for the rest of my infancy, there being nothing in it remarkable, I shall pass it over in silence. I find, that during my non-age, I had the reputation of a very sullen youth, but was always a favourite of my school-master, who used to say, that my parts were solid, and would wear well. I had not been long at the university, before I distinguished myself by a most profound silence; for during the space of eight years, excepting in the public exercises of the college, I scarce uttered the quantity of an hundred words; and indeed do not remember that I ever spoke three sentences together in my whole life. Whilst I was in this learned body, I applied myself with so much diligence to my studies, that there are very few celebrated books, either in the learned or modern tongues, which I am not acquainted with.



Short and Long Answer Questions:

1. How does this paper secure the interest of the public in subsequent numbers?
2. In what respects does the Spectator's description of himself conform to the life and temperament of Addison?
3. Point out what is humorous and what is serious in the Spectator's account of himself.
4. What classes of society are represented in the Club?
5. What points concerning Sir Roger's character arouse the most interest?
6. What matter is given the most emphasis in the characterization of the Templar?
7. How is the ideal merchant reflected in Sir Andrew?
8. What is the purpose of including Will Honeycomb among the members of the Club? Is the Will Honeycomb type of man to be found in society to-day?
9. What is attractive in the personality of Captain Sentry?
10. How is Sir Roger's character revealed in his home life?



*B-The Vision Of Mirza*

WHEN I was at Grand Cairo I picked up several oriental manuscripts, which I have still by me. Among others I met with one entitled, *The Visions of Mirza*, which I have read over with great pleasure. I intend to give it to the public when I have no other entertainment for them and shall begin with the first vision, which I have translated word for word as follows:

"On the fifth day of the moon, which according to the custom of my forefathers I always kept holy, after having washed myself, and offered up my morning devotions, I ascended the high hills of Bagdat, in order to pass the rest of the day in meditation and prayer. As I was here airing myself on the tops of the mountains, I fell into a profound contemplation on the vanity of human life; and passing from one thought to another, surely, said I, man is but a shadow and life a dream. Whilst I was thus musing, I cast my eyes towards the summit of a rock that was not far from me, where I discovered one in the habit of a shepherd, with a musical instrument in his hand. As I looked upon him, he applied it to his lips and began to play upon it. The sound of it was exceeding sweet, and wrought into a variety of tunes that were inexpressibly melodious, and altogether different from anything I had ever heard. They put me in mind of those heavenly airs that are played to the departed souls of good men upon their first arrival in paradise, to wear out the impressions of their last agonies, and qualify them for the pleasures of that happy place. My heart melted away in secret raptures.

"I had been often told that the rock before me was the haunt of a genius; and that several had been entertained with music who had passed by it, but never heard that the musician had before made himself visible. When he had raised my thoughts, by those transporting airs which he played, to taste the pleasures of his conversation, as I looked upon him like one astonished, he beckoned to me, and by the waving of his hand directed me to approach the place where he sat. I drew near with that reverence which is due to a superior nature; and as my heart was entirely subdued by the captivating strains I had heard, I fell down at his feet and wept. The genius smiled upon me with a look of compassion and affability that familiarized him to my imagination, and at once dispelled all the fears and apprehensions with which I approached him. He lifted me from the ground, and



taking me by the hand, Mirza, said he, I have heard thee in thy soliloquies, follow me.

"He then led me to the highest pinnacle of the rock, and placed me on the top of it. Cast thy eyes eastward, said he, and tell me what thou seest. I see, said I, a huge valley and a prodigious tide of water rolling through it. The valley that thou seest, said he, is the vale of misery, and the tide of water that thou seest is part of the great tide of eternity. What is the reason, said I, that the tide I see rises out of a thick mist at one end, and again loses itself in a thick mist at the other? What thou seest, says he, is that portion of eternity which is called time, measured out by the sun, and reaching from the beginning of the world to its consummation. Examine now, said he, this sea that is thus hounded with darkness at both ends, and tell me what thou discoverest in it. I see a bridge, said I, standing in the midst of the tide. The bridge thou seest, said he, is human life; consider it attentively. Upon a more leisurely survey of it, I found that it consisted of threescore and ten entire arches, with several broken arches, which, added to those that were entire, made up the number about an hundred. As I was counting the arches the genius told me that this bridge consisted at first of a thousand arches; but that a great flood swept away the rest, and left the bridge in the ruinous condition I now beheld it. But tell me further, said he, what thou discoverest on it. I see multitudes of people passing over it, said I, and a black cloud hanging on each end of it. As I looked more attentively, I saw several of the passengers dropping through the bridge, into the great tide that flowed underneath it; and upon further examination, perceived there were innumerable trap-doors that lay concealed in the bridge, which the passengers no sooner trod upon, but they fell through them into the tide and immediately disappeared. These hidden pitfalls were set very thick at the entrance of the bridge, so that throngs of people no sooner broke through the cloud, but many of them fell into them. They grew thinner towards the middle, but multiplied and lay closer together towards the end of the arches that were entire.

"There were indeed some persons, but their number was very small, that continued a kind of hobbling march on the broken arches, but fell through one after another, being quite tired and spent with so long a walk.

"I passed some time in the contemplation of this wonderful structure, and the great variety of objects which it presented. My heart was filled with a deep



melancholy to see several dropping unexpectedly in the midst of mirth and jollity, and catching at everything that stood by them to save themselves. Some were looking up towards the heavens in a thoughtful posture, and in the midst of a speculation stumbled and fell out of sight. Multitudes were very busy in the pursuit of baubles that glittered in their eyes and danced before them, but often when they thought themselves within the reach of them, their footing failed and down they sunk.

"The genius seeing me indulge myself in this melancholy prospect, told me I had dwelt long enough upon it: take thine eyes off the bridge, said he, and tell me if thou seest anything thou dost not comprehend. Upon looking up, What mean, said I, those great flights of birds that are perpetually hovering about the bridge, and settling upon it from time to time? I see vultures, harpies, ravens, cormorants, and among many other feathered creatures, several little winged boys, that perch in great numbers upon the middle arches. These, said the genius, are envy, avarice, superstition, despair, love, with the like cares and passions, that infect human life.

"I here fetched a deep sigh; alas, said I, man was made in vain! How is he given away to misery and mortality! tortured in life, and swallowed up in death! The genius, being moved with compassion towards me, bid me quit so uncomfortable a prospect. Look no more, said he, on man in the first stage of his existence, in his setting out for eternity; but cast thine eye on that thick mist into which the tide bears the several generations of mortals that fall into it. I directed my sight as I was ordered, and (whether or no the good genius strengthened it with any supernatural force, or dissipated part of the mist that was before too thick for the eye to penetrate) I saw the valley opening at the farther end, and spreading forth into an immense ocean, that had a huge rock of adamant running through the midst of it, and dividing it into two equal parts. The clouds still rested on one half of it, insomuch that I could discover nothing in it: but the other appeared to me a vast ocean planted with innumerable islands, that were covered with fruits and flowers, and interwoven with a thousand little shining seas that ran among them. I could see persons dressed in glorious habits with garlands upon their heads, passing among the trees, lying down by the sides of the fountains, or resting on beds of flowers; and could hear a confused harmony of singing birds, falling waters, human voices, and musical instruments. Gladness grew in me upon the discovery of so delightful a scene. I wished for the wings of an eagle, that I might



fly away to those happy seats; but the genius told me there was no passage to them, except through the gates of death that I saw opening every moment upon the bridge. The islands, said he, that lie so fresh and green before thee, and with which the whole face of the ocean appears spotted as far as thou canst see, are more in number than the sands on the sea-shore ; there are myriads of islands behind those which thou here discoverest, reaching farther than thine eye, or even thine imagination, can extend itself. These are the mansions of good men after death, who, according to the degree and kinds of virtue in which they excelled, are distributed among these several islands, which abound with pleasures of different kinds and degrees, suitable to the relishes and perfections of those who are settled in them; every island is a paradise, accommodated to its respective inhabitants. Are not these, O Mirza, habitations worth contending for? Does life appear miserable, that gives thee opportunities of earning such a reward? Is death to be feared, that will convey thee to so happy an existence? Think not man was made in vain, who has such an eternity reserved for him. I gazed with inexpressible pleasure on these happy islands. At length, said I, show me now, I beseech thee, the secrets that lie hid under those dark clouds which cover the ocean on the other side of the rock of adamant. The genius making me no answer, I turned about to address myself to him a second time, but I found that he had left me. I then turned again to the vision which I had been so long contemplating, but, instead of the rolling tide, the arched bridge, and the happy islands, I saw nothing but the long hollow valley of Bagdat, with oxen, sheep, and camels grazing upon the sides of it."



Passage:

1. On the fifth day of the moon, which according to the custom of my forefathers I always keep holy, after having washed myself and offered up my morning devotions, I ascended the high hills of Baghdad, in order to pass the rest of the day in meditation and prayer. As I was here airing myself on the tops of the mountains, I fell into a profound contemplation on the vanity of human life, and passing from one thought to another, 'Surely,' said I, 'man is but a shadow, and life a dream.' Whilst I was thus musing, I cast my eyes towards the summit of a rock that was not far from me, where I discovered one in the habit of a shepherd, with a little musical instrument in his hand. As I looked upon him he applied it to his lips, and began to play upon it. The sound of it was exceeding sweet, and wrought into a variety of tunes that were inexpressibly melodious and altogether different from anything I had ever heard. They put me in mind of those heavenly airs that are played to the departed souls of good men upon their first arrival in Paradise, to wear out the impressions of the last agonies, and qualify them for the pleasures of that happy place. My heart melted away in secret raptures.

"I had often been told that the rock before me was the haunt of a genius; and that several had been entertained with music who had passed by it, but never heard that the musician had before made himself visible. When he had raised my thoughts by those transporting airs which he played, to taste the pleasures of his conversation, as I looked upon him like one astonished, he beckoned to me, and by the waving of his hand directed me to approach the place where he sat. I drew near with that reverence which is due to a superior nature; and as my heart was entirely subdued by the captivating strains I had heard, I fell down at his feet and wept. The genius smiled upon me with a look of compassion and affability that familiarized him to my imagination, and at once dispelled all the fears and apprehensions with which I approached him. He lifted me from the ground, and taking me by the hand, 'Mirza,' said he, 'I have heard thee in thy soliloquies; follow me.'



### C- Sir Roger At Home

Having often received an invitation from my friend Sir Roger de Coverley to pass away a month with him in the country, I last week accompanied him thither, and am settled with him for some time at his country-house, where I intend to form several of my ensuing speculations. Sir Roger, who is very well acquainted with my humour, lets me rise and go to bed when I please ; dine at his own table, or in my chamber, as I think fit ; sit still, and say nothing, without bidding me be merry. When the gentlemen of the country come to see him, he only shows me at a distance. As I have been walking in his fields, I have observed them stealing a sight of me over an hedge, and have heard the knight desiring them not to let me see them, for that I hated to be stared at.

I am the more at ease in Sir Roger's family, because it consists of sober and staid persons ; for as the knight is the best master in the world, he seldom changes his servants and as he is beloved by all about him, his servants never care for leaving him: by this means his domestics are all in years, and grown old with their master. You would take his valet de chambre for his brother ; his butler is grey-headed; his groom is one of the gravest men that I have ever seen; and his coachman has the looks of a privy-councillor. You see the goodness of the master even in the old house-dog; and in a gray pad, that is kept in the stable with great care and tenderness out of regard to his past services, though he has been useless for several years.

I could not but observe with a great deal of pleasure, the joy that appeared in the countenances of these ancient domestics upon my friend's arrival at his country-seat. Some of them could not refrain from tears at the sight of their old master: every one of them pressed forward to do something for him, and seemed discouraged if they were not employed. At the same time the good old knight, with a mixture of the father and the master of the family, tempered the inquiries after his own affairs with several kind questions relating to themselves. This humanity and good nature engages everybody to him, so that when he is pleasant upon any of them, all his family are in good humour, and none so much as the person whom he diverts himself with: on the contrary, if he coughs, or betrays any infirmity of old age, it is easy for a stander-by to observe a secret concern in the looks of all his servants.



My worthy friend has put me under the particular care of his butler, who is a very prudent man, and, as well as the rest of his fellow-servants, wonderfully desirous of pleasing me, because they have often heard their master talk of me as of his particular friend.

My chief companion, when Sir Roger is diverting himself in the woods or the fields, is a very venerable man, who is ever with Sir Roger, and has lived at his house in the nature of a chaplain above thirty years. This gentleman is a person of good sense, and some learning, of a very regular life, and obliging conversation: he heartily loves Sir Roger, and knows that he is very much in the old knight's esteem; so that he lives in the family rather as a relation than a dependant.

I have observed in several of my papers, that my friend Sir Roger, amidst all his good qualities, is something of an humourist; and that his virtues, as well as imperfections, are, as it were, tinged by a certain extravagance, which make them particularly his, and distinguishes them from those of other men. This cast of mind, as it is generally very innocent in itself, so it renders his conversation highly agreeable, and more delightful than the same degree of sense and virtue would appear in their common and ordinary colours. As I was walking with him last night, he asked me how I liked the good man whom I have just now mentioned: and, without staying for my answer, told me, that he was afraid of being insulted with Latin and Greek at his own table ; for which reason, he desired a particular friend of his at the University, to find him out a clergyman rather of plain sense than much learning, of a good aspect, a clear voice, a sociable temper, and, if possible, a man that understood a little of backgammon. "My friend (says Sir Roger) found me out this gentleman, who, besides the endowments required of him, is, they tell me, a good scholar, though he does not show it. I have given him the parsonage of the parish; and because I know his value, have settled upon him a good annuity for life. If he outlives me, he shall find that he was higher in my esteem than perhaps he thinks he is. He has now been with me thirty years; and, though he does not know I have taken notice of it, has never in all that time asked anything of me for himself, though he is every day soliciting me for something in behalf of one or other of my tenants, his parishioners. There has not been a law-suit in the parish since he has lived among them : if any dispute arises, they apply themselves to him for the decision; if they do not acquiesce in his judgment, which I think never happened above once, or



twice at most, they appeal to me. At his first settling with me, I made him a present of all the good sermons which have been printed in English, and only begged of him that every Sunday he would pronounce one of them in the pulpit. Accordingly, he has digested them into such a series, that they follow one another naturally, and make a continued system of practical divinity."

As Sir Roger was going on in his story, the gentleman we were talking of came up to us; and upon the knight's asking him who preached to-morrow, (for it was Saturday night,) told us, the Bishop of St. Asaph in the morning, and Dr. South in the afternoon. He then showed us his list of preachers for the whole year, where I saw with a great deal of pleasure, Archbishop Tillotson, Bishop Saunderson, Doctor Barrow, Doctor Calamy, with several living authors who have published discourses of practical divinity. I no sooner saw this venerable man in the pulpit, but I very much approved of my friend's insisting upon the qualifications of a good aspect and a clear voice; for I was so charmed with the gracefulness of his figure and delivery, as well as the discourses he pronounced, that I think I never passed any time more to my satisfaction. A sermon repeated after this manner, is like the composition of a poet in the mouth of a graceful actor.

I could heartily wish that more of our country clergy would follow this example; and, instead of wasting their spirits in laborious compositions of their own, would endeavour after a handsome elocution, and all those other talents that are proper to enforce what has been penned by greater masters. This would not only be more easy to themselves, but more edifying to the people.

**Passage:**

1. The first of our society [The Spectator Club] is a gentleman of Worcestershire of an ancient descent, a baronet, his name Sir Roger de Coverley. His great grandfather was inventor of that famous Country-dance which is called after him. All who know that shire are very well acquainted with the parts and merits of Sir Roger. He is a gentleman that is very singular in his behaviour, but his singularities proceed from his good sense, and are contradictions to the manners of the world, only as he thinks the world is in the wrong. However, his humour creates him no enemies, for he does nothing with sourness or



obstinacy; and his being unconfined to modes and forms, makes him but the readier and more capable to please and oblige all he know him. When he lives in town [London] he lives in Soho Square. It is said, he keeps himself a bachelor by reason he was crossed in love by a perverse beautiful widow of the next country to him.



**Short and Long Answer Questions:**

1. Where was Addison invited by Sir Roger to stay with him?
2. Who among the servants of Sir Roger looked like his brother?
3. Who among the domestic servants of Sir Roger looks like a privy councilor?
4. Why did tears come in the eyes of the servants when Sir Roger came home?
5. Who among the domestic servants of Sir Roger is a very prudent man?
6. Sir Roger diverted his time "in the woods." What does "in the woods" mean?
7. Who among the domestics of Sir Roger lives with him more as a relation than a dependant?
8. Why did Sir Roger not want to be insulted by Latin and Greek at his table?
9. How much annuity has been settled upon the Chaplain?
10. Should country clergy waste their time in composing their own sermons?
11. Write about the manner in which Addison spent his days at the country-seat of Sir Roger?
12. Write a note on the domestics of Sir Roger and their qualities.
13. Why has there been no litigation in Coverley since the Chaplain came there?
14. Write a note on the way in which the Chaplain made his speeches from the pulpit?
15. Who was a mixture of the father and the master of the family? Why?



**Multiple Questions:**

1. Where did the writer go with Sir Roger?
  - a. guest house
  - b. country-house
  - c. farm house
  - d. country Club
  
2. What, according to Sir Roger, did the writer hate most?
  - a. being stared at
  - b. being talked about
  - c. being ordered about
  - d. none of the above
  
3. Which of the following is the reason why the servants never thought of leaving Sir Roger's service?
  - a. Sir Roger never visited his country house
  - b. He was the best master in the world
  - c. He was very painstaking
  - d. He was very inconsiderate
  
4. Why does Sir Roger show much tenderness and consideration towards the old dog?
  - a. because he had grown old with the dog
  - b. because the dog belonged to his father
  - c. because the dog belonged to his wife
  - d. because of the past services of the dog
  
5. In whose care was the author put when he visited the country-house of Sir Roger?
  - a. butler
  - b. valet de chamber
  - c. groom
  - d. coachman



6. We are told that one of the domestics of Sir Roger lived with him for thirty years. Who is that man?

- a. The groom
- b. The chaplain
- c. The coachman
- d. The valet de chamber

7. Which of the following is not a characteristic of the Chaplain?

- a. clear voice
- b. sociable temper
- c. ability to play backgammon
- d. carping behavior

8. Sir Roger wanted the Chaplain to deliver sermons every week. What sort of sermons he wanted the Chaplain to deliver?

- a. sermons written by Sir Roger
- b. sermons written by Addison
- c. sermons written by famous divines
- d. sermons written by the Chaplain

9. "There has not been a law-suit in the parish since he has lived among them." Who is the "he" of the statement?

- a. Addison
- b. Sir Roger
- c. The Butler
- d. The Chaplain

10. Match the persons in column A with their characteristics in column B

- |              |                     |
|--------------|---------------------|
| a. groom     | i. humourist        |
| b. coachman  | ii. grave person    |
| c. chaplain  | iii. A humourist    |
| d. Sir Roger | iv. A venerable man |



### D-Sir Roger At Church

I AM always very well pleased with a country Sunday; and think, if keeping holy the seventh day were only a human institution, it would be the best method that could have been thought of for the polishing and civilizing of mankind. It is certain the country-people would soon degenerate into a kind of savages and barbarians, were there not such frequent returns of a stated time, in which the whole village meet together with their best faces, and in their cleanliest habits, to converse with one another upon indifferent subjects, hear their duties explained to them, and join together in adoration of the Supreme Being. Sunday clears away the rust of the whole week, not only as it refreshes in their minds the notions of religion, but as it puts both the sexes upon appearing in their most agreeable forms, and exerting all such qualities as are apt to give them a figure in the eye of the village. A country-fellow distinguishes himself as much in the churchyard as a citizen does upon the Change, the whole parish politics being generally discussed in that place either after sermon or before the bell rings.

My friend Sir Roger, being a good church-man, has beautified the inside of his church with several texts of his own choosing: he has likewise given a handsome pulpit-cloth, and railed in the communion-table at his own expense. He has often told me, that at his coming to his estate he found his parishioners very irregular; and that in order to make them kneel and join in the responses, he gave every one of them a hassoc and a Common Prayer Book; and at the same time employed an itinerant singing-master, who goes about the country for that purpose, to instruct them rightly in the tunes of the psalms; upon which they now very much value themselves, and indeed out-do most of the country churches that I have ever heard.

As Sir Roger is landlord to the whole congregation, he keeps them in very good order, and will suffer nobody to sleep in it besides himself; for if by chance he has been surprised into a short nap at sermon, upon recovering out of it he stands up and looks about him, and if he sees anybody else nodding, either wakes them himself, or sends his servant to them. Several other of the old knight's particularities break out upon these occasions: sometimes he will be lengthening out a verse in the singing-psalms, half a minute after the rest of the congregation have done with it; sometimes, when he is pleased with the matter of his devotion,



he pronounces Amen three or four times to the same prayer; and sometimes stands up when everybody else is upon their knees, to count the congregation, or see if any of his tenants are missing.

I was yesterday very much surprised to hear my old friend, in the midst of the service, calling out to one John Matthews to mind what he was about, and not disturb the congregation. This John Matthews, it seems, is remarkable for being an idle fellow, and at that time was kicking his heels for his diversion. This authority of the knight, though exerted in that odd manner which accompanies him in all circumstances of life, has a very good effect upon the parish, who are not polite enough to see anything ridiculous in his behaviour; besides that the general good sense and worthiness of his character, make his friends observe these little singularities as foils that rather set off than blemish his good qualities.

As soon as the sermon is finished, nobody presumes to stir till Sir Roger is gone out of the church. The knight walks down from his seat in the chancel between a double row of his tenants, that stand bowing to him on each side; and every now and then he inquires how such an one's wife, or mother, or son, or father do, whom he does not see at church; which is understood as a secret reprimand to the person that is absent.

The chaplain has often told me, that upon a catechising-day, when Sir Roger has been pleased with a boy that answers well, he has ordered a Bible to be given him next day for his encouragement; and sometimes accompanies it with a flitch of bacon to his mother. Sir Roger has likewise added five pounds a year to the clerk's place; and that he may encourage the young fellows to make themselves perfect in the church-service, has promised, upon the death of the present incumbent, who is very old, to bestow it according to merit.

The fair understanding between Sir Roger and his chaplain, and their mutual concurrence in doing good, is the more remarkable, because the very next village is famous for the differences and contentions that rise between the parson and the 'squire, who live in a perpetual state of war. The parson is always at the 'squire, and the 'squire, to be revenged on the parson, never comes to church. The 'squire has made all his tenants atheists and tithe-stealers; while the parson instructs them every Sunday in the dignity of his order, and insinuates to them, almost in every



sermon, that he is a better man than his patron. In short, matters are come to such an extremity, that the 'squire has not said his prayers either in public or private this half year; and that the parson threatens him, if he does not mend his manners, to pray for him in the face of the whole congregation.

Feuds of this nature, though too frequent in the country, are very fatal to the ordinary people; who are so used to be dazzled with riches, that they pay as much deference to the understanding of a man of an estate, as of a man of learning; and are very hardly brought to regard any truth, how important soever it may be, that is preached to them, when they know there are several men of five hundred a year who do not believe it.



**Passage:**

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**Short and Long Answer Questions:**

1. How does Addison's representation of Sir Roger and his influence differ from Steele's?
2. Which church was started by Joseph Smith who claimed he was led by an angel?
3. What is the value of a Sir Joseph Banks coin from The Royal Horticultural Society?
4. Who was Mr. Rogers?



**E- Will. Wimble**

AS I was yesterday morning walking with Sir Roger before his house, a country-fellow brought him a huge fish, which he told him, Mr. William Wimble had caught that very morning: and that he presented it, with his service to him, and intended to come and dine with him. At the same time he delivered a letter, which my friend read to me as soon as the messenger left him.

SIR ROGER—I desire you to accept of a jack, which is the best I have caught this season. I intend to come and stay with you a week, and see how the perch bite in the Black River. I observed with some concern, the last time I saw you upon the bowling green, that your whip wanted a lash to it; I will bring half-a-dozen with me that I twisted last week, which I hope will serve you all the time you are in the country. I have not been out of the saddle for six days last past, having been at Eaton with Sir John's eldest son. He takes to his learning hugely.—I am, sir, your humble servant.

**WILL. WIMBLE.**

This extraordinary letter, and message that accompanied it, made me very curious to know the character and quality of the gentleman who sent them; which I found to be as follows. Will. Wimble is younger brother to a baronet, and descended of the ancient family of the Wimbles. He is now between forty and fifty; but being bred to no business and born to no estate, he generally lives with his elder brother as superintendent of his game. He hunts a pack of dogs better than any man in the country, and is very famous for finding out a hare. He is extremely well versed in all the little handicrafts of an idle man: he makes a May-fly to a miracle; and furnishes the whole country with angle-rods. As he is a good-natur'd officious fellow, and very much esteem'd upon account of his family, he is a welcome guest at every house, and keeps up a good correspondence among all the gentlemen about him. He carries a tulip-root in his pocket from one to another, or exchanges a puppy between a couple of friends that live perhaps in the opposite sides of the county. Will. is a particular favourite of all the young heirs, whom he frequently obliges with a net that he has weaved, or a setting-dog that he has made himself: he now and then presents a pair of garters of his own knitting to their mothers or sisters; and raises a great deal of mirth among them, by enquiring as



often as he meets them how they wear? These gentleman-like manufactures and obliging little humours, make Will. the darling of the country.

Sir Roger was proceeding in the character of him, when we saw him make up to us with two or three hazel-twigs in his hand that he had cut in Sir Roger's woods, as he came through them, in his way to the house. I was very much pleased to observe on one side the hearty and sincere welcome with which Sir Roger received him, and on the other, the secret joy which his guest discover'd at sight of the good old knight. After the first salutes were over, Will. desired Sir Roger to lend him one of his servants to carry a set of shuttlecocks he had with him in a little box to a lady that lived about a mile off, to whom it seems he had promis'd such a present for above this half year. Sir Roger's back was no sooner turned but honest Will. began to tell me of a large cock-pheasant that he had sprung in one of the neighbouring woods, with two or three other adventures of the same nature. Odd and uncommon characters are the game that I look for, and most delight in; for which reason I was as much pleased with the novelty of the person that talked to me, as he could be for his life with the springing of a pheasant, and therefore listened to him with more than ordinary attention.

In the midst of his discourse the bell rung to dinner, where the gentleman I have been speaking of had the pleasure of seeing the huge jack, he had caught, served up for the first dish in a most sumptuous manner. Upon our sitting down to it he gave us a long account how he had hooked it, played with it, foiled it, and at length drew it out upon the bank, with several other particulars that lasted all the first course. A dish of wild-fowl that came afterwards furnished conversation for the rest of the dinner, which concluded with a late invention of Will.'s for improving the quail-pipe.

Upon withdrawing into my room after dinner, I was secretly touched with compassion towards the honest gentleman that had dined with us; and could not but consider with a great deal of concern, how so good an heart and such busy hands were wholly employed in trifles; that so much humanity should be so little beneficial to others, and so much industry so little advantageous to himself. The same temper of mind and application to affairs might have recommended him to the publick esteem, and have raised his fortune in another station of life. What



good to his country or himself might not a trader or merchant have done with such useful tho' ordinary qualifications?

Will. Wimble's is the case of many a younger brother of a great family, who had rather see their children starve like gentlemen, than thrive in a trade or profession that is beneath their quality.

**Passage:**

1. Will. Wimble's is the case of many a younger brother of a great family, who had rather see their children starve like gentlemen, than thrive in a trade or profession that is beneath their quality. This humour fills several parts of Europe with pride and beggary. It is the happiness of a trading nation, like ours, that the younger sons, tho' uncapable of any liberal art or profession, may be placed in such a way of life, as may perhaps enable them to vie with the best of their family: accordingly we find several citizens that were launched into the world with narrow fortunes, rising by an honest industry to greater estates than those of their elder brothers. It is not improbable but Will. was formerly tried at divinity, law, or physick: and that finding his genius did not lie that way, his parents gave him up at length to his own inventions. But certainly, however improper he might have been for studies of a higher nature, he was perfectly well turned for the occupations of trade and commerce. As I think this is a point which cannot be too much inculcated, I shall desire my reader to compare what I have here written with what I have said in my twenty-first speculation.

Will Wimble has been identified with Mr. Thomas Morecraft, younger son of a Yorkshire baronet. Mr. Morecraft in his early life became known to Steele, by whom he was introduced to Addison. He received help from Addison, and, after his death, went to Dublin, where he died in 1741 at the house of his friend, the Bishop of Kildare. There is no ground for this or any other attempt to find living persons in the creations of the Spectator, although, because lifelike, they were, in the usual way, attributed by readers to this or that



individual, and so gave occasion for the statement of Pudgell in the Preface to his Theophrastus that 'most of the characters in the Spectator were conspicuously known.' The only original of Will Wimble, as Mr. Wills has pointed out, is Mr. Thomas Gules of No. 256 in the Tatler.



UNIT V

Two Annotations to set for explanation

In case of sections within the units the number of Annotations are justified according to the text prescribed

1. "Fairest of mortals, thou distinguish'd care

Of thousand bright inhabitants of air!

If e'er one vision touch'd thy infant thought,

Of all the nurse and all the priest have taught,

Of airy elves by moonlight shadows seen,

The silver token, and the circled green,

Or virgins visited by angel pow'rs,

With golden crowns and wreaths of heav'nly flow'rs,

Hear and believe! thy own importance know,

Nor bound thy narrow views to things below.

2. He said; when Shock, who thought she slept too long,

Leap'd up, and wak'd his mistress with his tongue.

'Twas then, Belinda, if report say true,

Thy eyes first open'd on a billet-doux:

Wounds, charms, and ardors were no sooner read,

But all the vision vanish'd from thy head.



UNIT II

ANNOTATIONS

Section A

**Dryden Mac Flecknoe**

1. All human things are subject to decay,  
And, when Fate summons, monarchs must obey:  
This Flecknoe, and, who, like Augustus, young  
Was call'd to empire, and had govern'd long:  
In prose and verse, was own'd, without dispute  
Through all the realms of Non-sense, absolute.

2. The rest to some faint meaning make pretence,  
But Shadwell never deviates into sense.  
Some beams of wit on other souls may fall,  
Strike through and make a lucid interval:  
But Shadwell's genuine night admits no ray,  
His rising fogs prevail upon the day:



**UNIT II Section B**

**Gray An Elegy Written in a country Churchyard**

**Annotations**

1. The curfew tolls the knell of parting day,  
The lowing herd wind slowly o'er the lea,  
The plowman homeward plods his weary way,  
And leaves the world to darkness and to me.
2. The breezy call of incense-breathing Morn,  
The swallow twitt'ring from the straw-built shed,  
The cock's shrill clarion, or the echoing horn,  
No more shall rouse them from their lowly bed.

**Poem 2 The Bard**

1. "Ruin seize thee, ruthless King!  
Confusion on thy banners wait,  
Tho' fann'd by Conquest's crimson wing  
They mock the air with idle state.  
Helm, nor hauberk's twisted mail,  
Nor even thy virtues, tyrant, shall avail  
To save thy secret soul from nightly fears,  
From Cambria's curse, from Cambria's tears!"



Such were the sounds, that o'er the crested pride

2. On a rock, whose haughty brow

Frowns o'er old Conway's foaming flood,

Rob'd in the sable garb of woe,

With haggard eyes the poet stood;

(Loose his beard, and hoary hair

Stream'd, like a meteor, to the troubled air)

And with a master's hand, and prophet's fire,

Struck the deep sorrows of his lyre;

### Poem 3 The Progress of Poesy

1. Awake, Æolian lyre, awake,

And give to rapture all thy trembling strings.

From Helicon's harmonious springs

A thousand rills their mazy progress take:

The laughing flowers, that round them blow,

Drink life and fragrance as they flow.

2. Oh! Sovereign of the willing soul,

Parent of sweet and solemn-breathing airs,

Enchanting shell! the sullen Cares

And frantic Passions hear thy soft control.

On Thracia's hills the Lord of War,

Has curb'd the fury of his car,

And dropp'd his thirsty lance at thy command.



Perching on the sceptred hand

Passage:

1. The speaker is hanging out in a churchyard just after the sun goes down. It's dark and a bit spooky. He looks at the dimly lit gravestones, but none of the grave markers are all that impressive—most of the people buried here are poor folks from the village, so their tombstones are just simple, roughly carved stones. The speaker starts to imagine the kinds of lives these dead guys probably led. Then he shakes his finger at the reader, and tells us not to get all snobby about the rough monuments these dead guys have on their tombs, since, really, it doesn't matter what kind of a tomb you have when you're dead, anyway. And guys, the speaker reminds us, we're all going to die someday.

But that gets the speaker thinking about his own inevitable death, and he gets a little freaked out. He imagines that someday in the future, some random guy (a "kindred spirit") might pass through this same graveyard, just as he was doing today. And that guy might see the speaker's tombstone, and ask a local villager about it. And then he imagines what the villager might say about him. At the end, he imagines that the villager points out the epitaph engraved on the tombstone, and invites the passerby to read it for himself. So basically, Thomas Gray writes his own epitaph at the end of this poem.

2. The churchyard graves may also contain the remains of a person who had the ability to become a great scholar, a generous national leader, or a man who could have been a great poet but is in the end no more than a "mute inglorious Milton." Gray goes on to speculate, however, that poverty may have prevented some dead men from doing not good but evil; now death has made them (unlike Oliver Cromwell) "guiltless" of shedding blood; they have not been able to slaughter, to refuse mercy, to lie, or to wallow in luxury and pride. Far from the "ignoble strife" of the great world, the village people have led "sober" and "noiseless" lives. Gray implies that, even though the village dead have accomplished nothing in the world, on balance they may be morally superior to their social betters.

Gray returns to the churchyard in the next section (lines 77 to 92), remarking on the graves' simple markers with their badly spelled inscriptions, names,



and dates. Some bear unpolished verses or consoling biblical texts; some are decorated with "shapeless sculpture." Gray is touched that such grave markers show the humanity these dead people share with all men and women (including, by implication, the famous who took paths of glory). Those who remain can sense that the dead "cast one long lingering look" back on what they were leaving and were comforted by at least one loved one. Gray reflects that the voice of general human nature can be heard crying from these graves. In the last line of this section, Gray reflects that what he has learned will apply to himself and his readers: The "wonted fires" of his life and those of his readers will continue to burn in the ashes of all graves.



**Short and Long Answer Questions:**

1. What do you think prompts the speaker to start thinking about his own death? For the first twenty or so stanzas, he's cheerfully thinking about the dead villagers. What shifts, and why?
2. Why do you think Gray uses so much personification? Why, for example, does he say "Let not Ambition mock their useful toil" in line 29, instead of, "Hey, ambitious people, don't make fun of these guys"? What's the effect on your reading?
3. Who do you think is the intended audience of this poem? Men, women? Rich people, poor people? Young or old? Why do you think so?
4. If this is an "Elegy," or a poem of mourning, who or what is it mourning? How do you know?
5. Why do you think Gray insisted so much on the fact that it's a *country* churchyard? Would the poem be different if it were set in a city? How so?
6. What do you imagine people will say about you after you're dead? What would you like them to say? If you could write your own epitaph, as Gray does in this poem, what would it say?
7. What is the universality of "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" by Thomas Gray?
8. What are Thomas Gray's thoughts on visiting a country churchyard?
9. What are some figures of speech in Thomas Gray's poem "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard?"
10. What is Gray's attitude toward the people buried in the cemetery? Toward the rich? Toward the poor?



Identify the letter of the choice that best completes the statement or answers the question.

The verse form of Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" is  
a. blank verse.  
b. alexandrines.  
c. rhymed couplets.  
d. quatrains.

The reference to the "hoary-headed swain" in "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" suggests Gray's desire for recognition from  
a. poets.  
b. the humble.  
c. politicians.  
d. the proud.

The opening lines of the "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" are set at  
a. twilight.  
b. daybreak.  
c. midnight.  
d. noon.

In the "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard," Gray's speaker stresses the  
a. laziness of the rural poor.  
b. shallowness of family life.  
c. equalizing nature of death.  
d. generosity of land owners.

In "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard," which technique is used in the following lines?

"Now fades the glimmering landscape on the sight,  
And all the air a solemn stillness holds"

- a. paradox
- b. dissonance
- c. inversion
- d. internal rhyme



UNIT III

**Sheridan The Rivals:**

1. LYD. Here, my dear Lucy, hide these books. Quick, quick. Fling Peregrine Pickle under the toilet throw Roderick Random into the closet put The Innocent Adultery into The Whole Duty of Man thrust Lord Aimworth under the sofa, cram Ovid behind the bolster there put The Man of Feeling into your pocket so, so now lay Mrs. Chapone in sight, and leave Fordyce's Sermons open on the table.

LUCY. Oh, burn it, ma'am ! the hairdresser has torn away as far as Proper Pride.

2.MRS. MAL. What business have you, miss, with preference and aversion? They don't become a young woman ; and you ought to know, that as both always wear off, 'tis safest in matrimony to begin with a little aversion. I am sure I hated your poor dear uncle before marriage as if he'd been a blackamoor and yet, miss, you are sensible what a wife I made ! And when it pleased Heaven to release me from him, 'tis unknown what tears I shed ! But suppose we were going to give you another choice, will you promise us to give up this



Beverley ?

Passage:

1. Meanwhile, in Mrs. Malaprop's drawing room, she and Lydia are having an argument. The aunt is praising Jack, while Lydia as steadfastly praises Beverley. Then Sir Anthony and Jack arrive. Lydia, refusing to see them, turns a chair around to face the wall and sits in it. Jack, in an obvious quandary, tells his father to leave him and Lydia alone; Lydia, facing the wall, wonders why her aunt hasn't noticed that the real Captain Anthony is not the same man who had visited earlier in the day. Sir Anthony refuses to leave, Jack refuses to speak (knowing that Lydia would recognize his voice and the jig would be up), and Lydia, still in a snit, refuses to turn around. The result: stalemate. Jack, trying to resolve the problem, begins speaking in a disguised voice, much to the consternation of his father. Finally, he whispers to Lydia not to be surprised, but she recognizes his voice, turns joyfully, and identifies him as her Ensign Beverley. Chaos ensues. Jack finally admits the ruse he practices on Lydia, and she sulks because now there will be no romantic elopement. Sir Anthony is proud of his son's cleverness, but Mrs. Malaprop suddenly realized that she was now face to face with the writer of the insulting letter she had intercepted. Sir Anthony begs her to forgive and forget, and she relents and agrees to do so. Sir Anthony and Mrs. Malaprop gaily make their exit, but when Jack turns to Lydia, she is still as cold as ice. She insists that their relationship must end because of his deception, and he cajoles her to no avail. When Sir Anthony and Mrs. Malaprop reenter expecting to find the lovers in one another's arms, they are startled to find them at odds. Lydia stalks angrily out of the room, and Sir Anthony makes the mistake of thinking that she is upset because Jack has made improper advances - an idea that cheers him and makes him remember his own conduct during courtship.



Short and Long Answer Questions:

1. Please give 3 examples of how Julia is a realist (as opposed to an idealist) in *The Rivals*.
2. What is the difference between artificial comedy and anti- sentimental comedy in *The Rivals*?
3. How is the theme of young/old presented in the play *The Rivals*?
4. Sheridan wrote to amuse through the use of wit and satire. Discuss with reference to *The Rivals*.
5. In *The Rivals*, why does Sheridan include an epilogue at the end of his play?
6. What consideration of marriage does *The Rivals* offer?
7. Can you give me a summary of the characters in the play *The Rivals*?
8. Discuss the theme of forgiveness as it appears in Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *The Rivals*. In the various incidents where forgiveness is granted, is it credible? Why is the credibility of forgiveness important to the themes of the story?
9. Compare and contrast Lydia Languish in Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *The Rivals* with Cecily Cardew in Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*. What particular characteristics are the two playwrights mocking by the ways they portray the two girls? In what ways are they different? How do their characteristics relate to the major themes of the plays?
10. Discuss the view of love presented in Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *The Rivals*. How realistic is the picture of love painted by the playwright? Are there any positive examples of love in the play? What is Sheridan attempting to convey by the way he pictures the lovers?



**Multiple questions.**

**1. What play is this for Richard Sheridan?**

- (a) His tenth.
- (b) His first.
- (c) He is not the author of this book .
- (d) His second.

**2. How does the play begin?**

- (a) At a party in London .
- (b) With two lovers quarreling .
- (c) In Bath on a sunny afternoon.
- (d) With an attorney bribing a sergeant at law.

**3. What does the attorney hand to the sergeant at law?**

- (a) a piece of paper.
- (b) a present .
- (c) some chocolate.
- (d) a stick of gum.

**4. What does the sergeant at law claim when he is given this item?**

- (a) He would like another peice of chocolate.
- (b) He wishes for more money .
- (c) He would like to quit his job.
- (d) That he cannot see the paper.

**5. How does the lawyer get the sergeant at law to accept the paper?**

- (a) He slips money to the sergeant at law.
- (b) He invites the sergeant at law to dinner.
- (c) He offers to marry his daughter.
- (d) He promises to invest in the sergeant at law's business.



#### UNIT IV

1. "On the fifth day of the moon, which according to the custom of my forefathers I always kept holy, after having washed myself, and offered up my morning devotions, I ascended the high hills of Bagdat, in order to pass the rest of the day in meditation and prayer. As I was here airing myself on the tops of the mountains, I fell into a profound contemplation on the vanity of human life; and passing from one thought to another, surely, said I, man is but a shadow and life a dream. Whilst I was thus musing, I cast my eyes towards the summit of a rock that was not far from me, where I discovered one in the habit of a shepherd, with a musical instrument in his hand.
2. I HAVE observed, that a reader seldom peruses a book with pleasure, till he knows whether the writer of it be a black [dark] or a fair man, of a mild or choleric disposition, married or a bachelor, with other particulars of the like nature, that conduce very much to the right understanding of an author. To gratify this curiosity, which is so natural to a reader, I design this paper and my next as prefatory discourses to my following writings, and shall give some account in them of the several persons that are engaged in this work. As the chief trouble of compiling, digesting, and correcting will fall to my share, I must do myself the justice to open the work with my own history.



3. I am the more at ease in Sir Roger's family. because it consists of sober and staid persons ; for as the knight is the best master in the world, he seldom changes his servants and as he is beloved by all about him, his servants never care for leaving him: by this means his domestics are all in years, and grown old with their master. You would take his valet de chambre for his brother ; his butler is grey-headed; his groom is one of the gravest men that I have ever seen; and his coachman has the looks of a privy-councillor. You see the goodness of the master even in the old house-dog; and in a gray pad, that is kept in the stable with great care and tenderness out of regard to his past services, though he has been useless for several years.