



The Works Of Alexander Pope Esq.

In Nine Volumes Complete. With His Last Corrections, Additions, And Improvements; As they were delivered to the Editor a little before his Death

Containing The First of his Letters

Pope, Alexander

London, 1751

Letters to and from Mr. Walsh. From 1705 to 1707.

Nutzungsbedingungen

[urn:nbn:de:hbz:466:1-56122](https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:hbz:466:1-56122)

LETTERS

TO AND FROM

W. WALSH^a, Esq.

From the Year 1705 to 1707.

LETTER I.

Mr. WALSH to Mr. WYCHERLEY.

April 20, 1705.

I Return you the ^b Papers you favour'd me with, and had sent them to you yesterday morning, but that I thought to have brought them to you last night myself. I have read

^a Of Abberley in Worcester-shire, Gentleman of the Horse in Queen Anne's reign, Author of several beautiful pieces in Prose and Verse, and in the opinion of Mr. Dryden (in his Post-script to Virgil) the best Critic of our Nation in his time. P.

Mr. Walsh encouraged

our Author much, and used to tell him, That there was one way of excelling yet left open for him, which was by *correctness*: that tho' we had several great poets, we had none that were *correct*; and therefore he advised him to make this his study.

^b Mr. Pope's Pastorals. P.

them

them over several times with great satisfaction. The Preface is very judicious and very learned; and the Verses very tender and easy. The Author seems to have a particular genius for that kind of poetry, and a Judgment that much exceeds the years you told me he was of. He has taken very freely from the ancients, but what he has mix'd of his own with theirs, is not inferior to what he has taken from them. 'Tis no flattery at all to say, that Virgil had written nothing so good at his age^c. I shall take it as a favour if you will bring me acquainted with him: and if he will give himself the trouble any morning to call at my house, I shall be very glad to read the verses over with him, and give him my opinion of the particulars more largely than I can well do in this letter. I am, Sir, &c.

L E T T E R I I .

Mr. W A L S H t o M r . P O P E .

June 24, 1706.

I Receiv'd the favour of your letter, and shall be very glad of the continuance of a correspondence by which I am like to be so great a

^c Sixteen. P.

gainer.

gainer. I hope, when I have the happiness of seeing you again in London, not only to read over the verses I have now of yours, but more that you have written since; for I make no doubt but any one who writes so well, must write more. Not that I think the most voluminous poets always the best; I believe the contrary is rather true. I mention'd somewhat to you in London of a Pastoral Comedy, which I should be glad to hear you had thought upon since. I find Menage in his observations upon Tasso's *Aminta*, reckons up fourscore pastoral plays in Italian; and in looking over my old Italian books, I find a great many pastoral and piscatory plays, which, I suppose, Menage reckons together. I find also by Menage, that Tasso is not the first that writ in that kind, he mentioning another before him which he himself had never seen, nor indeed have I. But as the *Aminta*, *Pastor Fido*, and *Filli di Sciro* of Bonarelli are the three best, so, I think, there is no dispute but *Aminta* is the best of the three: not but that the discourses in *Pastor Fido* are more entertaining and copious in several people's opinion, tho' not so proper for pastoral; and the fable of Bonarelli more surprizing. I do not remember many in other languages, that have written in this kind with success. Racan's *Bergeries* are much inferior to his lyric poems;

poems; and the Spaniards are all too full of conceits. Rapin will have the design of pastoral plays to be taken from the Cyclops of Euripides. I am sure there is nothing of this kind in English worth mentioning, and therefore you have that field open to yourself. You see I write to you without any sort of constraint or method, as things come into my head, and therefore use the same freedom with me, who am, &c.

L E T T E R I I I .

To Mr. W A L S H .

Windfor-Forest, July 2, 1706.

I Cannot omit the first opportunity of making you my acknowledgments for reviewing those papers of mine. You have no less right to correct me, than the same hand that rais'd a tree has to prune it. I am convinced as well as you, that one may correct too much; for in poetry, as in painting, a man may lay colours one upon another, till they stiffen and deaden the piece. Besides, to bestow heightening on every part, is monstrous: some parts ought to be lower than the rest; and nothing looks more ridiculous than a work, where the
thoughts,

thoughts, however different in their own nature, seem all on a level: 'tis like a meadow newly mown, where weeds, grass, and flowers, are all laid even, and appear undistinguish'd. I believe too that sometimes our first thoughts are the best, as the first squeezing of the grapes makes the finest and richest wine.

I have not attempted any thing of a Pastoral comedy, because, I think, the taste of our age will not relish a poem of that sort. People seek for what they call wit, on all subjects, and in all places; not considering that nature loves truth so well, that it hardly ever admits of flourishing: Conceit is to nature what paint is to beauty; it is not only needless, but impairs what it would improve. There is a certain majesty in simplicity which is far above all the quaintness of wit: insomuch that the critics have excluded wit from the loftiest poetry, as well as the lowest, and forbid it to the Epic no less than the Pastoral. I shou'd certainly displease all those who are charm'd with Guarini and Bonarelli, and imitate Tasso not only in the simplicity of his Thoughts, but in that of the Fable too. If surprizing discoveries should have place in the story of a pastoral comedy, I believe it would be more agreeable to probability to make them the effects of chance than of design; intrigue not being very consistent with
that

that innocence, which ought to constitute a shepherd's character. There is nothing in all the *Aminta* (as I remember) but happens by mere accident; unless it be the meeting of *Aminta* with *Sylvia* at the fountain, which is the contrivance of *Daphne*; and even that is the most simple in the world: the contrary is observable in *Pastor Fido*, where *Corisca* is so perfect a mistress of intrigue, that the plot could not have been brought to pass without her. I am inclin'd to think the pastoral comedy has another disadvantage, as to the manners: its general design is to make us in love with the innocence of a rural life, so that to introduce shepherds of a vicious character must in some measure debase it; and hence it may come to pass, that even the virtuous characters will not shine so much, for want of being oppos'd to their contraries. These thoughts are purely my own, and therefore I have reason to doubt them: but I hope your judgment will set me right.

I would beg your opinion too as to another point: it is, how far the liberty of borrowing may extend? I have defended it sometimes by saying, that it seems not so much the perfection of sense^a, to say things that had never been said before, as to express those best that have been

^a He should rather have said, *the perfection of conception.*
said

said ofteneft; and that writers, in the case of borrowing from others, are like trees which of themselves would produce only one sort of fruit, but by being grafted upon others may yield variety. A mutual commerce makes poetry flourish; but then poets, like merchants, should repay with something of their own what they take from others; not, like pyrates, make prize of all they meet. I desire you to tell me sincerely, if I have not stretch'd this licence too far in these Pastorals? I hope to become a critic by your precepts, and a poet by your example. Since I have seen your Eclogues, I cannot be much pleas'd with my own; however you have not taken away all my vanity, so long as you give me leave to profess myself
Yours, &c.

L E T T E R IV.

From Mr. WALSH.

July 20, 1706.

I Had sooner return'd you thanks for the favour of your letter, but that I was in hopes of giving you an account at the same time of my journey to Windsor; but I am now forced to put that quite off, being engaged to go to my
corpora-

corporation of Richmond in Yorkshire. I think you are perfectly in the right in your notions of Pastoral; but I am of opinion, that the redundancy of wit you mention, tho' 'tis what pleases the common people, is not what ever pleases the best judges. Pastor Fido indeed has had more admirers than Aminta; but I will venture to say, there is a great deal of difference between the admirers of one and the other. Corisca, which is a character generally admir'd by the ordinary judges, is intolerable in a Pastoral; and Bonarelli's fancy of making his shepherdes in love with two men equally, is not to be defended, whatever pains he has taken to do it. As for what you ask of the liberty of Borrowing; 'tis very evident the best Latin Poets have extended this very far; and none so far as Virgil, who is the best of them. As for the Greek Poets, if we cannot trace them so plainly, 'tis perhaps because we have none before them; 'tis evident that most of them borrowed from Homer, and Homer has been accus'd of burning those that wrote before him, that his thefts might not be discover'd. The best of the modern Poets in all languages, are those that have the nearest copied the Ancients. Indeed in all the common subjects of Poetry, the thoughts are so obvious (at least if they are natural) that whoever writes last, must write

I

things

things like what have been said before: But they may as well applaud the Ancients for the arts of eating and drinking, and accuse the moderns of having stolen those inventions from them; it being evident in all such cases, that whoever liv'd first, must first find them out. 'Tis true, indeed, when

unus et alter

Assuitur pannus,

when there are one or two bright thoughts stolen, and all the rest is quite different from it, a poem makes a very foolish figure: But when 'tis all melted down together, and the Gold of the Ancients so mix'd with that of the Moderns, that none can distinguish the one from the other, I can never find fault with it. I cannot however but own to you, that there are others of a different opinion, and that I have shewn your verses to some who have made that objection to them. I have so much company round me while I write this, and such a noise in my ears, that 'tis impossible I should write any thing but nonsense, so must break off abruptly. I am, Sir,

Your most affectionate,

and most humble Servant.

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LETTER

L E T T E R V .

From Mr. W A L S H .

Sept. 9, 1706.

AT my return from the North I receiv'd the favour of your letter, which had lain there till then. Having been absent about six weeks, I read over your Pastorals again, with a great deal of pleasure, and to judge the better read Virgil's Eclogues, and Spenser's Calendar, at the same time; and, I assure you, I continue the same opinion I had always of them. By the little hints you take upon all occasions to improve them, 'tis probable you will make them yet better against winter; tho' there is a mean to be kept even in that too, and a man may correct his verses till he takes away the true spirit of them; especially if he submits to the correction of some who pass for great Critics, by mechanical rules, and never enter into the true design and Genius of an author. I have seen some of these, that would hardly allow any one good Ode in Horace, who cry Virgil wants fancy, and that Homer is very incorrect. While they talk at this rate, one would think them above the common rate of mortals: but generally they are great admirers of Ovid and Lucan; and when they write themselves, we find out all the mystery. They
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scan their verses upon their fingers; run after Conceits and glaring thoughts; their poems are all made up of Couplets, of which the first may be last, or the last first, without any sort of prejudice to their works; in which there is no design, or method, or any thing natural or just. For you are certainly in the right, that in all writings whatsoever (not poetry only) nature is to be follow'd; and we should be jealous of ourselves for being fond of Similies, Conceits, and what they call saying fine Things. When we were in the North, my Lord Wharton shew'd me a letter he had receiv'd from a certain great General in Spain^a; I told him I would by all means have that General recall'd, and set to writing here at home, for it was impossible that a man with so much Wit as he shew'd, could be fit to command an Army, or do any other business^b. As for what you say of Expression: 'tis indeed the same thing to Wit, as Dress is to Beauty: I have seen many women over-dress'd, and several look better in a careless night-gown, with their hair about their ears, than Mademoiselle Spanheim dress'd for a ball. I do not design to be in London till

^a The Earl of Peterborow.

^b Mr. Walsh's Remark will be thought very innocent, when the reader is informed that it was made on

the Earl of Peterborow, just before the glorious campaigns of Barcelona and Valentia. P.

towards the parliament: then I shall certainly be there; and hope by that time you will have finish'd your Pastorals as you would have them appear in the world, and particularly the third, of Autumn, which I have not yet seen. Your last Eclogue being upon the same subject as that of mine on Mrs. Tempest's Death, I shou'd take it very kindly in you to give it a little turn, as if it were to the Memory of the same Lady, if they were not written for some particular Woman whom you would make immortal. You may take occasion to shew the difference between Poets Mistresses, and other mens. I only hint this, which you may either do, or let alone just as you think fit. I shall be very much pleas'd to see you again in Town, and to hear from you in the mean time. I am, with very much esteem,

Your, &c.

L E T T E R V I .

Oct. 22, 1706.

AFTER the thoughts I have already sent you on the subject of English Versification, you desire my opinion as to some farther particulars. There are indeed certain Niceties, which, tho' not much observed even by correct versifiers, I cannot but think, deserve to be better regarded.

1. It

1. It is not enough that nothing offends the ear, but a good Poet will adapt the very Sounds, as well as Words, to the things he treats of. So that there is (if one may express it so) a Style of Sound. As in describing a gliding stream, the numbers should run easy and flowing; in describing a rough torrent or deluge, sonorous and swelling, and so of the rest. This is evident every where in Homer and Virgil, and no where else, that I know of, to any observable degree. The following examples will make this plain, which I have taken from *Vida*.

Molle viam tacito lapsu per levia radit.

Incedit tardo molimine subsidendo.

Luctantes ventos, tempestatesque sonoras.

Immenso cum præcipitans ruit Oceano Nox.

Telum imbelle sine ictu, coniecit.

Tolle moras, cape saxa manu, cape robora, Pastor.

Ferte citi flammæ, data tela, repellite pestem.

This, I think, is what very few observe in practice, and is undoubtedly of wonderful force in imprinting the image on the reader: We have one excellent example of it in our language, Mr. Dryden's Ode on St. Cæcilia's day, entitled, *Alexander's Feast*.

2. Every nice ear must (I believe) have observ'd, that in any smooth English verse of ten

syllables, there is naturally a *Pause* at the fourth, fifth, or sixth syllable. It is upon these the ear rests, and upon the judicious change and management of which depends the variety of versification. For example,

At the fifth.

Where'er thy navy | spreads her canvass wings,

At the fourth.

Homage to thee | and peace to all she brings.

At the sixth.

Like tracts of leverets | in morning snow.

Now I fancy, that, to preserve an exact Harmony and Variety, the *Pause* at the 4th or 6th should not be continued above three lines together, without the interposition of another; else it will be apt to weary the ear with one continued tone, at least it does mine: That at the 5th runs quicker, and carries not quite so dead a weight, so tires not so much, tho' it be continued longer.

3. Another nicety is in relation to Expletives, whether words or syllables, which are made use of purely to supply a vacancy: *Do* before verbs plural is absolutely such; and it is not improbable but future refiners may explode *did* and *does* in the same manner, which are almost always used for the sake of rhyme. The same cause has occasioned the promiscuous use
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of *you* and *thou* to the same person, which can never sound so graceful as either one or the other.

4. I would also object to the irruption of Alexandrine verses, of twelve syllables, which, I think, should never be allow'd but when some remarkable beauty or propriety in them atones for the liberty: Mr. Dryden has been too free of these, especially in his latter works. I am of the same opinion as to Triple Rhimes.

5. I could equally object to the Repetition of the same Rhimes within four or six lines of each other, as tiresome to the ear thro' their Monotony.

6. Monosyllable Lines, unless very artfully managed, are stiff, or languishing: but may be beautiful to express Melancholy, Slowness, or Labour.

7. To come to the Hiatus, or Gap between two words, which is caus'd by two vowels opening on each other (upon which you desire me to be particular) I think the rule in this case is either to use the Cæsura, or admit the Hiatus, just as the ear is least shock'd by either: For the Cæsura sometimes offends the ear more than the Hiatus itself, and our language is naturally overcharg'd with consonants: As for example; If in this verse,

The old have Int'rest ever in their eye,
we should say, to avoid the Hiatus,

But th' old have int'rest.

The Hiatus which has the worst effect, is when one word ends with the same vowel that begins the following; and next to this, those vowels whose sounds come nearest to each other, are most to be avoided. O, A, or U, will bear a more full and graceful Sound than E, I, or Y. I know, some people will think these Observations trivial, and therefore I am glad to corroborate them by some great authorities, which I have met with in Tully and Quintilian. In the fourth book of Rhetoric to Herennius, are these words: *Fugiemus crebras vocalium concursiones, quæ vastam atque hiantem reddunt orationem; ut hoc est, Bacca æneæ amœnissimæ impendebant.* And Quintilian l. ix. cap. 4. *Vocalium concursus cum accidit, hiat & interfistit, & quasi laborat oratio. Pessimi longe quæ easdem inter se literas committunt, sonabunt: Præcipuus tamen erit hiatus earum quæ cavo aut patulo ore efferuntur. E plenior litera est, I angustior.* But he goes on to reprove the excess on the other hand of being too solicitous in this matter, and says admirably, *Nescio an negligentia in hoc, aut sollicitudo sit peior.* So likewise Tully (*Orator. ad Brut.*) *Theopompum reprebendunt,*

dunt, quod eas literas tanto opere fugerit, etsi idem magister ejus Socrates: which last author, as Turnebus on Quintilian observes, has hardly one Hiatus in all his works. Quintilian tells us, that Tully and Demosthenes did not much observe this nicety, tho' Tully himself says in his Orator, *Crebra ista vocum concursio, quam magna ex parte vitiosam, fugit Demosthenes.* If I am not mistaken, Malherbe of all the moderns has been the most scrupulous in this point; and I think Menage in his observations upon him says, he has not one in his poems. To conclude, I believe the Hiatus should be avoided with more care in poetry than in Oratory; and I would constantly try to prevent it, unless where the cutting it off is more prejudicial to the sound than the Hiatus itself. I am, &c.

A. POPE.

Mr. Walsh died at forty-nine years old, in the year 1708, the year before the

Essay on Criticism was printed, which concludes with his Elogy. P.