

## Poetic Qualities in An Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot Part II

A reader may ask if poetry was pursued by Pope for its therapeutic impact on his psyche like Dr. Arbuthnot's counsel was for his diseases and ailments, why he cared to get his poetical works published? Pope says that a number of eminent writers praised his literary acumen and encouraged him to get his work published. Primary among them were George Granville, William Walsh, Sir Samuel Garth, William Congreve, Charles Talbot, John Somers, John Sheffield (Duke of Buckingham), Francis Atterbury and Henry St. John. Pope decided to trust the judgement of these men of merit rather than the inferior personalities like Thomas Burnet, John Oldmixon, and Thomas Cooke.

Pope says that his earlier poems were descriptive in nature and lacked intellectual content. Poems like "Windsor Forest" and The Rape of the Lock were fanciful and dealt with ~~themes~~ like description of flowing rivers and lady's cosmetics. Even such inoffensive themes invited the censure of critics like Charles Gildon who wrote only for money and therefore could be easily hired to attack Pope. Also John Dennis furiously attacked these poems as if he had gone mad. Pope decided to remain silent over the seething remarks of Dennis as he knew Dennis had to pay his debts and he was trying to manage some money by criticising Pope.

Apart from the mad and deprived critics like Gildon and Dennis there were others who criticized his harmless poems unjustly. Even then Pope just smiled with a musement at their pettiness. Men like Richard Bentley and Lewis Theobald decided to attack Pope on the basis of technical aspects of poetry like rhyme,

meter, diction and punctuation ignoring the soul and essence of poetry. Pope says that these critics resemble dirty things which appear valuable only because they have been preserved in amber.

Pope then moves on to ridicule a critic named Ambrose Philips who had a few poems written under the title Pastorals to his credit. He had also translated many Persian tales into English but Pope could not approve of his work as much of the content was borrowed and there was little originality in his work. Pope says that such men resort to stealing as their own minds are barren and infertile. He further says that there are some poets who use excessively pompous and inflated style in their poems. It impresses upon a reader as if a prose piece has gone berserk. He says that nine such poets put together would make one poet and that too with the inferior capabilities of the poet like Nahum Tate. The shallowness of all such poets was exposed by Pope in his satires. They feared that even Addison could someday be targeted by Pope.

Then comes the most discussed part of the poem where Pope draws the satirical sketch of Joseph Addison whom Pope calls Atticus. Pope says that Atticus is a true genius and is justly famous. Atticus is "Blest with each talent and each art to please / And born to write, converse, and live with ease". But like Turkish Sultans he wanted to rule alone with no one to challenge his authority. It is strange that he loathes others who follow the same paths and devices he has used in the past to rise to the position of eminence. When he praises somebody his spirit is so low that the admiration feels condemnation. When he approves of somebody's work, the words of



encouragement are so faint that they impress scorn and contempt. Pope then underlines the cowardice in Atticus saying he is "willing to wound, yet afraid to strike / Just hint a fault, and hesitate dislike." Atticus is timid as an enemy and suspicious as a friend. He appears to be anxious to oblige people but obliges nobody. He frames the laws for writing poetry to be followed by his admirers in which he resembles Cato who used to frame laws for his little Senate. And as a ruler who relishes flattery, Atticus sits down after framing laws in anticipation of the praise that is to be showered upon him by his followers. Pope says that if an ordinary man had such shortcomings he would have been reduced to a laughing stock but it is a pity that a man as talented as Addison is a victim of these faults which are serious defects of character.

To be continued...