

GENTLEMAN'S MAGAZINE, 1789–91: THE SEWARD–WESTON DEBATE

Introduction: Women Reviewing and Reviewed – Contextualizing Anna Seward's Debates with Joseph Weston

Between 1789 and 1791, a literary debate raged in the pages of the *Gentleman's Magazine*, ostensibly on the comparative merits of John Dryden and Alexander Pope. In April 1789, Anna Seward published a multi-part review of John Morfitt's 1788 Latin poem *Philotoxi Ardenae* ('Woodmen of Arden') translated and introduced by Joseph Weston. Morfitt, a Birmingham barrister, and Weston, an organist from Solihull, had published a joint edition of Morfitt's original Latin side-by-side with Weston's literal English translation in blank verse, followed by Weston's prefatory essay and paraphrased translation. Weston in his preface lavishly praised Dryden while disparaging Pope and his modern successors, and throughout his preface Weston interspersed admiring references to Seward so artfully that his essay could easily appear to readers to have been endorsed by her.¹ Weston had already lauded Seward in the October and December 1788 numbers of *Gentleman's Magazine*; and the November edition had paired Seward's sonnet on his poetic theories with Weston's sonnet enumerating her charms.² Given these overt suggestions of friendship, readers might well have inferred that Weston's prefatory remarks on Pope and Dryden reflected Seward's own views.

Seward, however, did not altogether share Weston's views, particularly as they regarded Pope. Displeasure permeates a 7 January 1789 letter from Seward to Weston. The versions of Seward's letters we have available to us exist at several removes from Seward's originals: not only did Seward 'revis[e]' her letters for posthumous publication, but both Walter Scott and Archibald Constable substantially edited them after her death, publishing them in 1811.³ But even at that distance, Seward's letter still evidences her displeasure, offering a tense denial of anger which expresses 'wonder ... at [his] strong prejudices' and a none-too-subtle warning that Weston should 'greatly soften the hyperbole of [his] praise for [her], and the warmth of [his] censure upon Pope'.⁴ If this response is true

to her original letter, Seward probably had not anticipated Weston's exploitative use of her reputation in his preface.

Seward published a multi-part response in the April through June 1789 numbers of the *Gentleman's Magazine*: 'Strictures on the Woodmen of Arden'. Her 'Strictures' turned not on Morfitt's 1788 *Philotoxi Ardenae* itself, but rather on Weston's preface to his 'Drydenic' translation of the piece.⁵ Her 'Strictures' was a literary tour-de-force, commenting not only the merits of Weston's arguments, but on the whole pantheon of eighteenth-century authors. Her 'Strictures' then becomes a review of the literary marketplace overall.

Ostensibly wishing to distance herself from Weston's opinions and his grandiloquence, Seward crafted her 'Strictures' as the rhetorical opposite to Weston's preface: a reasoned essay that explained its purpose and parameters, established a hierarchy of pre-eminent poets in the eras Weston had defined (Miltonic, Augustan and modern) and systematically rebutted those claims with which Seward disagreed. Whether she envisioned the firestorm her discourse would ignite cannot be known. Weston responded vigorously, of course, as did many *Gentleman's Magazine* correspondents, all debating the respective merits of Pope, Dryden and others they deemed either admirable or unworthy, including Seward herself.⁶ Despite her announced intention to vindicate her favourite (Pope), however, Seward abandoned him some ten months before Weston's final assault. This departure suggests that, for Seward, the defence of Pope may have been a ruse – a paper tiger designed to conceal Seward's true objective: proving that her literary analysis deserved a place in the *Gentleman's Magazine*.

That Seward could achieve this goal only by compelling readers to accept her as both poet *and critic* ironically transposes modern perceptions of Seward as critic *and poet*. Recent scholarship has focused strongly on her assessments of other women writers, particularly Charlotte Smith and Clara Reeve. For example, Seward's remarks on Smith's *Elegiac Sonnets* are described by Teresa Barnard as 'much-debated analysis', by Melissa Bailes as 'vitriolic attacks', by Paula Feldman as 'rarely lost [opportunities] to disparage', and by Daniel Robinson as 'increasingly malicious' expressions of a 'jealous grudge'; and Melissa Sodeman adds that Seward 'did not scruple' to accuse Smith of liberal poetic borrowing.⁷ Damning though these charges appear, however, they all derive from comments made in Seward's *private*, posthumously published and heavily edited letters. Simply put, Seward never *publicly* reviewed Smith's poetry or fiction. In offering Seward's assessments of her peers, critics further separate key phrases from their audience-specific contexts. Take, for example, Seward's 6 October 1788 letter describing Smith's sonnets as 'a mere flow of melancholy and harmonious numbers, full of notorious plagiarisms'.⁸ Although at least three scholars cite this letter, none mention that her correspondent, Rev. Berwick, had apparently asked Seward's opinion; and Sodeman alone reveals how often periodicals accused

Smith of imitation or fraud.⁹ Moreover, only Bailes explores Seward's essentially organic critical approach, an 'ordering and ranking' of poets and poems into a 'rigid, hierarchical chain of being' threatened by such deviations as plagiarism.¹⁰ These mitigating factors potentially reposition the Berwick letter from unprovoked assault to brutally frank response.

Had she chosen to do so, Seward might have furthered her own critical ambitions by censuring Smith in print – an option she had already exercised with respect to Clara Reeve's *The Progress of Romance*. The Reeve exchange illustrates Seward's painstaking self-reinvention. In her reviews Seward had created several distinct personae and then used responses to those personae as a means of gauging public reaction to various critical tones. For instance, the January 1786 attack by 'A. S.' on Reeve (and specifically on her ranking of Samuel Richardson's novels) was so abrasive that Reeve, in her February response, declared herself unable to 'conceive it possible that so much malevolence, with so little delicacy, could proceed from the pen of one of [her] own sex.'¹¹ Writing to Mary Scott on 29 March 1786, Seward pronounced this reply 'at once weak and artful'; her 30 March 1786 letter to Court Dewes points out that she had affixed her initials to the critique and scornfully rejects Reeve's claimed disbelief that a woman could have written it.¹² Nevertheless, in her April 1786 public rebuttal, she adopted a more coolly detached tone, this time employing the pseudonym 'A Constant Reader' and affecting to be a third party concerned with acquitting Reeve's 'Hypercritic' of 'dark-spirited malice'.¹³ Whereas 'A. S.' had enumerated the perceived flaws in *The Progress of Romance* and its critical methodology, 'A Constant Reader' explained the need to prosecute such flaws vigorously:

It is the *duty* of all people, who are themselves candidates for the palm of Fame, to guard with active zeal those she has already conferred upon their illustrious predecessors, when either able, or impotent defamers, directly or indirectly, seek to blight or eclipse them.¹⁴

Seward's shift from 'A. S.' to 'A Constant Reader', then, is no mere role-play exercise; instead, it represents her transition from critic to ethically motivated critical theorist. Her zealous allegiance to literary forebears clearly illuminates the principles she applies to Reeve, Smith and others, and, ultimately, would bring to bear in her debate with Weston.

Perhaps because the skirmish with Reeve had underscored Seward's own susceptibility to criticism, she was not yet prepared to acknowledge her reviews publicly.¹⁵ Accordingly, she assumed a different pseudonym for her February 1786 letter on James Boswell's *The Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides, with Samuel Johnson, LL.D.* Debuting between the two Reeve letters, Seward's 'Benvolio' repeatedly attacks Johnson's character in a series of strategically complex moves. Her first 'Benvolio' letter, for instance, simultaneously rebuts the *Gentleman's*

Magazine November 1785 review, which had chastised Boswell for not praising Johnson highly enough, and denigrates the *Journal of a Tour* for attempting to conceal Johnson's flaws – a vain endeavour, she adds, because '[f]acts are stubborn things'.¹⁶ While she addresses the anonymous reviewer with punctilious respect, 'Benvolio' acidly indicts Boswell for his role in a shocking 'assault upon [a well-established] reputation' by printing Johnson's 'unjust contempt of [Elizabeth Montagu's] able and beautiful Treatise on Shakspeare'.¹⁷ Striking a careful balance between the forceful aggression of 'A. S.' and the elegant disdain of 'A Constant Reader', 'Benvolio' teases out the intricacies of Seward's hierarchical taxonomy: Johnson is condemned, in part, because his attack on Montagu undermines her respect for an 'illustrious predecessor' (Shakespeare) and thus betrays Johnson himself into an act of transgressive 'defamation'; Boswell, in turn, doubles his own 'filial' guilt by abetting an undutiful literary 'son' in his assault upon Shakespeare's more responsible 'daughter'.

That 'Benvolio' garnered the sort of attention not paid the other pseudonymous personae evidently reassured Seward that this voice was worth cultivating. Rev. Dr Warner brought the February critique to her attention, and Seward's 7 March 1786 response assures him that her 'literary ambition [is] not slightly gratified by his having characterized 'Benvolio's' words as 'able, eloquent, and convincing, without the least suspicion of the name or sex of their author'.¹⁸ But while Seward's letter establishes her unambiguous determination to cultivate a non-female critical voice, it does not specify whether her use of 'Benvolio' signifies a desire to appear male. This question remains unanswered in 'Benvolio's' April 1786 *Gentleman's Magazine* letter jointly critiquing Boswell's *Journal of a Tour* and Hester Lynch Piozzi's *Anecdotes of the Late Dr. Johnson*; and indeed Seward might never have clarified her stance had not a July 1787 'Mr. Urban' letter identified Johnson's attacker as a 'lady, with the misapplied signature of *Benvolio*'.¹⁹ Defending herself in the *Gentleman's Magazine* August 1787 number, 'Benvolio' almost entirely abandons her use of 'I' in favour of such self-references as 'the writer' or 'the author of the letters signed Benvolio ... *himself*', concluding the letter with an assertion that 'souls are of no sex, and their effusions therefore may, at pleasure, assume a masculine or feminine appellation'.²⁰ What Seward demanded of herself, then, was gender-neutral and highly intellectual prose that could not be 'dismissed by male critics as irrelevant because poorly reasoned'.²¹ She wanted her readers to accept her prose as sexless and be willing to embrace whichever gender – or lack thereof – she chose to manifest at any given time.

But facts are indeed stubborn things; and in 1789 Seward was faced with two inescapable proofs of this tenet: first, that only 'Anna Seward' could credibly denounce the views Weston's preface imputed to her; and, second, that 'Anna Seward' was an undeniably 'feminine appellation'. By publishing her 'Strictures' in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, moreover, she chose to conduct her battle

in an inherently masculine milieu. Although she could no longer shield herself behind the gender-neutrality (or gender-mutability) of 'Benvolio', she could and did adopt a carefully cultivated and essentially sexless voice. In a sense, this approach allowed her to enjoy the best of both worlds. Being a woman meant that she did not share Weston's burden of remaining 'elaborately and artificially polite' throughout the debate, a freedom that ironically allowed her to produce a 'more sincere and balanced, more "masculine" tone than Weston achieved.²² The period's gendered rules of etiquette imposed reciprocal duties, of course, and Weston's requisite chivalry was counterbalanced by Seward's compulsory grace and humility. But no authority governed the degree of sincerity with which either sex observed these rules. Of the two combatants, unfortunately for Weston, Seward employed polished artifice with far greater skill.

As Gretchen Foster notes, the Seward–Weston controversy provides a fascinating view of 'sexual politics' at work in an eighteenth-century literary debate; yet Foster also expresses dissatisfaction with what she calls the exchange's 'shortcomings as literary criticism' and the parties' mutual inability to 'describe their appreciation of Romantic poetry in terms that go much beyond enthusiastic exclamation.'²³ Both Seward and Weston display a certain weakness for effusion, but neither are professional critics. Further, as a woman, Seward lacked the formal education necessary to legitimize her opinions; as a relative unknown, Weston lacked the social standing to compete confidently with the famous Swan of Lichfield, advantages of a male education notwithstanding. Ultimately, 'sexual politics' make this an important critical debate. Seward's decision to risk her considerable reputation by initiating – in a nominally male arena – a contest over the respective merits of pre-eminent male poets shows both tremendous courage and a deep conviction that she was entitled to match wits with men of letters.

In a sense, Seward had entered this competition when she began infiltrating the *Gentleman's Magazine* critical ranks in her various pseudonymous guises. That she had learned from these experiences is clear from the tactics she employs in the 'Strictures'. She engages in a three-pronged attack, defining and maintaining a strict argumentative scope, establishing her own scholarly and critical credentials, and undermining Weston's authority. As her first prong, she identifies the preface and its claims as her parameters, assuring readers that she 'will not be led into new paths of controversy.'²⁴ Perhaps their friendship engendered Seward's suspicion that Weston might be easily drawn – and might attempt to draw her – into tangential arguments.²⁵ Her concerns were apparently well-founded. While Seward firmly adhered to her stated boundaries, several letters reveal a Weston thoroughly distracted by such incidentals as his quibble with 'M. F.' over the language of chivalric romance.²⁶

In her second prong, Seward substantiates her expertise: she itemizes the 'distinct lustre' of the Miltonic, Augustan and modern poetic ages.²⁷ In so doing, she

simultaneously forecloses Weston's ability to introduce new players at will and imposes her own lineal system of grouping writers by shared 'poetic precursors' or by 'predilection for a given verse form.'²⁸ Categorizing poets in this way allows Seward to display the impressive breadth of her own reading and the extent to which she has already considered each writer's proper place in an extended, complex literary chain. By introducing women writers – Elizabeth Montagu in the Augustan period, and Anna Laetitia Barbauld, Hannah More, Helen Maria Williams, Hester Piozzi, Elizabeth Carter, Hannah Cowley and Charlotte Smith in the modern era – Seward not only ensures their inclusion in a budding poetic canon but secures her own place as well. Her strategic incorporation of these women also reflects a keen understanding of literary politics. By grouping all the poets into their appropriate 'ages' (regardless of gender), identifying virtually all by surname only, and eschewing the term 'poetess' in favour of 'female poet', Seward places male and female writers on an equal footing.

Seward's third prong involves sabotaging Weston's authority by exploiting his histrionic bent, including his tendency either to idolize or to detest. For instance, the opening paragraph of her 'Strictures' asserts *three times* that he praises her too highly, offering as evidence the preface's 'phantom of imputed perfection ... most inapplicably given [Seward's] name.'²⁹ She describes Weston as a 'being' who harbours strong, injurious 'prejudices' against Pope and 'hyperbol[ic]' admiration for her.³⁰ In other words, Seward presents Weston as a man whose passions undermine his judgement. To this end, she returns to his 'prejudices' repeatedly throughout the debate. Making readers distrust – or at least question – Weston's attacks on Pope damages his credibility as her own critic as well.

This public foregrounding of Weston's admiration for Seward allows her to manipulate gendered social codes to her advantage. So honeyed are her self-effacing protestations that sincerity and artifice become indistinguishable; and this ambiguity forms the crux of an effective rhetorical manoeuvre. By thanking Weston for his compliments and denying that she deserves them, Seward displays the graceful humility expected of a woman. Etiquette will require *him* to reaffirm his praise, prompting her demurral, and so forth – a ritualistic performance to be preserved and publicized by the *Gentleman's Magazine*. In the meantime, Seward's reference to 'imputed perfection' intertextualizes the preface wherein Weston flatteringly compares her to Horace: 'the BRITISH POETESS towers as much above the ROMAN BARD – as she is acknowledged to do above most of her *own* Nation, in *Beauty, Affability, Genius, Taste, Benevolence* – and FILIAL PIETY!³¹ *Gentleman's Magazine* readers familiar with the preface are thus reminded that Weston does indeed trade in hyperbole and that Seward, despite her fame, has modestly downplayed his overwrought enthusiasm.

Weston inevitably rises to Seward's bait, and the 'hyper-sensitive and verbose' style of his initial response leaves him vulnerable to her critical scrutiny.³² In his

23 August 1789 'Mr. Urban' letter, he describes Seward as a 'beautiful, accomplished, and amiable Woman', a 'Goddess', a 'literary Amazon' whose lovely face 'melts down all opposition' and whose eyes 'dim the radiance of ... gems'.³³ Whether or not this is Weston's version of social artifice, such extravagance suggests that he simply cannot curb his pen. Nor does he bolster his credibility by abruptly shifting to a comparison between Pope, who 'suffered his Friends' to honour him above Dryden, and a person who wilfully 'suffers that a crime be committed, for the sake of his own advantage'.³⁴ Alternating between admiration and loathing, Weston seems determined to prove Seward's point for her. In fact, the 'Strictures' and this initial response typify the exchanges between two. Seward attacks and parries with the lofty, acerbic elegance of 'Benvolio', easily slipping into and out of the more 'feminine' style with which she modestly deflects praise. By contrast, Weston struggles to master both his tone and his temper and, as Foster notes, often projects an 'uneasy combination of sugary flattery and bitter acrimony'.³⁵ Given their respective performances, Seward appears poised for triumph.

But Seward's rhetorical strategy held its own limitations. Despite years spent cultivating a sexless critical voice in her pseudonymous reviews, for Seward to write as 'Anna Seward' required her to open the debate with a traditionally 'female' gambit: praising Morfitt's 'ingenious Latin poem' and Weston's 'genius' while modestly disclaiming her own virtue.³⁶ She adopted this tone very sparingly and otherwise employed only a gender-neutral voice. Further, she carefully ignored all compliments issued by any correspondent other than Weston. But regardless of the fact that she had executed a meticulous and measured criticism of the *Woodmen of Arden*; that she had scrupulously 'disavow[ed] a sensibility which Mr. Morfitt affect[ed] to take for granted'; or that Weston, to great extent, defeated *himself* in this debate, none of these things prevented the correspondents from condescending to her *because she was a woman*.³⁷ They may have done so in any event, but writing as 'Anna Seward' opened the door for them, subjecting herself to – and perhaps facilitating – the very sort of treatment she had thought to avoid.

The *RWWR* series collects the reviews of women, but Seward is, to this point, only one of two who rebutted their critics in the pages of the reviews themselves – and certainly no other woman writer had the cultural capital to warrant the investment of so many pages in a magazine ostensibly geared to *Gentlemen*. Although the letters in this debate are theoretically centred on the merits of Dryden and Pope, the debate between Anna Seward and Joseph Weston nevertheless serves as an interesting case study of what happened when a woman writer attempted to engage her male contemporaries as equals.

Notes:

1. J. Morfitt and J. Weston. *Philotoxi Ardenae, the Woodmen of Arden; a Latin Poem ... with a Translation in Blank Verse; Another in Rhyme: Attempted in the Manner of Dryden ... and an Essay on the Superiority of Dryden's Versification over that of Pope and of the Moderns*, by J. Weston (Birmingham, 1788), Preface, pp. xvii, xxvi.
2. *Gentleman's Magazine*, 58:2 (July–December 1789), pp. 915, 1008.
3. T. Barnard, *Anna Seward: A Constructed Life. A Critical Biography* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2009), pp. 2–4.
4. A. Seward, *Letters of Anna Seward: Written Between the Years of 1784 and 1807*, 6 vols (Edinburgh: Constable; London: Longman; 1811), vol. 2, p. 208. Barnard, *Anna Seward*, pp. 2–4.
5. G. Foster, *Pope Versus Dryden: A Controversy in Letters to The Gentleman's Magazine* (Victoria: English Literary, 1989), p. 9.
6. See *ibid.*, pp. 9–34, for a more comprehensive description of the debate's participants and theoretical bases.
7. Barnard, *Anna Seward*, p. 125; M. Bailes, 'The Evolution of the Plagiarist: Natural History in Anna Seward's Order of Poetics', *Eighteenth-Century Life*, 33:3 (2009), pp. 105–26, on p. 105; P. Feldman, 'Introduction', in P. Feldman, *British Women Poets of the Romantic Era: An Anthology* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), pp. xxv–xxxii; D. Robinson, 'Reviving the Sonnet: Women Romantic Poets and the Sonnet Claim', *European Romantic Review*, 6 (1995), pp. 98–127, on pp. 112, 113; M. Sodeman, 'Charlotte Smith's Literary Exile', *ELH*, 76:1 (2009), pp. 131–52, on p. 132.
8. Seward, *Letters*, vol. 2, p. 162.
9. Seward, *Letters*, vol. 2, p. 162; Bailes, 'The Evolution of the Plagiarist', p. 105; Robinson, 'Reviving the Sonnet', p. 112; Sodeman, 'Charlotte Smith's Literary Exile', pp. 131–2.
10. Bailes, 'The Evolution of the Plagiarist', pp. 108, 117. Robinson, too, notes Seward's exacting attachment to established literary precedents and concedes that she was 'clearly motivated at least in part by poetical principles', but he severely diminishes her critical agency by using such expressions as 'gripes', 'deeply heated prejudice', and 'harps on' ('Reviving the Sonnet', pp. 99–104, 111–13).
11. *Gentleman's Magazine*, 56:1 (1786), pp. 15–17, 117–18. 'A. S.' is identified here as a pseudonym because Rev. Thomas Russell also used this 'signature' on essays he contributed to *Gentleman's* during the 1780s. This information comes from Russell's obituary in *Gentleman's Magazine*, 58:2 (August 1788), pp. 752–3.
12. Seward, *Letters*, vol. 1, pp. 135, 149.
13. *Gentleman's Magazine*, 56:1 (1786), p. 288. The 'A Constant Reader' letter has been attributed to Seward by The Folger Collective on Early Women Critics (ed.), *Women Critics 1660–1820: An Anthology* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995), pp. 165–73. The Seward–Reeve exchange is analysed in greater detail in E. Fay, *A Feminist Introduction to Romanticism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), pp. 179–82.
14. *Gentleman's Magazine*, 56:1 (1786), p. 289, emphasis in original.
15. Fay, *A Feminist Introduction*, p. 182.
16. *Gentleman's Magazine*, 55:2 (1785), pp. 889–94; 56:1 (1786), pp. 125–6.
17. *Gentleman's Magazine*, 56:1 (1786), p. 126.
18. Seward, *Letters*, vol. 1, p. 255.
19. *Gentleman's Magazine*, 56:1 (1786), pp. 302–4; 57:2 (1787), p. 559, emphasis in original.

20. *Gentleman's Magazine*, 57:2 (1787), pp. 684–5.
21. Fay, *A Feminist Introduction*, p. 181.
22. Foster, *Pope Versus Dryden*, p. 33.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 32.
24. *Gentleman's Magazine*, 59:1 (1789), p. 292, below, p. 44.
25. Seward's 15 April 1788 letter to Sophia Weston (who was neither related to nor personally familiar with Joseph Weston) reports that Joseph Weston's 'comments, though always in themselves worth attention, often fatigue by their plenitude' (Seward, *Letters*, vol. 2, p. 92).
26. See, e.g., *Gentleman's Magazine*, 59:2 (1789), pp. 875–6, below, pp. 63–6.
27. *Gentleman's Magazine*, 59:1 (1789), p. 292, below, p. 44.
28. Robinson, 'Reviving the Sonnet', p. 110; Bailes, 'The Evolution of the Plagiarist', p. 108.
29. *Gentleman's Magazine*, 59:1 (1789), pp. 291–2, below, pp. 43–4.
30. *Gentleman's Magazine*, 59:1 (1789), p. 292, below, p. 44.
31. Weston, Preface to *Philotoxi Ardenae*, p. xxvi, emphasis in original.
32. Foster, *Pope Versus Dryden*, p. 24.
33. *Gentleman's Magazine*, 59:2 (1789), pp. 680–1, below, pp. 53–5.
34. *Gentleman's Magazine*, 59:2 (1789), p. 681, below, p. 55.
35. Foster, *Pope Versus Dryden*, p. 32.
36. *Gentleman's Magazine*, 59:1 (1789), p. 291, below, p. 43.
37. *Gentleman's Magazine*, 60:1 (1790), p. 118, below, p. 88.

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GENTLEMAN'S MAGAZINE

1789

59:1, no. 4 (April), pp. 291–2.
MR. URBAN, *April 25*.

A publication has lately appeared, intituled, The WOODMEN OF ARDEN. It consists of an ingenious Latin poem by Mr. Morfitt, with two translations of it by Mr. Weston; one literal, in blank verse; the other paraphrastic, and in rhyme. I think highly of Mr. Weston's genius; I know that he has many virtues; and I cannot but be grateful for that partiality to me [291] which his writings have more than once displayed. In the close of a systematic Preface to his translation in rhyme, mentioned above, appears a phantom of imputed perfection, to which he has most inapplicably given *my* name. Mr. Weston is a being whose prejudices are as strong as his talents. In this same Preface, he accuses Pope of having meanly *influenced* his friends to exalt his compositions above their just level, for the purpose of lowering Dryden's, and tearing the laurels from his brow. I believe Pope injured by this accusation; and I am afraid that my acquaintance with Mr. W. and the *hyperbole* of his encomium, should subject *me* to a similar imputation, and induce many to believe that the general assertions of that Preface have my concurrence.

Hence it is that I wish you would allow a place in your Magazine to the ensuing strictures. In combat with the opinions of a man I esteem, to whom I am obliged, they were drawn from me by jealousy, 'even to a Roman strictness,'¹ for the poetic glory of the last half-century.

It is probable the length of these observations may render it inconvenient to comprise them in one, or even in two Magazines. Should you divide them, and should Mr. W. reply before their course is finished, I declare that I will *not* be led into new paths of controversy. My business is with the PREFACE to The WOODMEN OF ARDEN.

In the first place, it asserts the Author's opinion, that ENGLISH RHYME was brought to the *acmé* of *perfection* by Dryden; that, since his time, it has been gradually declining from *good* to *indifferent*, and from *indifferent* to *bad*; and this *bad*, Mr. W. calls the *modern style of versification*. Farther on in the Essay, he

avows an ardent desire to see the Pierian spring restored to what he calls Drydenical purity; asserting, that it was corrupted by Pope, and has been poisoned by his successors.

In *this*, in every age, since first the light of Poesy dawned, there have been fifty pretenders to its inspirations for one that has been really inspired; but no person in their senses will affirm, that the poetic character of any period takes its colour from the *poetasters* who infest it. Mr. W. cannot be so absurd as to bring *such* of our scribblers into comparison with the illustrious bards of Milton and Dryden's day, and of Pope's and Prior's.

By the MODERNS, therefore, Mr. W. must be supposed to mean the *celebrated* poetic writer's from Pope's decease to the present hour. Let us look at the distinct lustre of the three periods to which he alludes.

The first shone by the light of MILTON's genius, of DRYDEN's, OTWAY's, COWLEY's, WALLER's, DAVENANT's, BUTLER's, DENHAM's, LEE's, Lord ROSCOMMON's.

The second, generally called the Augustan age, by that of POPE, PRIOR, YOUNG, GAY, SWIFT, ADDISON, TICKELL, ROWE, CONGREVE, PARNELL, ARBUTHNOT, STEELE, PHILIPS, WATTS, Lady M. W. MONTAGUE.

Ours, by that of GRAY, HAYLEY, MASON, THOMSON, COLLINS, AKENSIDE, the two WARTONS, COWPER, JEPHSON, GOLDSMITH, JOHNSON, BEATTIE, CHURCHILL, SHENSTONE, LANGHORNE, Sir WILLIAM JONES, PYE, MALLET, OWEN CAMBRIDGE (whose epic satire on Antiquarianism, THE SCRIBLERIAD, is, perhaps, the best mock-heroic poem in the language except the Dunciad), SHERIDAN, LOWTH, SARJENT, WHALLEY, MATHIAS, JERNINGHAM, WHITEHEAD, HORACE WALPOLE, and CHA. FOX (whose poetic brilliants, though small, are of the first water), LLOYD, WESLEY (author of the noble allegoric poem THE BATTLE OF THE SEXES), DYER, POTTER, the two HOOLES, HAWKINS BROWNE, SOMERVILE, CRABBE, CAWTHORNE, HOME, CROWE, STEVENS (author of a fine poem in blank verse called RETIREMENT), GARRICK, MURPHY, DE LA CRUSCA, CUMBERLAND, GREATHED, SWIFT (a spirited satiric poet), BARRY, BUTT (whose^a fame has been blighted by too free an use of the Drydenic licences as to versification), the witty, but irreverent, PETER PINDAR, the two CUNNINGHAMS, the SEVEN* celebrated Female Poets, BARBAULD, MORE, WILLIAMS, PIOZZI, CARTER, COWLEY, CATH. SMITH, the rising poetic lights, CARY and LISTER, the unschooled sons of genius, BURNS (who is our *new* Allen Ramsay), NEWTON, YEARSLEY, REID, and the greatest of these wonders, the ill-starred CHATTERTON, who, had he lived, and his ripe years borne proportionate fruits, must have been the first Poet in the world. Yours, &c. ANNA SEWARD. (*To be continued.*) [292]

* Fear of offending an amiable correspondent prevents our changing this to EIGHT. EDIT.

59:1, no. 5 (May), pp. 389–91.

Miss Seward's Strictures on the Preface to the Woodmen of Arden (*continued from p. 292.*)

If I had not been in some sort addressing him, I should certainly have added the name of WESTON to the last,* and (Milton excepted) far the brightest, as well as greatly the most numerous, of the three lists; for Mr. W. has genius to vie with most of his contemporaries, if Prejudice had not chained him to Dryden's car, and persuaded him to take the dirt upon its wheels for studs of jet, placed *purposely* there, as foils to its golden axis.²

Have they of this third list collectively 'poisoned the Pierian Spring,' either respecting sentiment, imagery, or style? The imputation is injurious, and demands public refutation.

In order to prove Pope's long-confessed refinements to have been real corruptions, Mr. W. asks some ingenious questions concerning the eligibility of keeping down certain parts in poetic composition, upon the painter's system, to give more effect to the brilliant passages. Judgement will readily confess, that the system should be adopted by the sister science; but the manly and graceful plainness of style, such as frequently occurs in *Milton's* poetry, form its *judicious* shades; nor is Pope's by any means destitute of these mellowings; but incongruous metaphor, inconsistent fable, and prating familiarity of expression, instead of softening down, at intervals, the too obtrusive lights of composition, blot, and defile it. With such errors did the *great* Dryden *too often* corrupt the living waters of that Pierian Spring, to which his genius gave him perpetual access.

The Essay in question enumerates what it calls *tinkling* compound epithets amongst the fancied improvements of the MODERNS. Tinkling is a most inapplicable adjective; since when, *ill* chosen compound epithets may be stiff, may *grate*, but cannot *tinkle* on the ear. When *well* chosen, their merit is not to the *ear*, but to the *understanding*, by their condensing and energetic power. They are of the Miltonic, not of the Popeian school, and are too seldom used by its disciples.

Our Drydenic enthusiast has certainly convicted Prior and Montague's able criticism upon the Hind and Panther,³ of one *trivial* mistake, viz. their idea that the words *fated* and *doomed* are exactly synonymous. He calls *that* criticism a wretched abortion; with what justice, let the following quotation from it decide. It is given from memory, and therefore perhaps not verbatim; but the sense is faithful.

* The Author of these Strictures is shocked to perceive that she had, through haste, omitted to mention the distinguished names, LYTTTELTON, ANSTEY, MICKLE, JEKYLL, amid her former enumeration of the Poetic Writers in the last half-century. She will probably feel future pain from recollecting several others, whom the incompetence of her memory alone prevented from being named to the honour of the times in which she has lived.

Though the fables of the ancients carry a double meaning, the story is one and entire, the characters not broken and changed, but always conformable to the nature of the creatures they introduce. They never tell us that the dog which snapt at a shadow lost his troop of horse; *that* would be unintelligible. It is Dryden's new way of telling a story, to confound the moral and the fable together. How can we conceive a panther reading in a Bible? and what relation has the hind to our Savior? If you say he means the ancient church, how can we imagine an eating and walking church, feeding on lawns, and ranging in forests? Let it, at least, be *always* a church, or always a cloven-footed beast; common sense cannot endure his shifting the scene every line.

Extreme must be the prejudice that can induce a man of genius to deem observations, so indisputably just, the abortive effects of malice. Where the understanding is thus outraged, can it be in melody, sweet as even *Pope's*, to make compensation? and in the Hind and Panther we only find some harmonious and picturesque lines amidst a tedious number of pages, filled with dry, prolix jingles of senseless controversy.

It is curious that Mr. W. should have selected the eight charming verses, which open the Hind and Panther, as specimens of *fine style*, since they are not in *Dryden's* general manner, but exactly in that of *Pope* and his *disciples*, – without one Alexandrine or triplet; with much point and antithesis, and with the sense only once, and that slightly, but very beautifully, overflowing the couplet. [389]

It always appeared to me, that *Pope* formed his style upon a few of the best passages in *Dryden*. Mr. W. is very angry with him for separating the dross from the gold.

Pope's numbers seem to have but one fault; viz. the sense, as Mr. W observes, is too generally confined within the boundary of the couplet; but *that* is surely better than its overflowing too often, as in *Dryden's*. – My ear dislikes the drag occasioned in the versification of the latter by his placing Alexandrines so frequently in the *middle* of sentences: when harmoniously constructed, they have a majestic effect on *closing* them, even in the heroic measure; but surely the frequent triplets are very botching. I find more *sameness* in *Dryden's* everlasting Iambics than in that which results from the sense being too seldom allowed to float into the first line of the ensuing couplet for its pause, as in *Pope*. He uses the spirited accent upon the first syllable in a verse twenty times for once that it occurs in *Dryden*; and where several objects are to be described in succession, he generally takes the inverted order of the words and the natural one alternately, as in the following passage from a recently published poem of infinite beauty:

Pale shoot the stars across the troubled night;
The timid Moon withdraws her conscious light;
Shrill scream the famish'd bats, and shivering owls,
And loud and long the dog of midnight howls.⁴

Another species of superior excellence in Pope's verses over those of Dryden; the former describe in the lively dramatic *present* tense much oftener than the latter. The passage quoted above is in *Pope's* style. Had it run *thus*, it had been in *Dryden's*, and perhaps not in his worst manner:

The stars shot pale across the troubled night,
And the affrighted Moon withdrew her light;
And hungry bats, and owls, and ravens prowld,
And, to increase the din, the dog of midnight howld.

By this alteration the lines are all Iambics, and have therefore less solemn force of sound.

Mr. Weston complains that Pope is too regularly harmonious. I have selected, out of countless instances, the following passage, in proof that he spared not, occasionally, to use harsh numbers for *picturesque* purposes.

First march the heavy mules, securely slow,
O'er hills, o'er dales, o'er crags, o'er rocks they go;
Jumping high o'er the shrubs of the rough ground,
Rattle the clattering cars, and the shock'd axles bound.
But when arriv'd at Ida's spreading woods,
Fair Ida! water'd with descending floods,
Loud sounds the axe, redoubling strokes on strokes,
On all sides round the forest hurls her oaks;
Headlong, deep echoing, groan the thickets brown,
And rattling, cracking, crashing, thunder down.⁵

Let us look at a passage in Dryden, whose harshness of numbers is *not* picturesque.

Was there no milder way but the small-pox,
The very filthiness of Pandora's box?
So many spots, like naeves in Venus' soil!
One jewel set off by so *many foil*!
Blisters, with pride swell'd, that through's flesh did sprout,
Like rose-buds stuck i'th' lily skin about.
Each little pimple had a tear in it,
To wail the fault its rising did commit;
Which, rebel-like, with its own lord at strife,
Thus made an insurrection 'gainst his life.
Or were these gems sent to adorn his skin,
The cabinet of a richer soul within?
No comet need foretell his change drew on,
Whose corpse might seem a constellation.⁶

* Bad grammar.

To say nothing of the odiousness of these ideas, or rather conceits, let the passage be viewed as style merely; a specimen of the purity of Dryden's Pierian Spring, which Pope is accused of having corrupted. If it be urged, that this extract is from a juvenile poem of Dryden's, be it remembered that Pope wrote his Pastorals, and the first part of sweet Windsor Forest, two years earlier in life. Thus, at sixteen, did Pope corrupt the Aonian fountain.

His Pastorals.

Thyrsis, the music of the murmuring spring
Is not so mournful as the lays you sing;
Nor rivers, winding through the vale below,
So sweetly warble, or so smoothly flow.
Now sleeping flocks on their soft fleeces lie,
The moon, serene in glory, mounts the sky;
While silent birds forget their tuneful lays,
Sing of thy Daphne's fate, thy Daphne's praise.⁷

As an instance that Dryden, in his riper years, was prone to let his style fall below the poetic level where the subject called *aloud* for elevation, observe how the Empress of Heaven is made to open her indignant soliloquy, in his translation of the *Aeneid*:

Then am I vanquish'd, must I yield, *said she*,
And must the Trojans reign in Italy?
So Fate will have it, and Jove adds his force,
Nor can my power divert their *happy* course.
Could angry Pallas, with revengeful spleen,
The Grecian navy *burn*, and *drown* the *men*,⁸
And cannot I, &c. [390]

Six lines after, Juno says,

The wretch, yet hissing with her father's flame;⁹

and thus describes the victim of Minerva's wrath, as Falstaff describes himself reeking from the buck-basket,

Hissing hot, Master Ford, hissing hot.¹⁰

Now let us compare the style of the two poets, assuming the persons of females, and addressing their lovers, – Helen her Paris, Eloisa her Abelard.

Dryden's Epistle from Helen to Paris.

The crown of Troy is powerful, I confess,
Yet I have reason to think ours no less;
But 'tis your love *moves* me, which made you take
Such pains, and run such hazards for my sake.
I have perceive'd, though *I dissembled too*,
A thousand things that Love has *made you do*;

Your eager eyes would almost dazzle mine,
 In which, wild man, your wanton thoughts would shine.
 Sometimes you'd sigh, sometimes disorder'd stand,
 And with unusual ardour press my hand;
 Contrive, just after me, to take the glass,
 Nor would you let the least occasion pass;
 When oft I fear'd *I did not mind* alone,
 But blushing sat for things which you have done.
 Then murmur'd to myself, 'he'll for my sake
 Do any thing,' – *I hope 'twas no mistake.*
 Oft have I read, within this pleasing grove,
 Under my name, the charming words, 'I love!'
 I, frowning, seem'd not to believe your flame,
 But now, alas! *am come to write the same.*
 For O! your *face* has such peculiar charms,
 That who *can hold from* flying to your arms?¹¹

This is the style to which Mr. W. seeks to draw us *back* from the *corruption* of the following:

Eloisa to Abelard

Thou know'st how guiltless first I met thy flame,
 When Love approach'd me under Friendship's name.
 My fancy formed thee of angelic kind,
 Some emanation of th' all-beauteous mind;
 Those smiling eyes, attempering every ray,
 Shone sweetly lambent with celestial day.
 From lips like those what precepts fail'd to move?
 Too soon they taught me, 'twas no sin to love.
 Dim and remote the joys of saints I see,
 Nor envy them that heaven I lose for thee.¹²

A little more from Dryden's Cheapside¹³ Miss, married to Menelaus:

Your Trojan wealth, believe me, I despise,
 My own poor native land has dearer ties;
 I cannot doubt but, should I follow you,
 The sword would soon our fatal crime pursue;
 A wrong so great my husband's race would rouse,
 And *my relations would his cause espouse.*
 You boast your strength and courage, but alas!
 Your words receive small credit from your face.¹⁴

So Helen tells her lover he looks like a sneaking coward; so *ill* does she *express* this compliment to his complexion.

A little more from Pope's charming Nun:
 No weeping orphan saw his father's stores
 Our shrines irradiate, or emblaze our floors!
 But such plain roofs as Piety could raise,

And only vocal with their Maker's praise.
 In these lone walls (their day's eternal bound)
 These moss-grown domes, with spiry turrets crown'd,
 Where awful arches make a noon-day night,
 And the dim windows shed a solemn light,
 Thy eyes diffus'd a reconciling ray,
 And gleams of glory brighten'd all the day.
 But now no face divine contentment wears,
 'Tis all blank sadness and continual tears.¹⁵

The lines which, in the poem, succeed to the above passage, and form a description of the Paraclete scenery, yield to no poetry as *landscape painting*. Dryden never equaled, and Milton has not excelled, them. The landscape is as *original* as it is solemn and striking, and the sound of the versification breathes the very spirit of elevated melancholy. (*To be concluded in our next.*) [391]

59:1, no. 6 (June), pp. 510–12.

Miss Seward's Strictures on the Preface to the Woodmen of Arden; (*concluded from p. 391.*)

Few, Mr. Urban, that attend to the extracts in your last number, will think Mr. Weston *wise* in *rejecting* the excuse which Friendship, less blinded by injudicious zeal, alledges for the frequent coarseness of Dryden's ideas, and the frequent bathos of his style, viz. 'writing for bread,¹⁶ he had not time to chuse and reject his thoughts, to polish and refine his language.' But its being known that he never expunged, or even altered, a single passage in the course of those various editions of his Poems that passed under his eye, prove that the pruning-knife and the chisel were *not* voluntarily withheld; since it is impossible to conceive that there ever lived a man so notoriously conceited as that, in repeated revision of so many volumes, he could see no passage, nor even expression, that he wished to omit or alter. It is therefore plain that Dryden found his wilderness so weedy, that to attempt clearing it would be an Herculean labour, swallowing up that time which he wanted to employ in pressing on with *new* publications, for whose profits his necessities so loudly called. – He trusted to the majestic trees of this wilderness, 'laden with blooming gold;¹⁷ for the preservation of his fame; and they *will* preserve it. But he little dreamt that their fruits should so far intoxicate the brain of a brother poet, in future time, as that he should assert the superior beauty of this wilderness on *account* of its weeds, and abuse the majestic parks and lawns of succeeding bards, from which the nettles and switch-grass have been rooted up.

It is also terribly impolitic in Mr. Weston to bring Dryden and Pope into view *at once*, and then to attack the moral character of the latter, whose imputed crime must be only conjectural; and whose errors are, compared with the mean faults of Dryden, but as a passing cloud of Summer to December's darkness.

Pope did every justice to Dryden's genius; witness one amongst many lines in his praise:

And what Timotheus *was* is Dryden now.¹⁸

But in that style in which they both *chiefly* wrote (for Pope was *not* a master of *lyric* composition) he felt his own superiority; not *vainly*, because thousands felt, and still feel it also. He probably wished to see it *asserted*. Why should that wish be deemed proof of a bad heart, even if he did finesse a little to obtain it?

Dryden's writings prove that he was wholly without fixed principles in Religion, Politics, or Criticism; that his Interest was with his Legislator, his Guide, and his God. Witness his mean and profane renunciation of the religion in which he had been educated, and had ably defended, for the idolatries he had stigmatised! A Popish King just then mounted on the throne, *who* discerns not the court-parasite in the new apostate? Witness his hyperbolic praise of the deceased Cromwell, to please the Republicans, whose downfall he did not then foresee! – and witness his subsequent *abuse* of Cromwell, who being dead when he extolled him, the Poet had no excuse, from any after-conduct of the imputed *angel*, for changing him into a *devil*. Even Mr. W. allows that he formed his critical opinions according to the interest of the hour, callous to all the self-contradictions into which such meanness betrayed him.

How inconceivable is it, that beneath the obtrusive prominence of such faults in Dryden, the writer, who compares [510] the two poets, *can* be severe upon the human frailties of Pope, relieving the necessities of his abusive foe, and watching, with filial tenderness, by the couch of his aged mother!

Mr. W's observation is just upon Dryden's Alexandrine, reprobated by Dr. Johnson, in his Life of that Poet. But to reprobate poetic excellence was Dr. Johnson's *custom*; a thrice dangerous one to the public taste, since it requires unusual strength of mind to escape the pernicious influence of that wit and force of language,

which can make the *worse* appear
The *better* reason, to perplex and dash
True criticism.¹⁹

The line reprobated by the despot is this:

And with paternal thunder *vindicates* his throne.²⁰

Mr. W. justly defends its dignity of sound.

And, like another Helen, *fir'd* another Troy,²¹

is upon the *same* construction. But it appears to me that *this* is the only variation from its perfect model that the ear *endures* in the Alexandrine; though Mr. W. affirms that the pause may be placed after *any* of its syllables, without injury to the harmony.

The next line, quoted in *proof* of that assertion, is to *my* ear a doleful drag, little resembling a *verse*:

By many follow'd, lov'd by most, admir'd by all.²²

There are several of *kindred* imperfection in Guiscard and Sigismunda; for instance:

*Like Liberty, indulg'd with choice of good and ill,*²³

and

*A pomp, prepar'd to grace the present he design'd.*²⁴

Those lines, if read with *proper* emphasis, are *not* verse, though they may *scan* as such, since the *sense* allows no pause after the words *indulg'd* and *grace*.

Mr. W. asserts the poetic right of intermixing, at pleasure, lines of fourteen syllables into the common heroic couplet. The first line quoted from Dryden, to illustrate the claim,

But Maurus sweeps whole parishes, and peoples every grave,²⁵

has such strength of thought and imagery, that they atone for *any* liberty, however generally unjustifiable, that may be taken with the numbers; but the *next* citation,

The tedious qualms of nine long months, and travail, to requite,²⁶

possessing nothing striking or poetic in the *thought*, it cannot surely be in the mere echo of its sound to its sense to recompense the bad effect of putting a line and three quarters, of eight feet measure, into *one*, and then drawing it through the texture of the couplet numbers, like a hoop, five yards wide, stuck across the limbs of an elegant maid of honour!

This *last* Drydenic licence sounds to me like ludicrous ballads, part of which are sung, and then a line *said*.

Captain Colvert's gone to sea, heigh boys! ho boys!
 Captain Colvert's gone to sea, O!
 Captain Colvert's gone to sea, with all his company,
 In the great Benjamin, ho!

Now you shall hear how he was cast upon an uninhabited island, and married the governor's daughter.

Captain Colvert's gone to sea, &c.

Mr. W. gives to Pope's patrons amongst the nobility the title of *Wou'd be Maecenas*. The phrase is invidious; and his poetic brethren of this day are not much obliged to him for thus discouraging poetic patronage; for assisting to spread that Gothic mantle over the Muses which the dark huge hands of the envious Colossus first unfurl'd in the Lives of the Poets. Either Horace has had more

injustice from his translators, Cowley, Dryden, and even Milton of the number, than ever poet met, or those whom Mr. W. calls the wou'd be Maecenases patronised a *greater* poet than *Horace*.

Mr. Weston writes in this Preface as if the excellence or worthlessness of a poem depended wholly upon the construction of its *measure*; and as if the couplet was the only order of rhyme. He seems to forget that the lyric, with its countless varieties, and almost unlimited privileges, affords ample field for his alexandrines and triplets, whose frequent intermixture suits not the chastity of the heroic couplet; though it appears to me that it is by no means an advantage to make the sense so generally end with the second line, as in the otherwise *perfect* style of Pope's versification.

After all, it is a small part of the intrinsic excellence of poetry that the elegant style of Pope, or the slovenly one of Dryden, can give or take away. A poem has little merit if it does not remain fine poetry after having been taken out of *all* measure. Where there is [511] loftiness of thought, ingenuity of allusion, and strength of imagery, to stand *that* test, true lovers of the art allow an author to do almost what he pleases with the numbers, provided he does not insist upon their preference of the slovenly to the polished ones, readily promising that such a work shall be dear to them in *any* dress. They will by no means wish that *every* part should *blaze*; but would *chuse* that there should be 'interstices of black velvet between the gems';²⁷ desiring, however, to be excused from *applauding* the custom of *Dryden's* Muse, to put on 'soiled linen with her diamonds.'²⁸

Several of Mr. W's poetic friends, as well as himself, are surprised that any person can prefer his *close* translation of Mr. Morfitt's fine Latin poem to his more ingenious *paraphrastic* one. He, and they, must however *expect* that preference from those who agree with him in thinking that Pope has degenerated from Dryden in the beauty and purity of style. My friend will find many who, because the latter-named poet lived a degree more remote from the present day than the former, will decree the palm of pre-eminence to *him*; but whatever author shall be rash enough to resume the slip-shod licences of Dryden, *see* if they will applaud the result. Not they; even though it should be adorned with all the riches of allusion and imagery which glow through the writings of Mr. Weston. His Miltonic Sonnets appear to me models of perfection in that arduous order of poetic composition. ANNA SEWARD. [512]

59:2, no. 8 (August), pp. 680–2.

MR. URBAN, *Solihull, Aug. 23.*

When I published the WOODMEN OF ARDEN I was perfectly aware that, unless the Poem should steal quietly along into the Vale of Oblivion, the Preface would furnish an ample subject for animadversion. My dislike to POPE'S Versification, my detestation of his Principles, and the indignation which I felt that so many

wise and so many worthy persons should have become the Dupes of an *Impostor*, hurried on my pen with a degree of vehemence that set Fear at defiance. But, though, on cool reflection, I entertained some doubts of the prudence of my conduct, I had none of the justice of my cause; and, reposing with confidence on arguments which I conceived would not easily be confuted, I felt little apprehension that any Antagonist would start up in a *very* formidable shape.

But I was too blindly secure. An Antagonist *has* started up in a most formidable shape *indeed* – viz. that of a Friend; armed too with weapons of the most formidable kind – Candour, Politeness, and Generosity: and, to form a regular climax of distress, that candid, polite, and generous Friend, is a WOMAN; a beautiful, accomplished, and amiable Woman! Can a more perplexing dilemma be imagined that that which presents itself? Could a more disagreeable predicament be invented than that in which I stand?

I am attacked by one of the finest Writers of the Age, with the united force of brilliant Wit, magnificent Metaphor, and critical Acumen. What must I do? Must I defend myself, or must I fly the field? Disgrace awaits me on either hand. *If* I defend myself, who can tell that, in the warmth of argument, a *strenuous* defence may not undesignedly be converted into an Attack? And what a pitiful figure does one of Homer's Heroes make while wounding a Goddess! If, to avoid this danger, I give ground to my fair Antagonist, will the World give me credit for my Magnanimity? No. – Will my fair Antagonist herself give me credit for it? No. – To decline the proffered combat would, in her eyes, as well as in those of the publick, betray a consciousness of a weak cause; and, perhaps, seem an insolent affectation of superiority: and both her sense and her spirit would, I am sure, reject with scorn the idea of being indebted to my forbearance or compassion.

Such, Mr. Urban, have been my reflections for the four last months; and, ridiculous as the assertion may appear to some, whose minds are strangers to those trebly-refined sensations which constitute the extreme degree of human Happiness or Misery, I aver that I have passed many an unpleasant hour in vain attempts to form some resolution on the subject. Weakened and dispirited by reiterated attacks of a nervous fever, I looked forward, with an anxiety bordering on terror, to the time when, on [680] the closing of MISS SEWARD's correspondence, I should no longer be able to delay my choice of combat or of flight. Nor do I know *which* mode of conduct I might ultimately have adopted, had not a new opponent rushed into the field, to offer his assistance to one who is herself AN HOST!

Non tali auxilio nec defensoribus istis SEWARD eget.²⁹

I feel so grateful for this strange Knight's unexpected interference (which has so considerably lessened my embarrassment), that I am not much disposed to enquire if I am obliged, by the laws of chivalry, to accept the challenge of one who has slept for six months over the supposed provocation; nor will I urge the still

stronger objection that this unknown Adversary comes in disguise, and refuses to declare his name and rank in arms. Though, from the gentle and courteous terms in which his defiance is couched, I believe him to be of no vulgar degree, I cannot but think the behaviour of my first Opponent infinitely more intitled to respect, who, with the grace and dignity of a THALESTRIS, while with one hand she shakes her glittering spear, with the other lifts her beaver, and discovers a countenance that melts down all^a opposition, and eyes that dim the radiance of the gems that spangle-o'er her burnished helmet.

I may now, Mr. Urban, content myself with parrying some of this *literary Amazon's* most dangerous thrusts, and secure a not inglorious retreat, to try my strength upon her Auxiliary.

As the Strictures on my Preface are extended to *three* Numbers, I shall extend my observations on them to three Numbers also; a method which, in the present state of my health, I shall find peculiarly convenient. Letter the first, in your Magazine for April, will give me no great trouble, as there is very little business done in *that*, except summoning the Court, opening the Commission, and calling over the names of the Jurymen; to every one of which I object, however, from motives of sound policy. Though they may be all *good men and true*, I claim the privilege (allowed in the court of APOLLO at least) of *challenging* every mother's son of them, less those, whom as interested persons I reject, should deafen the Court with the clamours of their resentment. – No. – If I *must* be put upon my defence, e'en let my fair *Accuser*, whom, as Mr. Hayley has acknowledged her to be 'the leader of the female Train,' I will also allow to be my *Judge*, make up her Seven female Poets a Dozen, and let me be tried by THEM! I shall then stand a chance of a favourable Verdict, as I can conscientiously affirm, that *their* share of the Censure which I have bestowed on the Moderns will be very trifling indeed.

Two Mistakes occur in Miss Seward's Exordium. I have neither imputed to HER a single Perfection which she does not^b possess, nor have I accused POPE 'of having meanly *influenced* his friends to exalt his Compositions above their just Level, for the purpose of lowering DRYDEN's, and tearing the Laurels from his Brow.'

All who have the Honour and Happiness of Miss Seward's Acquaintance, must own that I might have considerably enlarged the Catalogue of her Virtues without the least violation of Truth; and, on a reference to my preface (p. 14), it will be found that I only glanced at 'the insidious arts which Pope *suffered* his Friends to practice, in order to undermine the Reputation of the deceased Poet, and to asperse the Characters of his living Supporters.' But I will not insist on the Distinction; for, although the difference between *influencing* and *permitting* may appear at first sight material, I will frankly confess, that I should be inclined to consider the person who commits a crime, and the person who, with the power to *prevent* it, suffers that crime to be committed, for the sake of his own advantage, as nearly upon an equality.

I shall reserve to a more proper place what I have further to say on this point, and proceed to remark, that Miss Seward is perfectly right when she supposes, that by the MODERNS I mean the *celebrated* Poetic Writers from Pope's decease to the present hour – (indeed I could not possibly mean the *Poetasters*); and a most tremendous Phalanx, in Battle-array, has she brought against poor me!

The plan which I have proposed to myself will not permit me to reply *now* to the question which she so triumphantly asks, in the beginning of her *second* letter; but I most sincerely admire her spirit and good-sense in restoring to that rank, from which Dr. Johnson so unjustly degraded him, SIR WILLIAM DAVENANT, who, in spite of the illiberal ridicule of the profligate VILLIERS, and in spite of the instances of [681] false Taste which may be found in his Writings, had yet Spirit, Sense, Genius, and Morality, sufficient to secure for him a very high place among the Bards of CHARLES's days.

Had our Arch-critic read, or at least recollected, a Stanza with which I shall conclude this Address, its superlative merit (doubly endeared to HIM by the nature of the SUBJECT) would have pleaded hard for the unfortunate Author's admission into the Poetic Corps, even though, to make room for him, Johnson should have been obliged to thrust from their unmerited situations *Duke, Stepmey, Yalden, Pomfret*, and many more, whom the good Doctor seems to have lugged out of Oblivion, for the mere Purpose of 'exalting the humble, and bringing the mighty low!'

O, *harmless* DEATH, whom still the VALIANT *brave*,
 The WISE *expect*, the SORROWFUL *invite*,
 And all the GOOD *embrace*, who know the GRAVE
 A *short, dark* passage to ETERNAL LIGHT!
*The Dying Reply to the Philosopher.*³⁰

Yours, &c. JOSEPH WESTON. [682]

59:2, no. 2 (August), pp. 682–3.

MR. URBAN, *Aug.* 5.

The publick could not but be obliged to Mr. Weston, if he had no other merit than that of having called forth those animated and ingenious strictures which have lately graced the pages of your Miscellany. Yet, much as I admire the good sense and taste of the fair writer, I cannot help thinking that she has overstepped the limits of justice, and that, in endeavouring to vindicate Pope and the moderns from some undeserved accusations, she has been too hard upon Dryden, and totally unfair in her estimation of the poets of preceding times. Is not the lustre of Pope's period considerably diminished by the absence of the names of Akenside, Hammond, Collins, Thomson, Mallet, Lyttelton, A. Philips, Welsted, Allan Ramsay, Glover, Broome, Shenstone, Somerville, Pomfret, Hughes, Garth,

the Duke of Buckingham, and Dennis? The list of poetic writers in Milton's age might be swelled to an equal amount, if all those who were admired during their lives were admitted. But it must be more than common excellence which can insure a reputation of an hundred years; and probably in that space many of those luminaries, which contribute to the splendour of the present day, will be extinguished and forgotten. That Dryden purposely kept down certain parts of his writings in order to serve as foils to the rest, is an assertion in which Mr. W. will not, perhaps, find a single advocate; as the prematurity in which pecuniary circumstances compelled him to hurry his publications into the world is known and lamented by every one. Had he polished with the minute skill and diligence of Pope, he would have been without an equal in his line. But since the unfortunate state of his affairs denied him leisure to do so, let us throw a veil over his blemishes, and exhibit with conscious pride the numerous beauties of our noble countryman. Instead of this, Miss S. has extracted the most dark and blotted passages, which are contrasted with the most splendid and graceful lines of his rival. What would she say if a critic, as a specimen of Shakespeare's genius, should produce some of that vile ribaldry which is so plentifully interspersed in the works of our immoral bard? Permit me to shew how Dryden could sometimes write. In his Epistle to Sir Godfrey Kneller are these lines:

More cannot be by mortal art exprest,
But venerable Age shall add the rest;
For Time shall with his ready pencil stand,
Retouch your figures with his ripning hand,
Mellow your colours, and imbrown the teint,
Add ev'ry grace which time alone can grant,
To future ages shall your fame convey,
And give more beauties than he takes away.³¹

A description of a storm:

The cries of men are mix'd with rattling shrouds,
Seas dash on seas, and clouds encounter clouds;
At once from East to West, from pole to pole,
The forky lightnings flash, the roaring thunders roll.

Again:

No star appears to lend his friendly light,
Darkness and tempest make a double night;
But flashing fires disclose the deep by turns,
And while the lightnings blaze, the water burns.³²

Nothing can go beyond the following passage in his translation from the *Metamorphoses*. – The House of Sleep:

An arm of Lethe, with a gentle flow,
 Arising upwards from the rock below,
 The palace moats, and o'er the pebbles creeps,
 And with soft murmurs call the coming sleeps;
 Around its entry nodding poppies grow,
 And all cool simples that sweet rest bestow,
 Night from the plants their sleepy virtue drains,
 And passing sheds it on the silent plains.³³

We cannot wonder at any enthusiasm offered up to the author of the foregoing lines. But, as a friend to the Muses, [682] I regret that Mr. W. should carry his admiration of Dryden so far, as even studiously to imitate his defects. He will find his account, if he has the resolution to make a sacrifice of his own judgement to the public taste, since private prejudice should always give way, in such matters, to universal and established opinion. With pleasure I seize this opportunity of adding my vote to Miss Seward's with respect to Mr. W's Sonnets, which are extremely elegant and highly finished.

M—s. [683]

59:2, no. 3 (September), p. 818.

MR. URBAN, *Sept.* 8.

Mr. Weston, in his answer to Miss Seward, p. 680, is pleased to take umbrage at my presuming to think his *execration* of Mr. Pope harsh and unjustifiable. In the exuberance of his fancy, he is pleased to denominate me 'a strange knight,' wants to know my 'rank in arms,' and calls me his 'unknown adversary.' I am not insensible that gentlemen of Mr. Weston's genius and literary abilities are 'tremblingly alive' at any arraignment of their productions; I am well aware they nearly approach to infallibility in their own estimations; yet I had no idea when I sent you those few candid remarks inserted in p. 512, couched, as I thought, in terms both respectful and inoffensive, that they would so far have excited Mr. Weston's spleen; I could not suppose those observations on the justice and propriety of a single word would have so much discomposed him. Mr. Weston seems to possess the *genus irritabile* in a very superlative degree, and to be happy in a very comfortable sense of his own importance. On the one hand, he ranks me as an auxiliary of the elegant Seward, and, on the other, pushes me back with his flourish of *non tali auxilio*, &c.; but, when the truth of the matter appears, the sentence will be found totally inapplicable to me; I have not the least claim to the honour he has unwittingly assigned me. Mr. Urban can inform him my letter was transmitted at least four months before its insertion,* and previous to the appearance of Miss Seward's elegant strictures on Mr. Weston's Preface: why

* True. EDIT.

the date was altered,* Mr. Urban can also best tell him. He may assure himself I had not 'slept six months over the supposed provocation.'

Does Mr. W. suppose it enhances his magnanimity by insulting over the ashes of the venerable dead, and execrating the man who has almost universally been esteemed in the foremost rank of poets, and among the best of men? Would Mr. W. have adventured on the sentence had the admired Pope been living? If so, his hardihood might have excited our astonishment, though I question whether his prudence would have acquired our applause.

Mr. W. is perfectly right in saying I am 'unknown, and in disguise.' I acknowledge myself a son of obscurity, 'a fellow whom nobody knows;' but in this, as well as in my estimation of Mr. Pope, I plead a majority on my side; I believe more than two-thirds of Mr. Urban's correspondents make use of initials or anonymous signatures. But this is nothing to the matter in hand. What does it avail to the justice of the cause who or what I am? The whole dispute between us is, whether Mr. Pope can be justly deemed EXECRABLE or not. I hold the latter; Mr. W. has pledged himself to prove the former: and, if I mistake not, a very tough piece of work he will have of it. When he has brought forth his 'strong reasons,' his valid evidences, and laid them before us with those shining talents he is confessedly master of, if they are satisfactory, I shall retain to myself a liberty of yielding to superior evidence, changing my opinion, and becoming his convert; until which time I hope he will let me quietly enjoy my present sentiments, as I have no intentions of occupying Mr. Urban's valuable columns, or troubling him or the publick on this subject again. Thus far I thought necessary in my own vindication. Yours, &c.

M. F.

59:2, no. 3 (September), pp. 818–21.

MR. URBAN, *Lichfield, Sept. 15.*

You will permit a few comments on the letters in your last number, from my polite antagonists, concerning the subject of Dryden and Pope. Mr. Weston imputes to the latter the meanness of at least *suffering* those preferences of himself to Dryden to get abroad, which appeared so frequently in the public prints during his life-time.

Reflecting one instant *coolly* on the subject, he must have the generosity to withdraw this charge. I have avowed my opinion, that the two writers possessed great and equal genius, and that Pope became, upon the whole, much the finest poet, from that superior taste and judgement which banished those prosing redundancies, those disgusting images, those low expressions, which so often [818] sully and debase the writings of Dryden. Can Mr. W. suppose, were Pope

* By chance. EDIT.

alive, I should have been indelicate enough to consult him before I published my vindication of his character and of his claims? How very improbable that he had power to prevent the appearance of *similar* assertions!

When prejudice and personal enmity peruse Mr. Weston's hyperbolic praise of me, they may, with equal justice, declaim, as he does against Pope, upon the meanness and vanity of my *suffering* its appearance. They will ungenerously conceal their consciousness that it was probably out of my power to suppress what it is certain I never saw till I saw it in print. Knowing *that* truth, he would be shocked at *their* injustice. I hope, therefore, that he will awaken to a sense of his *own*.

In reply to the observation of your ingenious correspondent M—s, p. 682, that the lustre of Pope's period is diminished by the absence of the names of Akenside, Hammond, Collins, Shenstone, with some others of considerable celebrity, I alledge, that the *personal* existence of those writers during that of Pope is of no consequence. He heard Dryden converse in a coffee-room when he was twelve years old, and boasted of the circumstance through life with generous pleasure; but a poet cannot be said to exist till his writings become known. Akenside died so lately as the year 1770, aged forty-nine. His great work, THE PLEASURES OF IMAGINATION, was not published till forty-four, in which year Pope died. Akenside's poetic lustre cannot, therefore, be said to gild the period in which the Bard of Twickenham flourished; it descended upon the *later* times, where the poets are placed whom we mention to the honour of our *own* day. Collins also was not heard-of in Pope's life-time. His Odes, descriptive and moral, were first published in the year forty-six, and it was many years before they had either sale or fame. The blindness of the age to their *now* celebrated excellence cost their unfortunate author his reason and his life. His glory, so long eclipsed, first shone on the aera in which I placed the *last*, and by no means the least, powerful division of the bards. The same plea justifies the placing of Shenstone, Hammond, Somerville, Mallet, &c. in the last set, namely, their celebrity not being risen in the meridian of Pope, in the reigns of Anne and George the First, in the age that is styled *Augustan*. Allen Ramsay and the Duke of Buckingham were omitted through forgetfulness in the second list; and in the third, from the same cause, Lyttelton, Ansty, Mickle, Jekyll, Polwhele, and our present Tickell. If the poetasters Pomfret and Dennis ought to have been found in the *second* enumeration, there are an *army* of better writers not mentioned in the *third*. I did not chuse to bring forward, for the honour of Pope's period, any of the heroes of his inimitable Dunciad. On examination, I find Thomson ought to have graced the second instead of the third galaxy.

I cannot think with M—s, that only very superior poets survive their century. On the contrary, it has always seemed to me that antiquity induces the generality of readers to set a double value on every beauty, and to pass over defects with indulgence. Had Dryden's contemporaries, Denham, Lee, Roscommon, and

even Waller, whose names have outlived the centennial limits; had they lived and produced their poems *now*, I do not believe they would have many admirers. Denham's verses are in general heavy, laboured, inharmonious; and Waller's have more courtly wit than poetic fire. In the second division, Parnell, Gay, Addison, Watts, and the two Philips, soar not to the highest eminences of the Aonian mountain; yet each of them have written some things in verse that will probably preserve the honour of their memories so long as our language shall remain. Amongst the least celebrated of the third list, there are few who have not written as well as those second-rate bards of the preceding periods.

Suffer me to assure M—s, that I produced some of the many bald passages from Dryden, not to lower his fame on the ground of possessing a genius creative, rich, and luxuriant, but merely to confute an assertion which, if believed *just*, might tempt our young writers into a coarse and weedy style, *viz.* that Dryden's gross defects are happy negligences, voluntarily adopted for the *judicious* repose of composition, and in themselves preferable to the chaste, graceful, and polished numbers of Pope.

M—s says, I have selected the most dark and blotted passages of the elder bard, contrasting them with the most splendid ones of his rival. That was by no means my design; but I thought it fair to make the first selection from the [819] earliest compositions of each; and the Pastorals of Pope, from which the first quotation was made, are the least esteemed of any thing he wrote.

If from Pope's Homer lines can be produced mean and wretched as those which Dryden has, in his Aeneid, put into the mouth of the Empress of Heaven, and if it cannot be proved that such vulgar language occurs on almost every page in Dryden, I will give up the point in contest; which, on my part, goes no farther than to assert, that the poetic writers of *this* day have done honour to their art, by avoiding the botching vulgarities of Dryden's style, and emulating the polished graces of his successor.

It was surely fair to place in one point of view the enamoured epistle by Dryden from Ovid, and that by Pope from Eloisa's Letters to Abelard. All who have sense and taste enough to *attend* to the subject, know that *both* these poets translated upon the only plan which makes translations worth any thing, *viz.* to abandon every idea of closeness, and to interweave any new sentiment or imagery that occurs, if it can add grace or spirit to the theme. It is thus that translations justly procure for those who give them the honours of original composition. The most beautiful of Dryden's poetry, in the heroic couplet, is from Ovid, Chaucer, and Boccace. In the epistles from Helen, and Eloisa, their respective translators took similar subjects; and if it is fair to compare the Odes on the Power of Music, for the purpose of decreeing the *lyric* palm to Dryden, it is equally fair to compare the two love-epistles, where Pope's superiority over his rival in the *heroic* measure is even more distinguished.

Neither did I, in that comparison, extract the *most* splendid lines from the Eloisa. Those in which she describes herself and Abelard in the hour of her profession; those where she presents herself officiating as priestess amidst the solemnities of the mass; the Paraclete scenery; the impersonization of Melancholy sitting amongst the twilight groves, dusky caverns, long-sounding ailes, and intermingled tombs of the monastery, and breathing over them a gloom, which shades the flowers, and darkens the umbrage; all those are passages of great poetic superiority to those I quoted from that poem in contrast to the vapid effusions of Helen's ideas from the pen of Dryden. Scarce any traces of the picturesque beauties can be found in the original letters between Abelard and Eloisa; they are the rich creations of an imagination, which, setting style apart, I have not seen transcended by Dryden.

M—s has quoted some extremely beautiful passages from that confessedly great poet. We often find them interspersed in his writings; but we also find them surrounded and disgraced by verses below mediocrity. The following lines, from Pope to Jervas, are not less excellent than those which M—s has given us from Dryden's Epistle to Kneller. Speaking of the beautiful women whose pictures had been drawn by Jervas, the Poet says,

O! lasting as those colours may they shine;
Free as thy stroke, and faultless as thy line;
New graces hourly, like thy works, display;
Soft without weakness, without glaring gay;
Led by some rule that guides, but not constrains,
And finish'd more thro' *happiness* than *pains*.
The kindred arts shall in their praise conspire;
One dip the pencil, and one string the lyre.³⁴

The ensuing verses, describing sea-storms, by Pope, have an equal right to our admiration with those quoted in the last Magazine from Dryden. Both are *free* translations; Dryden's from Ovid, Pope's from Homer.

He spoke, and high the forky trident hurl'd,
Rolls clouds on clouds, and wakes the watry world;
At once the face of sea and sky deforms,
Swells all the winds, and rouses all the storms;³⁵
Wide o'er the waste the rage tempestuous sweeps,
And Night rush'd headlong on the shaded deeps.³⁶
With what a cloud the brows of Heaven are crown'd!
What raging winds, what roaring waters round!³⁷
Now here, now there, the giddy ships are borne,
And all the whirling shrouds in fragments torn;³⁸
For, by the howling tempest, rent in twain,
Flew sail and sail-yards rattling o'er the main.³⁹

Dryden's House of Sleep, from the Ceyx and Alcyone of Ovid, is exquisite versification; but, in *that* passage, *all* the imagery and invention is OVID's. As allegoric painting, Pope's portrait of Dulness, where all the features are *original*, has equal happiness of invention, equal strength of colouring. How often, in the great work from whence it is quoted, do we find the most beautiful flowers of fancy entwined around the rod of satire!

Dulness o'er all possess'd her ancient right,
Daughter of Chaos, and eternal Night; [820]
Fate, in their dotage, this fair idiot gave,
Gross as her fire, and as her mother grave;
Laborious, heavy, busy, bold, and blind,
She rules in native anarchy the mind.⁴⁰
Her ample presence fills up all the space,
A veil of fogs dilates her awful face.⁴¹

As *local* description, what can be more charming than the following lines from the same poem?

Lo! where Maeotis sleeps, and scarcely flows,
The freezing Tanais through a waste of snows,
The North by myriads pours her mighty sons,
Great nurse of Goths, of Alans, and of Huns.
See, where the morning gilds the palmy shore,
The soil that arts and infant letters bore,
His conquering tribes th' Arabian prophet draws,
And saving Ignorance inthrones by laws.⁴²

We may apply to the above extracts from Pope what M—s says after his quotations from Dryden; 'we cannot wonder at any enthusiasm offered up to their author.' Yours, &c. ANNA SEWARD. [821]

59:2, no. 4 (October), pp. 875–6.

MR. URBAN, *Solihull*, Oct. 26.

Unpleasant as the task of answering Miss Seward's objections to my unfortunate Preface proves to be; interrupted as I am by perpetual returns of my fever; that task is rendered still more unpleasant by interruptions of a different kind. One correspondent, and another, and yet another, urges objection after objection, before I have advanced three steps in my defence.*

I might, perhaps, without much impropriety, wave a reply to *those* objections until I shall have finished my reply to Miss Seward; but I must take the liberty of

* After this affecting exordium, we have no doubt but our other correspondents (particularly the benevolent M—s) will excuse our omitting their favours on this subject till Mr. Weston has concluded. EDIT.

suspending, *once more*, my principal design, that I may set M. F. right in a matter which I can with truth aver that he has totally mistaken; for, though I hope I do not possess *all* that IRRITABILITY, and *all* that SELF SUFFICIENCY which, in a moment of vexation, he has thought proper to ascribe to me, I certainly *do* possess so much SENSIBILITY as to feel exceedingly hurt at his remarkable misconception of my intentions; and flatter myself with the idea of possessing just so much IMPORTANCE as entitles me to a vindication, when unjustly accused.

I did *not* 'take umbrage' at my execration of Mr. Pope being deemed by M. F. harsh and unjustifiable. On consulting my letter in your Magazine for August, it will be found that I professed myself (and with evident sincerity) even '*grateful*' for M. F.'s unexpected interference. True it is, that I denominated him a 'strange knight;' but, if he ever read a single romance, he could not be ignorant that the epithet 'strange' is used seldom, if ever, in the language of Chivalry, in an invidious sense (as if it were synonymous to *queer*). 'Strange knight' means *there* neither more nor less than *stranger-knight*, but is rather better grammar. – He is again mistaken in supposing that I 'want to know his rank in arms.' I have expressed no such wish. I *did* call him my 'unknown adversary;' and where was the crime? Is he *not* unknown? Is he *not* my adversary?

Whoever will take the trouble of glancing over the paragraph which has given so much offence to M. F. will find that good-humoured raillery has been misapprehended by *him* for virulent invective.

I had no idea (says M. F.) when I sent you those few candid remarks inserted in p. 512, couched, as I thought, in terms both respectful and inoffensive, that they would so far have excited Mr. Weston's spleen; I could not suppose those observations on the justice and propriety of a single word would have so much discomposed him.

Why all this parade? In the paragraph alluded to above, I had done this 'strange knight;' this 'unknown adversary,' the justice to own that, from the *gentle* and *courteous* terms in which his defiance was couched, I believe him to be of *no vulgar degree*; and I had already confessed, in an apologetical address, inserted in your Magazine for July, that the manner in which he called upon me was 'candid;' and I appeal, Mr. Urban, to your ingenious Editor, whether I did not make a similar acknowledgement in the postscript of a private letter which accompanied that which was intended for publication*; and a compliment which was never meant to meet the eye of your correspondent could neither be intended: conciliate his favour, nor to deprecate his further censure.

Expressions thus favourable betrayed, one would think, no very large portion of spleen, no very violent degree of discomposure! Oh! but (says M. F.) the '*non tali auxilio*,' &c.! True. There is no getting rid of that. Fatal quotation! There *was*

* This was certainly the case. EDIT.

an implication of [875] inferiority in the supposed auxiliary; – ‘that’s the truth on’t.’⁴³ But, in some measure to soften the never-to-be-forgiven censure, permit me just to hint to M. F. that his talents may be much above mediocrity, and yet have no right to range themselves in the same rank with the transcendent abilities of a SEWARD!

If M. F. imagines my flourish (as he calls it) was introduced merely at random, and without apparent reason, let him re-consider one paragraph toward the beginning, and one toward the conclusion, of his first letter, and he may possibly retract his opinion. In the former of those passages he will find an enumeration of the excellencies of the POET, seemingly intended to prove the injustice of my execration of the MAN; and in the latter he will find a list of *various* meanings which his Dictionary affixes to the word ‘execrable,’ followed by a grave exclamation of ‘surely Mr. Pope could not deserve ALL these!’

Every classical reader of the book of Job knows that the naughty word which our translators have put into the mouth of his wife, viz. ‘*curse*,’ might, with equal probability, and with greater politeness, have been rendered ‘*bles*.’ – Had MISS SEWARD commented on this circumstance, she might probably have complained of the hardship which Job’s unfortunate helpmate has sustained, thus stigmatised as an impious vixen, when, for aught that appears to the contrary, she might be a very religious and very peaceable kind of a woman; but, most assuredly, Miss Seward, after informing Mr. Urban’s readers that the verb in the *original* admits of different, nay opposite significations, and, in reality, means *either* ‘to bless’ or ‘to curse,’ would never have exclaimed, ‘surely the good lady could not mean BOTH!’

Had my spleen been roused, even in the least degree, by M. F.’s reprehension of the term ‘execrable,’ what prevented me from bringing forward these hasty inaccuracies, these accidental slips of a not inelegant pen, while under the influence of that spleen? Nor are they blazoned even *now* (when Candour itself must allow that I have received *some* provocation) in the unmanly wantonness of triumph, nor in the mean spirit of revenge; but only to *prove* that my implication of the inferiority of M. F. to Miss Seward originated not from rancour or from pride.

I do *not* ‘insult over the ashes of the *venerable* dead.’ The man whom, had he been living, I should have regarded with horror, I cannot allow to have become venerable by ceasing to exist. His *works* exist; and many whose abilities have challenged admiration, and many whose virtues have excited esteem, are consigned to contempt and infamy as long as those works endure. Shall I be deterred by the foolish adage of ‘*De mortuis nil nisi BONUM*’ from entering my protest against such injustice? Shall an assertion, that ‘Pope has almost universally been esteemed in the foremost rank of poets, and among the best of men,’ strike me with such awe, that, though I *can* prove both claims to be unjust, I must not *dare*

to do it, lest I should find the UNIVERSE in arms against me? Whatever may be the risk; however, I *shall* do it. *Fiat Justitia, ruat Coelum!*

Shall this CROMWELL, who has injured that poetical constitution which he pretended to amend, trampled on the rights of those fellow-citizens whom he ought to have loved and protected, and, by dint of the most hypocritical pretences to piety and morality, imposed on the understandings, and seduced the affections of the rich and the powerful, making them his stepping-stones to the highest seat in the realms of Parnassus; shall this USURPER, I say, who, having thus wickedly gained the throne, vilified the abilities, and assassinated the reputations of those whose claim to it might interfere with his own, and gibbeted all their adherents and abettors, rest undisturbed in the dust? Can the office of tearing him from his grave, that he may be *exalted* for an example to all succeeding tyrants, though disagreeable, be deemed sacrilegious? Is it not even meritorious? Seeming cruelty to the dead is real humanity to the living. – Who, endued with poetic genius and classical erudition, though, perhaps, not blest with sufficient application, or sufficient leisure, to produce works of an elaborate or an exalted kind, will venture to amuse the world with the light and elegant effusions of Taste and Sensibility, through the medium of your very respectable Miscellany, if some LEVIATHAN of literature, suspecting that the young fry may, some time or other, prove rivals, is at hand, with his enormous jaws distended, to swallow them at a gulp? JOSEPH WESTON*. [876]

59:2, no. 5 (November), pp. 971–2.

Continuation of Mr. Weston's Vindication of himself (*from p. 876.*)

M.F. exultingly asks, if 'I would have adventured on the sentence had the admired Pope been living?' – I certainly would; and M. F. *might* have stared with 'Astonishment at my Hardihood' and 'Imprudence.' I might perchance, Mr. Urban, have been rewarded with a place in the Temple of Dulness; and would then have consoled myself for present Disgrace, by the Consciousness of Rectitude, and the Hope that some future Writer might be as just and as generous to ME, as the Conductor of your Magazine has been to the injured and insulted WELSTED: for which I *once more* thank him. Were it necessary, I could evince the Sincerity of my Thankfulness, by producing a Poem, written more than a Dozen Years since, 300 Lines of which are appropriated to the honest purpose of rescuing from unmerited Obloquy not only Welsted, but also many other Heroes of the inimitable Dunciad. That Dunciad, upon whose rotten, pestilential Carcase, even the embalming Art of the admirable SEWARD is exercised in vain! – Inimi-

* We must apologize to our readers for this letter's breaking off abruptly. – Mr. W. will know that we were so closely urged in respect of time, that it is not without difficulty we have made room for so much of it. EDIT.