



## **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**

XXVII. Concerning laughter.

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**Nutzungsbedingungen**

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## L E T T E R    XXVII.

Decemb. 30, 1710.

**I** Resume my old liberty of throwing out myself upon paper to you, and making what thoughts float uppermost in my head, the subject of a letter. They are at present upon laughter, which (for aught I know) may be the cause you might sometimes think me too remiss a friend, when I was most intirely so: for I am never so inclin'd to mirth as when I am most pleas'd and most easy, which is in the company of a friend like yourself.

As the fooling and toying with a mistress is a proof of fondness, nor disrespect, so is raillery with a friend. I know there are prudes in friendship, who expect distance, awe, and adoration, but I know you are not of them; and I for my part am no Idol-worshipper, tho' a Papist. If I were to address Jupiter himself in a heathen way, I fancy I should be apt to take hold of his knee in a familiar manner, if not of his beard like Dionysius; I was just going to say, of his buttons; but I think Jupiter wore none (however I won't be positive to so nice a critic as you, but his robe might be subnected with a Fibula.) I know some philosophers define laughter, *A recommending ourselves to our*

own



own favour, by comparison with the weakness of another: but I am sure I very rarely laugh with that view, nor do I believe children have any such consideration in their heads, when they express their pleasure this way: I laugh full as innocently as they, for the most part, and as fillily. There is a difference too betwixt laughing *about* a thing and laughing *at* a thing: one may find the inferior man (to make a kind of casuistical distinction) provoked to folly at the sight or observation of some *circumstance of a thing*, when the *thing itself* appears solemn and august to the superior man, that is, our judgment and reason. Let an Ambassador speak the best sense in the world, and deport himself in the most graceful manner before a Prince, yet if the tail of his shirt happen (as I have known it happen to a very wise man) to hang out behind, more people shall laugh at that than attend to the other; 'till they recollect themselves, and then they will not have a jot the less respect for the minister. I must confess the iniquity of my countenance before you; several muscles of my face sometimes take an impertinent liberty with my judgment, but then my judgment soon rises, and sets all right again about my mouth: and I find I value no man so much, as him in whose sight I have been playing the fool. I cannot be *sub persona* before a man I love;



love; and not to laugh with honesty, when nature prompts, or folly (which is more a second nature than any thing I know) is but a knavish hypocritical way of making a mask of one's own face.—To conclude, those that are my friends I *laugh with*, and those that are not I *laugh at*; so am merry in company, and if ever I am wise, it is all by myself. You take just another course, and to those that are not your friends, are very civil; and to those that are, very endearing and complaisant: thus when you and I meet, there will be the *Risus & Blanditiæ* united together in conversation, as they commonly are in a verse. But without laughter on the one side, or compliment on the other, I assure you I am, with real esteem,

Your, &c.

L E T T E R XXVIII.

From Mr. CROMWELL.

Oct. 26, 1711.

**M**R. Wycherley visited me at Bath in my sickness, and express'd much affection to me: hearing from me how welcome his letters would be, he presently writ to you; in which I inserted my scrall, and after, a second.

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