



## **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**

III. The answer. Of correcting, and the extreme of it. Of pastoral comedy, and its character. Of the liberty of borrowing from the ancients.

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**Nutzungsbedingungen**

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

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.

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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, grafs, 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<sup>a</sup>, to say things that had never been said before, as to express those best that have been

<sup>a</sup> 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.

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LETTER 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-