Elegy to the Memory of an Unfortunate Lady

What beckoning ghost, along the moonlight shade
Invites my steps, and points to yonder glade?
’Tis she!—but why that bleeding bosom gored,
Why dimly gleams the visionary sword?
5 O ever beauteous, every friendly! tell,
Is it, in Heaven, a crime to love too well?
To bear too tender, or too firm a heart,
To act a lover’s or a Roman’s part?2
Is there no bright reversion in the sky,
10 For those who greatly think, or bravely die?
Why bade ye else, ye Powers! her soul aspire
Above the vulgar flight of low desire?
Ambition first sprung from your blest abodes;
The glorious fault of angels and of gods:3
15 Thence to their images on earth it flows,
And in the breasts of kings and heroes glows.
Most souls, ’tis true, but peep out once an age,
Dull sullen prisoners in the body’s cage:
Dim lights of life, that burn a length of years
20 Useless, unseen, as lamps in sepulchers;
Like Eastern kings a lazy state they keep,
And close confined to their own palace, sleep.
From these perhaps (ere Nature bade her die)
Fate snatched her early to the pitying sky.
25 As into air the purer spirits flow,
And separate from their kindred dregs below;
So flew the soul to its congenial place.
Nor left one virtue to redeem her race.4
But thou, false guardian of a charge too good,
30 Thou, mean deserter of thy brother’s blood!
See on these ruby lips the trembling breath,
These cheeks, now fading at the blast of death;
Cold is that breast which warmed the world before,
And those love-darting eyes must roll no more.
35 Thus, if Eternal Justice rules the ball,
Thus shall your wives, and thus your children fall: 
On all the line a sudden vengeance waits, 
And frequent hearses shall besiege your gates. 
There passengers shall stand, and pointing say 
(While the long funerals blacken all the way),
Lo these were they, whose souls the Furies steeled, 
And cursed with hearts unknowing how to yield. 
Thus unlamented pass the proud away, 
The gaze of fools, and pageant of a day!
So perish all, whose breast ne’er learned to glow 
For others’ good, or melt at others’ woe.
   What can atone (oh, ever-injured shade!) 
Thy fate unpitied, and thy rites unpaid?
No friend’s complaint, no kind domestic tear
Pleased thy pale ghost, or graced thy mournful bier. 
By foreign hands thy dying eyes were closed, 
By foreign hands thy decent limbs composed, 
By foreign hands thy humble grave adorned, 
By strangers honored, and by strangers mourned!
What though no friends in sable weeds appear, 
Grieve for an hour, perhaps, then mourn a year, 
And bear about the mockery of woe 
To midnight dances, and the public show?
What though no weeping Loves thy ashes grace, 
Nor polished marble emulate thy face?
What though no sacred earth allow thee room, 
Nor hallowed dirge be muttered o’er thy tomb?
Yet shall thy grave with rising flowers be dressed, 
And the green turf lie lightly on thy breast:
There shall the morn her earliest tears bestow, 
There the first roses of the year shall blow; 
While angels with their silver wings o’ershade 
The ground, now sacred by thy reliques made.
   So peaceful rests, without a stone, a name, 
What once had beauty, titles, wealth, and fame.
How loved, how honored once, avails thee not, 
To whom related, or by whom begot; 
A heap of dust alone remains of thee, 
’Tis all thou art, and all the proud shall be!
Poets themselves must fall, like those they sung, 
Deaf the praised ear, and mute the tuneful tongue.
Even he, whose soul now melts in mournful lays, 
Shall shortly want the generous tear he pays; 
Then from his closing eyes thy form shall part, 
And the last pang shall tear thee from his heart, 
Life’s idle business at one gasp be o’er, 
The Muse forgot, and thou beloved no more!

5. In Roman Catholic countries suicides are not given Christian burial.
The First Satire of the Second Book of Horace Imitated¹

TO MR. FORTESCUE²

There are (I scarce can think it, but am told),
There are, to whom my satire seems too bold:
Scarce to wise Peter³ complaisant enough,
And something said of Chartres much too rough.

The lines are weak, another's pleased to say,
Lord Fanny⁴ spins a thousand such a day.
Timorous by nature, of the rich in awe,
I come to counsel learned in the law:
You'll give me, like a friend, both sage and free,⁴a
Advice; and (as you use) without a fee.

I'd write no more.

Not write? but then I think,
And for my soul I cannot sleep a wink.
I nod in company, I wake at night,
Fools rush into my head, and so I write.

You could not do a worse thing for your life.
Why, if the nights seem tedious, take a wife:
Or rather truly, if your point be rest,
Lettuce and cowslip wine;⁵ Probatum est.
But talk with Celsus,⁶ Celsus will advise
Hartshorn, or something that shall close your eyes.
Or, if you needs must write, write Caesar's⁷ praise,
You'll gain at least a knighthood, or the bays.⁸

What? like Sir Richard,⁹ rumbling, rough, and fierce,
With arms, and George, and Brunswick crowd the verse?
Rend with tremendous sound your ears asunder,
With gun, drum, trumpet, blunderbuss, and thunder?

1. In his Preface to the translation of Ovid’s Epistles (1680), Dryden distinguished three methods of translation: “metaphrase,” translating as nearly as possible word for word and line for line; “paraphrase,” retaining the sense but not the literal wording of the original (the method that he used in translating Virgil, and Pope in translating Homer); and “imitation,” following the general structure of the original, modernizing its allusions to circumstances, manners, and men, and, assuming, as he says, “the liberty not only to vary from the words and sense, but to forsake them both” as occasion demands. It is this mode that Pope used in some of his major satires of the 1730’s, Imitations of Horace.

Experience had taught him that if in his satires he named actual people, he was charged with cruelty or slander, and if he used fictitious names, they were often identified by gossip with people he had not intended at all. General satire seemed to miss the mark. Satire aimed at individuals aroused sympathy for the victim and antagonism toward the satirist. When Bolingbroke pointed out that his situation was much like that which Horace had treated with wry humor in Satires II.i, Pope immediately set about “imitating” it, converting it into a completely contemporary, even a personal poem. It is a vigorous defense of Pope the satirist, who is presented in the heroic role of the disinterested friend and defender of virtue and truth in an evil time.

2. William Fortescue, the eminent lawyer, who, though a Whig and a supporter of Walpole, was a friend of Pope.

3. Peter Walter, a notorious moneylender; Francis Chartres, a debauchee and gambler. Pope mentions them in other satires.

4. John, Lord Hervey. See Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot, line 305 and note. Fannius was a poetaster mentioned contemptuously by Horace (Satires I.v.21–22 and I.x.80).

4a. Frank.

5. Used as soporifics; “Probatum est” may be freely rendered “a proved remedy.”

6. A Roman writer on medicine, here used as a fictitious name for a physician. “Hartshorn,” or buckshorn, was an herb used in treating the eyes and in sleeping potions.

7. George II’s.

8. The poet-laureateship.

9. Sir Richard Blackmore (1654–1729), London physician, knighted by William III for his Whig principles and his epics. Pope and all the “wits” laughed at his poems, with good reason. Observe the noisy emptiness of lines 23–26, which are intended to suggest Blackmore’s inflated style.
Or nobly wild, with Budgell’s fire and force,
Paint angels trembling round his falling horse?¹

F. Then all your Muse’s softer art display,
Let Carolina² smooth the tuneful lay,
Lull with Amelia’s liquid name the Nine,
And sweetly flow through all the royal line.

P. Alas! few verses touch their nicer ear;
They scarce can bear their laureate twice a year;³
And justly Caesar scorns the poet's lays,
It is to history he trusts for praise.

F. Better be Cibber, I'll maintain it still,
Than ridicule all taste, blaspheme Quadrille,⁴
Abuse the City's best good men in meter,
And laugh at peers that put their trust in Peter.

Even those you touch not, hate you.

P. What should ail 'em?

F. A hundred smart in Timon⁵ and in Balaam:
The fewer still you name, you wound the more;
Bond is but one, but Harpax is a score.⁶

P. Each mortal has his pleasure: none deny
Scarsdale his bottle, Darty his ham pie;
Ridotta⁷ sips and dances, till she see
The doubling lustres⁸ dance as fast as she;
F——⁹ loves the senate, Hockley Hole his brother,
Like in all else, as one egg to another.

I love to pour out all myself, as plain
As downright Shippen, or as old Montaigne:¹⁰
In them, as certain to be loved as seen,
The soul stood forth, nor kept a thought within;

In me what spots (for spots I have) appear,
Will prove at least the medium must be clear.
In this impartial glass, my Muse intends
Fair to expose myself, my foes, my friends;
Publish the present age, but where my text
Is vice too high, reserve it for the next:
My foes shall wish my life a longer date,
And every friend the less lament my fate.

My head and heart thus flowing through my quill,
Verse-man or prose-man, term me which you will,
Papist or Protestant, or both between,

¹ Eustace Budgell, Addison’s cousin, had sung the praises of the king’s horse, which had been shot out from under him at the battle of Oudenarde (1708). George yearned for military glory.
² Queen Caroline and the Princess Amelia. Contrast with the bombast of lines 25–26 the mellifluous emptiness of lines 30–32.
³ Colley Cibber (1671–1757), the laureate, wrote execrable official odes for each New Year and for the king’s birthday.
⁴ A popular card game.
⁵ When in his Epistle to the Earl of Burlington (1731) Pope had described a fictitious “Timon,” owner of a vulgar, ostentatious estate, the town had identified him with the Duke of Chandos and charged Pope with ingratitude to a friend. “Balaam”: a fictitious London merchant whose rise and fall Pope recounts in his Epistle to Lord Bathurst (1732).
⁶ Dennis Bond, a notorious embezzler, mentioned by name in Pope’s Epistle to Bathurst, line 100. “Harpax” (Greek for “robber”) is a type of the miser in the same poem (lines 91–92).
⁷ A type name for a pleasure-loving woman. Ridotto is Italian for a social assembly with music and dancing.
⁸ Cut-glass chandeliers.
⁹ Stephen Fox, a Whig politician; “his brother”: Henry, later Lord Holland. “Hockley Hole” was a bear garden.
¹⁰ William Shippen, the plain-spoken leader of the Jacobites in Parliament. The essays of Michel de Montaigne (1533–92) abound in self-revelation.
Like good Erasmus, in an honest mean,
In moderation placing all my glory,
While Tories call me Whig, and Whigs a Tory.
Satire’s my weapon, but I’m too discreet
To run amuck, and tilt at all I meet;
I only wear it in a land of hectors;
Thieves, supercargoes, sharpers, and directors.
Save but our army! and let Jove encrust
Swords, pikes, and guns, with everlasting rust!
Peace is my dear delight—not Fleury’s more:
But touch me, and no minister so sore.
Whoe’er offends, at some unlucky time
Slides into verse, and hitches in a rhyme,
Sacred to ridicule his whole life long,
And the sad burden of some merry song.
Slander or poison dread from Delia’s rage.
Hard words or hanging, if your judge be Page.
From furious Sappho scarce a milder fate,
P—xed by her love, or libeled by her hate.
Its proper power to hurt, each creature feels;
Bulls aim their horns, and asses lift their heels;
’Tis a bear’s talent not to kick, but hug;
And no man wonders he’s not stung by Pug.
So drink with Walters, or with Chartres eat,
They’ll never poison you, they’ll only cheat.
Then, learned sir! (to cut the matter short)
Whate’er my fate, or well or ill at court,
Whether old age, with faint but cheerful ray,
Attends to gild the evening of my day,
Or Death’s black wing already be displayed,
To wrap me in the universal shade;
Whether the darkened room to muse invite,
Or whitened wall provoke the skewer to write,
In durance, exile, Bedlam, or the Mint,
Like Lee or Budgell, I will rhyme and print.

2. Pope admired greatly the Dutch humanist Erasmus (1466–1536).
3. “Hectors”: bullies; “supercargoes”: officers in charge of the cargoes of merchant ships; “directors”: i.e., of the collapsed South Sea Company, whose corruption was revealed by a Parliamentary inquiry when the company failed in 1720. But Pope, whose sympathies lay with the Tories and the landed gentry, is probably thinking generally of trade and finance.
4. Cardinal Fleury, minister of Louis XV of France, whose foreign policy was based on preserving peace.
5. Usually assumed to be Mary Howard. Countess of Delorain, a mistress of George II, who according to gossip had tried, in a fit of jealousy, to poison a Maid of Honor.
7. Pope’s most violent attack on Lady Mary Wortley Montagu.
8. Poxed, i.e., infected with syphilis.
9. The name of a pet dog or monkey.
1. i.e., whether I go mad and am, like other madmen, locked up in a darkened room, or whether I am in prison with a whitewashed wall for paper and a skewer for pen.
2. “Bedlam”: Bethlehem Hospital for the insane; “the Mint”: an area in Southwark, where debtors were free from arrest. Nathaniel Lee (ca. 1653–92), the tragic poet, was confined for a while in Bedlam. Eustace Budgell, minor poet and relative of Addison, was in financial straits before his suicide in 1737.
3. Pope had thus referred to Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and her husband in his Epistle to Bathurst, line 96. A “plum” is slang for a man who (usually dishonestly) has made £100,000; “testers” are sixpences.
Will club their testers, now, to take your life!

105 P. What? armed for Virtue when I point the pen,
Brand the bold front of shameless guilty men,
Dash the proud gamester in his gilded car;
Bare the mean heart that lurks beneath a star; 4
Can there be wanting, to defend her cause,
Lights of the Church, or guardians of the laws?
Could pensioned Boileau 5 lash in honest strain
Flatterers and bigots even in Louis’ reign?
Could laureate Dryden pimp and friar engage, 6
Yet neither Charles nor James be in a rage?

110 And I not strip the gilding off a knave,
Unplaced, 7 unpensioned, no man’s heir, or slave?
I will, or perish in the generous cause.
Hear this, and tremble! you who ’scape the laws.
Yes, while I live, no rich or noble knave
Shall walk the world, in credit, to his grave.

115 To Virtue only and her friends a friend, 8
The world beside may murmur, or commend.
Know, all the distant din that world can keep,
Rolls o’er my grotto, 9 and but soothes my sleep.
There, my retreat the best companions grace,
Chiefs out of war, and statesmen out of place.

120 There St. John mingles with my friendly bowl
The feast of reason and the flow of soul:
And he, whose lightning pierced the Iberian lines, 1
Now forms my quincunx, 2 and now ranks my vines,
Or tames the genius of the stubborn plain.
Almost as quickly as he conquered Spain.

125 Envy must own, I live among the great.
No pimp of pleasure, and no spy of state,
With eyes that pry not, tongue that ne’er repeats,
Fond to spread friendships, but to cover heats;
To help who want, to forward who excel;
And who unknown defame me, let them be
Scribblers or peers, alike are mob to me.

130 This is my plea, on this I rest my cause—
What saith my counsel, learned in the laws?
F. Your plea is good. But still I say, beware!
Laws are explained by men—so have a care.

135 It stands on record, that in Richard’s times
A man was hanged for very honest rhymes. 3

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4. The star worn on the chest by Knights of the Garter.
5. Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux (1636–1711), critic and distinguished satirist.
6. In his “Protestant play,” The Spanish Friar (1681).
7. Holding no public office.
8. A translation of line 70 of Horace’s poem, which Pope took as the motto of the satires that he wrote in the 1730’s.
9. The subterranean passage under the road that separated his house at Twickenham from his garden became, in Pope’s hands, a romantic grotto ornamented with minerals and shells.
1. Charles Mordaunt, Earl of Peterborough (1658–1736), won renown in Spain (hence the allusion to “Iberian lines”) during the campaign of 1705.
2. Tress or shrubs planted in fives: one at each corner of a square, one in the center.
3. Two rhymers have been suggested by scholars: John Ball, executed under Richard II in 1381 for his role in the Peasants’ Revolt, and one Collingbourne, executed under Richard III for treasonable rhymes.
Consult the statute: quart. I think, it is, 
Edwardi sext. or prim. et quint. Eliz. 
See Libels, Satires—here you have it—read.

But grave epistles, bringing vice to light. 
Such as a king might read, a bishop write, 
Such as Sir Robert⁴ would approve—

Indeed?
The case is altered—you may then proceed; 
In such a cause the plaintiff will be hissed, 
My lords the judges laugh, and you’re dismissed.

1733

The Universal Prayer

Father of all! in every age,  
In every clime adored, 
By saint, by savage, and by sage, 
Jehovah, Jove, or Lord!

Thou Great First Cause, least understood:  
Who all my sense confined  
To know but this—that thou art good, 
And that myself am blind:

Yet gave me, in this dark estate,  
To see the good from ill; 
And binding Nature fast in fate, 
Left free the human will.

What conscience dictates to be done,  
Or warns me not to do, 
This, teach me more than Hell to shun, 
That, more than Heaven pursue.

What blessings thy free bounty gives,  
Let me not cast away; 
For God is paid when man receives, 
To enjoy is to obey.

Yet not to earth’s contracted span,  
Thy goodness let me bound, 
Or think thee Lord alone of man, 
When thousand worlds are round:

Let not this weak, unknowing hand 
Presume thy bolts to throw,

⁴. Sir Robert Walpole, the Prime Minister.
And deal damnation round the land,
   On each I judge thy foe.

If I am right, thy grace impart,
   Still in the right to stay;
If I am wrong, oh teach my heart
   To find that better way.

Save me alike from foolish pride,
   Or impious discontent,
At aught thy wisdom has denied,
   Or aught thy goodness lent.

Teach me to feel another’s woe,
   To hide the fault I see;
That mercy I to others show,
   That mercy show to me.

Mean though I am, not wholly so
   Since quickened by thy breath;
Oh lead me wheresoe’er I go,
   Through this day’s life or death.

This day, be bread and peace my lot:
   All else beneath the sun,
Thou know’st if best bestowed or not,
   And let thy will be done.

To thee, whose temple is all space,
   Whose altar, earth, sea, skies!
One chorus let all being raise!
   All Nature’s incense rise!

c. 1715

Epistle to Miss Blount

On Her Leaving the Town, After the Coronation

As some fond virgin, whom her mother’s care
Drags from the town to wholesome country air,
Just when she learns to roll a melting eye,
And hear a spark, yet think no danger nigh;
From the dear man unwilling she must sever,
Yet takes one kiss before she parts forever:
Thus from the world fair Zephalinda flew,
Saw others happy, and with sighs withdrew;
Not that their pleasures caused her discontent;
She sighed not that they stayed, but that she went.
   She went, to plain-work, and to purling brooks,
Old-fashioned halls, dull aunts, and croaking rooks:
She went from opera, park, assembly, play,
To morning walks, and prayers three hours a day;
To part her time ’twixt reading and bohea,
To muse, and spill her solitary tea,
Or o’er cold coffee trifle with the spoon,
Count the slow clock, and dine exact at noon;
Divert her eyes with pictures in the fire,
Hum half a tune, tell stories to the squire;
Up to her godly garret after seven,
There starve and pray, for that’s the way to heaven.
Some squire, perhaps, you take delight to rack,
Whose game is whist, whose treat a toast in sack;
Who visits with a gun, presents you birds,
Then gives a smacking buss, and cries—"No words!"
Or with his hounds comes hollowing from the stable,
Makes love with nods and knees beneath a table;
Whose laughs are hearty, though his jests are coarse,
And loves you best of all things—but his horse.
In some fair evening, on your elbow laid,
You dream of triumphs in the rural shade;
In pensive thought recall the fancied scene,
See coronations rise on every green:
Before you pass the imaginary sights
Of lords and earls and dukes and gartered knights,
While the spread fan o’ershades your closing eyes;
Then give one flirt, and all the vision flies.
Thus vanish scepters, coronets, and balls,
And leave you in lone woods, or empty walls.
So when your slave, at some dear idle time
(Not plagued with headaches or the want of rhyme)
Stands in the streets, abstracted from the crew,
And while he seems to study, thinks of you;
Just when his fancy points your sprightly eyes,
Or sees the blush of soft Parthenia rise,
Gay pats my shoulder, and you vanish quite;
Streets, chairs, and coxcombs rush upon my sight;
Vexed to be still in town, I knit my brow,
Look sour, and hum a tune—as you may now.

From The Dunciad

From Book the Fourth

[THE CARNATION AND THE BUTTERFLY]

Then thick as locusts blackening all the ground,
A tribe, with weeds and shells fantastic crowned,
Each with some wondrous gift approached the Power,
A nest, a toad, a fungus, or a flower.
But far the foremost, two, with earnest zeal,
And aspect ardent to the throne appeal.
The first thus opened: “Hear thy suppliant’s call,
Great Queen, and common mother of us all!
Fair from its humble bed I reared this flower,
Suckled, and cheer’d, with air, and sun, and shower,
Soft on the paper ruff its leaves I spread,
Bright with the gilded button tipped its head,
Then throned in glass, and named it CAROLINE:
Each maid cried, charming! and each youth, divine!
Did Nature’s pencil ever blend such rays,
Such varied light in one promiscuous blaze?
Now prostrate! dead! behold that Caroline:
No maid cries, charming! and no youth, divine!
And lo the wretch! whose vile, whose insect lust
Laid this gay daughter of the Spring in dust.
Oh punish him, or to th’ Elysian shades
Dismiss my soul, where no carnation fades.”

He ceased, and wept. With innocence of mien,
The accused stood forth, and thus addressed the Queen.
“Of all th’ enameled race, whose silvery wing
Waves to the tepid zephyrs of the spring,
Or swims along the fluid atmosphere,
Once brightest shined this child of heat and air.
I saw, and started from its vernal bower
The rising game, and chased from flower to flower.
It fled, I followed; now in hope, now pain;
It stopped, I stopped; it moved, I moved again.
At last it fixed, ’twas on what plant it pleased,
And where it fixed, the beauteous bird I seized:
Rose or carnation was below my care;
I meddle, Goddess! only in my sphere.
I tell the naked fact without disguise,
And, to excuse it, need but show the prize;
Whose spoils this paper offers to your eye,
Fair even in death! this peerless Butterfly.”

“My sons!” she answered, “both have done your parts;
Live happy both, and long promote our arts.
But hear a mother, when she recommends
To your fraternal care, our sleeping friends.
The common soul, of heaven’s more frugal make,
Serves but to keep fools pert, and knaves awake:
A drowsy watchman, that just gives a knock,
And breaks our rest, to tell us what’s a clock.
Yet by some object every brain is stirred;
The dull may waken to a hummingbird;
The most recluse, discreetly opened, find
Congenial matter in the cockle-kind;
The mind, in metaphysics at a loss,
May wander in a wilderness of moss;
The head that turns at super-lunar things,
Poised with a tail, may steer on Wilkins’ wings.
“O! would the Sons of Men once think their eyes
And reason given them but to study flies!
See Nature in some partial narrow shape,
And let the Author of the whole escape:
Learn but to trifle; or, who most observe,
To wonder at their Maker, not to serve.”

1743

Ode on Solitude

Happy the man whose wish and care
A few paternal acres bound,
Content to breathe his native air,
In his own ground.

Whose herds with milk, whose fields with bread,
Whose flocks supply him with attire,
Whose trees in summer yield him shade,
In winter fire.

Blest, who can unconcernedly find
Hours, days, and years slide soft away,
In health of body, peace of mind,
Quiet by day,

Sound sleep by night; study and ease,
Together mixed; sweet recreation;
And innocence, which most does please
With meditation.

Thus let me live, unseen, unknown;
Thus unlamented let me die;
Steal from the world, and not a stone
Tell where I lie.

ca. 1700–09

1717, 1736

1. The hint for this poem was taken from Horace’s well-known Epode 2, which praises the simplicity and innocence of country life, a favorite literary theme in Pope’s time.