

Letters to Dead Authors

Letters to Dead Authors by Andrew Lang is a witty and imaginative collection of fictional letters celebrating and engaging with the works and legacies of literary greats.

LETTER--To W. M. Thackeray

In this letter to W. M. Thackeray, the author navigates the nuances of praising the works of a departed novelist, where the usual constraints of criticism—such as envy or the potential for flattery—are absent, making it easier to commend wholeheartedly. Thackeray is celebrated for his versatility and unmatched excellence in literature, noted for his unique blend of humor, pathos, and keen observation of life. Unlike contemporaries who approached writing with the methodical dedication of a desk job, Thackeray's work is likened to the inspired moments of the Scholar Gypsy, transcending mere profession to reflect life's full spectrum.

Critics who label Thackeray as cynical, focusing merely on society's sordid aspects, fail to grasp the broader scope of his satire, which is an indictment not of his perspective but of life itself. Such viewpoints overlook his ability to create multifaceted characters, both flawed and virtuous, illustrating his profound understanding of human nature. Thackeray's portrayal of women, often criticized for being either too idealized or too flawed, in truth, captures the genuine complexities and dualities of their character, challenging the notion that he couldn't depict "good women" convincingly.

Moreover, Thackeray's reflective interludes within his narratives prompt readers toward deeper contemplation on life and human conduct, much like the Greek Chorus, enriching the storytelling with philosophical musings that elevate his prose to the poetic. The author of the letter defends these digressions as one of Thackeray's most endearing qualities, suggesting that his ability to intertwine narrative with reflection contributes significantly to the richness and depth of his work.

Thackeray's lasting impact is encapsulated in the emotional resonance of his works, with scenes and characters that linger "forever echoing in the heart and present in the memory." His legacy is that of a companion and comforter through the reader's journey, offering both solace and celebration of the human condition. The letter thus serves not only as an homage to Thackeray's literary achievements but also as a meditation on the enduring power of his storytelling, affirming his position as a titan of English literature without rival.

LETTER--To Charles Dickens

The letter to Charles Dickens delves into the unique literary divide between those who favor Dickens and his contemporary, Thackeray, arguing instead for appreciation of both authors' works. The narrator identifies himself as impartial, enjoying the merits of both writers without taking sides. Despite this neutrality, the chapter critiques the extreme imitations and mannerisms of Dickens's "special devotees," who, despite their adoration, might misunderstand the breadth of his humor and the depth of his works beyond the surface-level mimicries. The evolution of Dickens's reception is noted, with a recognition of his enduring popularity and the way his novels, such as "David Copperfield," provide solace and escape to readers, even as some openly reject his books like "Pickwick."

The chapter progresses to lament the decline of humor in England, attributing societal issues and lack of understanding of Dickens to a broader dearth of humor. Dickens is celebrated for inheriting and contributing to a British tradition of robust, uproarious humor and social satire. Characters like Sam Weller and Mrs. Gamp symbolize the essence of old English comedy, reared on "the beef and beer" of a bygone era. Yet, the chapter questions the longevity of Dickens's appeal, especially concerning his pathos and melodrama, which, to modern sensibilities, may seem overwrought or maudlin.

In its critique, the letter points out the paradox of Dickens's intense and sometimes gratuitous emotional manipulation, particularly in his depiction of child characters like Little Nell and Paul Dombey. There's an argument that such overt sentimentality might disengage contemporary readers rather than endear them. However, the chapter acknowledges the subjective nature of emotional response to literature, highlighting that what moves one reader to tears may leave another cold.

The chapter concludes by addressing what it perceives as Dickens's occasional excesses in both dark and fantastical elements, which can distance readers through their implausibility or heavy-handedness. Yet, amidst these critiques, the chapter retains a deep respect and affection for Dickens's work, recognizing his unparalleled contribution to English literature and humor, while expressing hope that his legacy will continue to be cherished, notwithstanding changing tastes and sensibilities.

LETTER--To Master Isaak Walton

In a heartfelt letter addressed to Master Isaak Walton, the author fondly recalls the joy and solace found in Walton's "The Compleat Angler," amidst the challenges and evolutions of angling and landscape that have occurred since Walton's time. The author delineates how urban expansion and pollution have encroached upon the once idyllic angling spots near London, rendering the pursuit of trout—a symbol of tranquility and contentment—increasingly difficult for the common angler. This transformation reflects broader societal and environmental degradations, with angling liberties confined to those who can afford them, exacerbating societal discontent.

The narrative continues by contrasting the angling experiences in England with those in the more remote and rugged terrains of Scotland, where trout are less wary and the angling spirit discovered by Richard Franck—despite his contentious political affiliations—remains accessible. Franck's criticism of Walton and Walton's lack of response to such critiques highlight a philosophical divergence between the two men, underscoring Walton's pacifistic and contemplative nature versus Franck's confrontational stance.

Walton's life, marked by personal loss and the tumult of political upheaval, remained unmarred by bitterness, credited to his innate kindness, deep faith, and love for angling. These virtues served as a triple anchor, steadying him amidst the "labyrinth of human fortunes." The author admires Walton's ability to maintain his equanimity and faith despite the chaos, presenting him as a paragon of balance and resilience. The closing thoughts speculate on the authorship of the pastoral poem "Thealma and Clearchus," attributing it to John Chalkhill, and questioning the true genesis of the work, which adds an element of mystery to Walton's literary legacy.

This reflection not only serves as an homage to Walton but also as a meditation on the evolving relationship between humans and nature, the value of simplicity and contentment, and the enduring virtues that can guide one through life's vicissitudes. Through Walton's example, the author advocates for a life enriched by the tranquility of nature, the steadfastness of faith, and the simplicity of pleasures that withstand the test of time and societal transformation.

LETTER--To M. Chapelain

To preserve us from all false travelling knights and from lying bookmen that tell tales of lands that never were. And so I commend me to you, and to your ghostly and bodily welfare. And ever pray for me, as I shall for you, to the God of Seynt Albones, to have you in his keeping, whether in Englund or beyond the sea, or in the lands that never were. And ever more, Sir John, clepe upon Seynt George, and he shall help you, as he hath meny a good knight out of peril and disease. And I, at my coming back from Ynde, will visit you, by the leave of our Lord, and tell you of many things that now I write not, for lack of space and time. Till then, be of good cheer and keep well your armour bright and your heart lighter than your shield, for in lightness is the might of all true knights and men of worth.

In this admonition to Sir John Maundeville, the author oscillates between reverence and skepticism towards the tales of diverse lands and strange wonders recounted by the knight. The juxtaposition of a medieval world brimming with marvels against the backdrop of a modern, colonial quest for domination in lands like Ynde (India) offers a critique of both the insatiable curiosity and the imperial ambitions of England. The letter mocks the concept of adventure and discovery, satirizing the colonial enterprise by showing it as just another chapter in a long history of tales and travels, some true, many fabricated. The skepticism extends to the authenticity of Sir John's own travels, while playfully engaging with the expansionist and colonial narratives of the British Empire, suggesting that the quest for Ynde is a continuation of the fantastical tales of knights-errant. The discussion on different routes to India, the sardonic comments on modern English politics, and the imagined responses of diverse stakeholders (from the Emir of the Afghans to Muscovy and the radical elements within England itself) serve to highlight the absurdist elements inherent in the justification and execution of colonial ventures, all the while framing it within the chivalric and adventurous discourse supposedly epitomized by Sir John Maundeville's travels.

LETTER--To Sir Walter Scott, Bart.

In the letter to Sir Walter Scott, dated September 8, 1885, at Rodono, St. Mary's Loch, the author vividly praises Scott for his unique charm and influence that transcends time, likening his presence to a reassuring friend from the past. Scott is celebrated for his unparalleled manliness, lack of jealousy, and his contentment with his life, whether it would have been marked by wealth and honor or mere simplicity as a Border sportsman and antiquary. The letter reflects on Scott's genial nature, which the author suggests is rare and noble, making Scott a solitary figure in his endearing qualities.

Scott's works are seen as immortal, deeply intertwined with the spirit of the Scottish landscape, history, and legends. Despite the passing of nearly sixty years since Scott's death, the landscape and the essence of Scotland, though changed by the march of time and industry, still evoke the memories of his narratives. The letter touches on contemporary changes and problems, such as political shifts and environmental degradation, while celebrating the endurance of Scott's legacy in the midst of transformation.

The author then transitions to address historical and military losses that have marred British history since Scott's time, imagining Scott's potential literary tributes to fallen heroes. Meanwhile, the juxtaposition of modern developments against the timeless nature of Scott's Scotland serves as a reminder of the enduring heritage and the changes that have swept through, both enhancing and challenging the preservation of Scott's memory and the Scottish identity.

The letter concludes with a personal reflection on the unchanged beauty of the Scottish landscape, despite modern challenges, and expresses a deep gratitude towards Scott for his enduring influence on the author's understanding of poetry and life. The letter is an affectionate homage, blending admiration for Scott's literary genius with a poignant reflection on the passage of time and the lasting impact of his work on Scottish identity and heritage.

LETTER--To Alexandre Dumas

In this letter to Alexandre Dumas, the author celebrates Dumas's vast and golden literary legacy, likening it to a solid foundation more enduring than rock. Dumas, despite a moment of late-life doubt where he envisioned his works as impermanent as structures on sand, is reassured of his everlasting impact on literature, akin to the immortal stories from the "Arabian Nights" or tales of Boccaccio. Esteemed for introducing a "greater and more kindly" influence in modern literature, Dumas's creativity, initially sparked by Walter Scott, is heralded for its miraculous breadth and unflinching strength.

Emphasizing Dumas's unparalleled vigor and the joy his books emanate, the letter praises the lively, gallant characters of Dumas's creation who embody the spirit of adventure with their bravery and love for life. It addresses the unfounded criticisms levied against Dumas for his alleged reliance on ghostwriters, arguing that any collaborator's success was derived solely from Dumas's own inexhaustible vivacity. These collaborators, absent Dumas's inspiration, accomplished little on their own, their works quickly fading into obscurity.

Dumas is lauded for his capability to engage and entertain without succumbing to baseness or moral corruption, presenting tales of honor, love, and friendship that lead through delightful adventures. The letter highlights the enduring humanity and realism of Dumas's characters, particularly from his most celebrated series—the Cycle of the Valois and the Cycle of Louis XIII and Louis XIV—as well as the standalone masterpiece, "Monte Cristo."

Further, it defends Dumas against accusations of frivolity and superficiality, positing that his works' endurance is testament to their depth and substance, transcending the fleeting preferences for pessimism and overwrought realism. The brightness of Dumas's dialogue, the excitement of his battles and duels, and the Homeric grandeur of his narratives are particularly extolled.

In conclusion, the letter asserts that Dumas's legacy, characterized by liveliness and wit, will outlive the criticisms and remain a beloved refuge from the more sordid and tedious tales of contemporary literature. Dumas's spirit, likened to the epic heroes of old, endows his stories with a timeless appeal, celebrating the virtues of chivalry, friendship, and honor above all.

LETTER--To Robert Burns

In addressing Robert Burns, the person conveys a unique blend of admiration and critique regarding the Scottish poet's influence and legacy. As a figure deeply beloved by his people, Burns is seen as embodying the ideals and foibles of the Scottish spirit—his independence, his love for whisky and the lassies, elevating him to an almost mythic status among Scots. The year marking the centennial of Burns's celebrated Poems published in Kilmarnock is anticipated to spark widespread festivities and an uptick in whisky consumption, affirming his enduring place in his countrymen's hearts.

The letter, however, ventures beyond mere veneration, touching upon the complex relationship between admiration and critique. The writer delicately navigates through Burns's oeuvre, willing to discern and select rather than indiscriminately praise all works. This nuanced appreciation acknowledges the simplicity and rustic charm of Burns's verse, crediting him with capturing the true essence of rural Scottish life in a manner unparalleled by poets before or since, including the ancients like Theocritus.

Burns's life is scrutinized not just for his poetic accomplishments but also for his personal choices and the societal norms of rural Scotland, which often clashed with the moralist views of his time. His unabashed expression of rural love and life, according to the author, adds a layer of genuine verity to his work, albeit one that might not align with everyone's moral compass.

The letter speculates on the possibility of an alternative, perhaps happier path for Burns had he been born in an earlier era—away from the societal and literary pressures of 18th-century Scotland. It imagines Burns as a less tormented soul, whose mastery in crafting exquisite lyrics would remain undisputed, yet whose life might have been spared the harsh scrutiny and personal strife that marked his actual existence.

In pondering what might have been lost to the world had Burns led a quieter, simpler life, the writer acknowledges the double-edged sword of Burns's legacy: the world gained immeasurably from his reflection on and rebellion against the social constructs of his time, yet Burns himself paid a personal cost for his prominence and outspokenness. Through this contemplation, the letter offers a rich, albeit condensed, reflection on the enduring complexity of Robert Burns's legacy—as much celebrated for his unvarnished portrayal of Scottish life and character as he is critiqued for the same.

LETTER--To Edgar Allan Poe

In his letter to Edgar Allan Poe, the author addresses the enduring and perplexing animosity towards Poe's legacy, particularly from his contemporaries and certain elements within the American literary critique. Despite being celebrated as one of the greatest literary figures in America, Poe is uniquely disparaged in his homeland, partly due to his critical role in the literary world. The author reflects on the unfortunate circumstances that led Poe to become a reviewer, arguing that such a position for a man of his talent was lamentable. By offering candid and often harsh critiques of his peers, Poe alienated many, including the minor figures who never forgave his attacks. This letter discusses how these actions contributed to the long-lasting defamation Poe has suffered posthumously.

The author sympathizes with Poe's struggles, highlighting the extreme poverty and the professional challenges he faced, exacerbated by his uncompromising pride. The letter also touches upon how the literary environment has evolved since Poe's time, suggesting that Poe might have enjoyed greater success and recognition had he been born later. It emphasizes the transformation in the literary profession in America, which now offers respect and rewards that were inaccessible to Poe.

Despite his controversial role as a critic, Poe's enduring legacy as a poet and a writer of tales is undisputed. The author dismisses the need to elaborate on Poe's poetry, suggesting that Poe's own definition of poetry as "the rhythmic creation of the beautiful" speaks for itself and perfectly encapsulates his work. The letter critiques Poe's exclusion of the "didactic" in poetry, juxtaposing his views with the traditional acceptance of moral instruction in literature.

However, the letter acknowledges the deep imprint Poe left with "The Raven," a poem that, despite Poe's theory favouring vague exaltation in poetry, became his most renowned piece. The author challenges Poe's aesthetic philosophy by comparing it with the universally acclaimed works of Homer and Moliere, demonstrating that Poe's restrictive view of poetry does not align with the broader literary canon's valuation.

In essence, this letter offers a nuanced reflection on Edgar Allan Poe's legacy, examining the complexities of his critical reception, the adversities he faced, and his contribution to literature. It emphasizes the contradiction between Poe's theoretical ideals of poetry and the broader, lasting appreciation of diverse poetic expressions.

LETTER--To Theocritus

In this reflective letter to Theocritus, the author begins by hearkening to the sweetness of Theocritus's own verse, capturing the essence of his poetry which dances fluidly between the joyous and the melancholy shades of life. The author ponders whether, in death, Theocritus found a realm as enriching as the Sicilian

landscape that fueled his inspiration. Contemplating the existence of an afterlife sweeter than the most vivid dreams of poets, the author imagines an Elysium under alien stars where Theocritus could enjoy eternal spring, far removed from the temporal concerns that afflict the living.

This Elysium envisioned is not one of dim twilight and restful peace that poets like Ronsard and Du Bellay aspired to, but a place resplendent with the high suns of Sicily and the enchantment of untouched nature. The author muses that perhaps for Theocritus, the afterlife is a realm where the earthly pleasures of sunlit landscapes and the simple joys of rural life continue unabated. Through evocative descriptions of Sicilian scenery and the pastoral lifestyle that Theocritus so adored, the letter paints a vivid picture of a poet whose works breathe with the lifeblood of Sicily's natural wonders and the timeless rituals of its people.

In reflecting on Theocritus's departure to Alexandria, the author laments the poet's disillusionment with city life and the loss of his bucolic muse amidst the clamor of civilization. This transition marks a poignant contrast to Theocritus's pastoral symphonies, suggesting a spiritual and creative exodus from the simplicity and purity of nature to the complexity and corruption of urban existence.

Ultimately, the letter serves not only as a tribute to Theocritus but also as a contemplation on the eternal quest for beauty and truth in the transient world. Through allusions to Theocritus's work and life, the author subtly criticizes the materialism and ambition that draw one away from the natural and the authentic. In this imagined dialogue with Theocritus, the reader is invited to ponder the landscapes, both real and mythic, that sustain the human spirit beyond the dust and noise of temporal pursuits.

LETTER--To Omar Khayyam

In his letter to the Persian poet Omar Khayyam, the author pays homage to Khayyam's philosophical and existential musings, encapsulating the essence of his work while contextualizing it within a broad historical and geographical tapestry. He begins by evoking the imagery of southern breezes tossing rose petals—symbolic of beauty and transience—over Khayyam's grave, a nod to the poet's own verses on life's fleeting nature. This introduction not only sets the letter's reflective tone but also aligns the author's admiration with Khayyam's appreciation for the simpler pleasures of existence, such as the shade beneath a bough or the observation of the world's ceaseless motion.

The writer delves into Khayyam's skepticism regarding the afterlife, portraying him as a figure detached from the dogmas of heaven or hell, and content in his uncertainty—a rendition of Khayyam's own questioning stance toward divine judgment and the mysteries of death. This perspective is encapsulated in the rhetorical query about a pitcher fearing the well, which symbolizes the inevitability of fate and the futility of fearing the end. The author suggests that, like potsherds, humans are ultimately returned to the earth, forgotten in the cycle of existence, a reflection of Khayyam's fatalistic views on mortality and the eternal return to stillness.

In a broader sweep, the letter links Khayyam's contemplations on the ephemeral nature of life and existence to the ancient wisdom of the East, contrasting it with a pivotal moment in Western history—the Battle of Senlac (Battle of Hastings), where Harold Godwinson fell. This juxtaposition not only serves to bridge distinct cultural philosophies but also highlights the universality of Khayyam's themes across time and place.

By intertwining references to historical events, geographic locations, and Khayyam's poetic themes, the author crafts a tribute that is as much an acknowledgment of Khayyam's influence on literature and philosophy as it is a reflection on the collective human condition—our shared confrontations with life's impermanence, the search for meaning amidst uncertainty, and the beauty found in life's transient moments. This imaginative correspondence encapsulates the essence of Khayyam's work, translating his reverie on existence into a timeless dialogue that spans cultures and epochs, inviting readers to ponder the enduring questions of life and the legacy of wisdom bequeathed by voices of the past.

LETTER--To Pierre de Ronsard (Prince of Poets)

In this letter to Pierre de Ronsard, the writer expresses deep admiration for Ronsard's poetry and his choice of eternal rest among the natural beauty and ancient heroes of the Elysian fields, contrasting it with the unfortunate fate of his tomb and memory through the ages. Ronsard's longing for a simple grave near the Loire, adorned only by laurel and nature, is highlighted against the reality of his tomb's destruction during the religious and revolutionary turmoil in France. The letter delves into the decline of Ronsard's reputation, overshadowed by later poets and critics who could not appreciate his lyrical innovation and classical influences. Yet, the author observes a revival of Ronsard's legacy, crediting poets like Theophile Gautier and Alfred de Musset with rediscovering the beauty in Ronsard's work, emphasizing a return to the natural and lyrical that Ronsard himself cherished.

The narrative also paints a vivid picture of Ronsard's life and inspirations, imagining him wandering through various landscapes, engaged with the natural world and ancient literature. Ronsard's poetry is celebrated for encapsulating the beauty of nature, love, and the fleeting nature of life, symbolized by his frequent references to roses. The author reflects on the rich, albeit often sorrowful, offerings of Ronsard's verses, filled with wisdom on the passage of time and the inevitability of aging.

Towards the letter's conclusion, the author touches on the financial struggles Ronsard faced later in life, challenging the misconception of him as a neglected, envious figure. Instead, he is praised for his rich contribution to poetry and his enduring influence despite the hardships. The author's respect and longing to connect with Ronsard's spirit and legacy, admiring his ability to blend the beauty of the natural world with the complexities of human emotion and the classical past, culminate the epistle. This homage to Ronsard serves as a testament to the timeless resonance of his work and the renewed appreciation for his poetic genius in the face of previous neglect and misunderstanding.

LETTER--To Herodotus

The author, addressing Herodotus of Halicarnassus, undertakes a quest to ascertain the truthfulness of the historical accounts provided by Herodotus. The journey leads to Britain, an island described with much intrigue, having a river called Thames, and a large city fraught with modern contrivances and a prevailing ignorance of the past.

The narrative unfolds as the author initially struggles to find anyone familiar with Herodotus but eventually is directed to the City of the Priests, possibly Oxford, known for its academic and ecclesiastical significance. The path to the city, engaging in its details about rivers and peculiar fishing practices, brings forth a nonchalant critique of local customs and a humorous comparison of ancient to modern life.

Upon reaching the city, the author notes its desolation during "The Long" or "The Vac," humorously attributing it to a tradition aimed at humbling the young priests through rowing and sports, hinting at the academic schedule of Oxford. The exploration leads to a priest, known for his supposed knowledge on a wide array of subjects including Herodotus, who dismissively labels Herodotus as "The Father of Liars."

The priest criticizes Herodotus for alleged fabrications and accuses him of willfully distorting facts, such as Solon's visit to Croesus and Xerxes' dreams. The priest's critique extends to accuse Herodotus of plagiarism and naivety, though it's clear that his arguments are selectively interpretive, humorous, and paradoxical, intentionally reflecting a lack of comprehensive understanding of Herodotus's context and the value of his works.

This letter blends factual historical inquiry with satirical observations of English life and academia, making playful jabs at the anachronisms of modernity viewed through ancient eyes. Its whimsy contrasts the

earnestness typically expected in a letter to a revered historical figure, using this juxtaposition to both entertain and offer light commentary on the timeless nature of historical scholarship and the subjective lens through which we view the past.

LETTER--To Monsieur de Moliere, Valet de Chambre du Roi

In a reverent tone, the author initiates a letter to Monsieur de Moliere, expressing immense admiration for Moliere's transformational impact on French comedy, paralleling his achievements with those of Louis XIV for France. Moliere is commended for not only elevating the genre of comedy but also fostering a cultural exchange that saw the English stage significantly influenced by French wit, particularly during times when English playwrights infused their works with a coarser humor unlike the refined taste of French drama.

As the letter unfolds, it delves into comparisons between past and present theatrical practices, observing a continuous tradition of borrowing from French plays, a homage to the lasting legacy of Moliere. The author laments the modern English stage's continued tactical inspirations from French creativity, underscoring it as a testament to Moliere's enduring influence.

Moliere's unparalleled craftsmanship in character creation is highlighted, with mentions of his most memorable characters like Alceste, Don Juan, and others that showcase his ability to blend humor with philosophical depth, ahead of societal norms. Moliere's skepticism towards religion, manifested in his portrayal of credulity and satire of dogmatic beliefs, is reflected upon, positioning him as a figure who found solace and truth in human folly rather than divine prospects, a stance that distinguished him sharply from his contemporaries like Pascal.

The letter shifts to explore Moliere's personal struggles and the empathy evident in his comedies towards those who endure life's cruelties, rather than siding outright with characters of young prosperity. It appreciates Moliere's nuanced approach to depicting the human condition, where even figures of mockery retain a semblance of dignity and evoke audience sympathy.

Finally, the author reflects on the posthumous treatment of Moliere's legacy, alternating between critique and admiration for the fervor of 'Molieristes'. While recognizing the valuable preservation of Moliere's contributions, the author criticizes the excessive focus on trivial details over the essence of Moliere's works, wishing for a Moliere himself to satirize the superficial engagement with his legacy. Throughout, the letter maintains a tone of profound respect and genuine contemplation on Moliere's unparalleled contributions to comedy and culture, underlining the timeless relevance and humanity of his work.

LETTER--Epistle to Mr. Alexander Pope

In an epistolary tribute to Alexander Pope, the anonymous author delves into the fraught legacy of Pope's work, navigating through the criticism and admiration that have followed Pope beyond his lifetime. The author posits Pope's poetry as a garden of artistic endeavor, meticulously cultivated but relentlessly besieged by commentators and biographers akin to destructive forces. These critics, armed with their own interpretations and biases, seek to dismantle Pope's character and contributions, often misrepresenting his intentions and outcomes.

The letter enumerates several critiques, portraying Pope as a figure marred by controversy and misunderstood genius. Elwin's harsh assessment casts Pope as intellectually dishonest and morally dubious, a creator of falsehoods and a master of manipulation whose talents are overshadowed by his alleged deceptions and indiscretions. According to this view, Pope's efforts in literature and personal conduct are marked by conflict, duplicity, and a relentless quest for fame that often alienated him from his peers.

Yet, amidst the litany of accusations, the author acknowledges the undeniable craftsmanship and emotional depth of Pope's work. Pope's skill in weaving intricate, resonant poetry is recognized, even as his critics decry his methods and motivations. The comparison to Homer underscores a creative ambition that strives for epic grandeur but potentially falls short in capturing the heroic essence, according to the author. Pope's adaptation of Homeric tales is critiqued for lacking the original's visceral power, with the translation offering a sanitized, stylized version bereft of the raw emotion and dynamic energy found in Homer's work.

However, the letter also reflects on the universality and enduring fascination with Pope's literary output, recognizing that despite the criticisms and the changing tastes of time, Pope's work continues to captivate and challenge contemporary audiences. The author laments the fading of childhood admiration for Pope's couplets in favor of a more nuanced appreciation of ancient epics, signaling a personal journey from youthful idolization to mature reconsideration of Pope's place in the literary canon.

Ultimately, the letter is a meditative homage to Alexander Pope, capturing the complexities and contradictions of his legacy. It illustrates the passion and pitfalls of a life dedicated to literature, where the quest for artistic immortality is fraught with perpetual conflict, misunderstanding, and the shifting sands of critical acclaim.

LETTER--To Lucian of Samosata

In a letter to Lucian of Samosata, the author muses over Lucian's current abode in a paradisiacal setting, surrounded by beauty, laughter, and notable companions like Heine, Plato, and others who share Lucian's wit and clarity of vision. This imaginative paradise serves as a backdrop for expressing deep appreciation for Lucian's enduring satire and wisdom, painting him as the master of mirth and contentment. The author, in a tone blending admiration with wistfulness, wonders about the joy that Lucian's company — including Rabelais, Voltaire, and others — would find in their "Happy Islands," devoid of life's burdens and filled with perpetual youth and laughter.

Transitioning to a more contemporary setting, the author laments the absence of Lucian's incisive mockery in a world overrun by superstition, pseudo-science, and shallow philosophies. Through an imaginative summoning of Lucian's perspective, the author critiques modern societal flaws, like the auctioning of popular sages, revealing a yearning for Lucian's sharp insights in navigating the follies of present times. This reflection expands to a broader critique of society's gullibility, the trivial pursuits of pleasure, and the unchanging nature of human vices and follies, essentially arguing that despite centuries of progress, humanity remains as susceptible to the same old weaknesses and simplifications that Lucian once mocked.

Finally, the letter shifts focus to Rabelais and the awaited advent of the "Coqcigrues" — a metaphorical representation of absurdities plaguing society. This is vividly illustrated through an encounter with a horde of physicians advocating against pleasure and a cacophony of prescriptive voices from various "reformers" imposing their dogmas on Pantagruel and his companions. This chaotic scene symbolizes the absurdity of societal constraints and the loss of joy in living, themes both Rabelais and Lucian explored in their works. The author implicitly contrasts the timeless wisdom and liberating satire of Lucian and Rabelais with the modern era's restrictive norms and the decline in intellectual freedom, humorously underscoring the timeless relevance of their critiques and the necessity of their insight to challenge contemporary absurdities.

LETTER--To Jane Austen

In a letter to Jane Austen, the author expresses admiration and critiques on behalf of the contemporary audience. He acknowledges Austen's high artistry in literature but notes her diminishing popularity among modern readers who find her style outdated and her characters too restrained. The author suggests Austen's

works lack the sensationalism and dramatic passion that current tastes favor, evident in characters from other popular novels of the time. Despite the critique, he intimately discusses the subtleties in Austen's characterization, lauding her portrayal of genteel, moral heroines like Emma, Elizabeth, and Catherine, who, though not dazzling in birth or fortune, capture the essence of real, virtuous English women.

Austen's choice to focus on everyday, moral, and societal concerns rather than grand passions or social reforms—a common theme in more modern literature—is highlighted as both a strength and a limitation. The critique extends to the mundane social circles Austen portrays, lacking the allure of nobility and grandiose settings preferred in the literary market of the day.

The author speculates on potentially controversial topics Austen could have explored, such as the fates of Lydia and Kitty or the elopement of Mrs. Rushworth, which might have captivated readers with a taste for sensationalism. However, he ultimately admires Austen for her faithful adherence to realism and moral integrity over sensationalism.

The letter also touches on Austen's deliberate avoidance of the then-emerging debates on evolution, social reforms, and the more profound psychological or spiritual experiences of her characters, aligning her work more with traditional values and narratives rather than the pressing social and scientific inquiries of the time.

Austen's understated approach to fiction, focusing on the nuanced, moral domestic life rather than overt passion or societal critique, is posited as a reason for her declining popularity in an age seeking more explicit and sensational literature. Yet, the author's reverence for Austen's "gentle self-respect" and humor in her characters denotes a lasting appreciation for the depth and humanity in her work, suggesting a timeless quality to her insights into human nature and relationships.

LETTER--To Lord Byron

In a witty and eloquent letter addressed to Lord Byron, the author expresses admiration and critiques surrounding Byron's legacy, cleverly intertwining praise with the criticisms of contemporaries and later critics. The letter opens humorously, referencing Leigh Hunt's less formal address to Byron and setting the tone for a playful yet insightful scrutiny of Byron's posthumous reputation. The writer humorously laments the fate of Byron's works in an age less receptive to his genius, navigating through the varying opinions of modern poets and critics with both reverence and satirical sharpness.

The narrative weaves in mentions of various figures and their views on Byron's work, from the Swiss critic Scherer, who is depicted as dry and unimaginative, incapable of appreciating Byron's brilliance, to the contrasting perspectives of poets and reviewers like Arnold and Swinburne. Arnold lauds Byron for his poetic force and unmatched contribution to the literary field, likening his work to a powerful torrent of clarity, strength, and natural beauty. Swinburne, on the other hand, dismisses Byron's works as inferior, lacking in earnestness, and inadequate compared to Shelley's pristine compositions, sparking a fiery debate on Byron's rightful place within the pantheon of literary greats.

The letter cleverly criticizes Swinburne's harsh judgments, humorously undercutting his authority by comparing his outbursts to Offenbach's relation to Beethoven, suggesting a lack of depth in his condemnation. It touches on the critique that Byron's poetry lacks sincerity, except in political subjects, and mockingly agrees with assessments of Byron's Pegasus as flawed and his style as cumbersome.

By interspersing these criticisms with personal interjections and a nuanced understanding of poetic greatness, the letter does not just offer a defense of Byron but also a sardonic commentary on the nature of literary criticism itself. The author, while humorously acknowledging the mixed assessments of Byron's poetry, ultimately champions the enduring significance and sublime qualities of Byron's works amidst the changing tides of literary preferences and scholarly opinions. The letter closes by highlighting the fickle nature of

literary status and the subjective endeavors of critics in categorizing the immensity of a talent like Byron's, underlining the enduring mystery and complexity of his legacy.

LETTER--To Percy Bysshe Shelley

In a letter addressed to Percy Bysshe Shelley, the author reflects on Shelley's indifference to public opinion during his life and his minimal concern for posthumous reputation. Despite Shelley's fears that his works would be condemned by future generations, the verdict has been overwhelmingly positive, awarding him immortality of fame, with some dissenters' voices expected to diminish over time. The author mentions critiques that favored Shelley's prose over his poetry and describes Shelley's unique poetic contribution as irreplaceable and beyond the realm of ordinary human experience.

Shelley's revolutionary spirit and desire for societal reform are noted, yet the modern world remains largely unchanged from Shelley's time, with continued political and social issues. The author acknowledges reforms that have been enacted, such as emancipation in Ireland and the extension of voting rights to poorer citizens, yet suggests that Shelley's hopes for a transformed society have not been fully realized. Furthermore, the controversies and debates among Shelley's biographers and commentators are highlighted, emphasizing the trivial and often misguided focus on his personal life rather than his literary legacy.

A critical portrayal of a biographer who maligns Shelley's character is briefly described, serving as a critique of efforts to diminish Shelley's achievements through personal attacks. The letter concludes with a somber reflection on humanity's future, foreseeing a bleak end but imagining a scenario where Shelley's work endures until the last moments of human existence.

Throughout, the letter maintains a tone of admiration for Shelley's work while providing a critical perspective on the reception of his works and the unchanging nature of the world he sought to reform. The author's engaging style encapsulates an eloquent tribute to Shelley's enduring legacy amid an unappreciative and stagnant society.

LETTER--To Q. Horatius Flaccus

In his letter to Q. Horatius Flaccus, commonly known as Horace, the author muses on the nature of the afterlife and whether it offers Horace the same pleasures he enjoyed in life: the beauty of both country and town, and the delights of nature and human company. The letter reflects on Horace's stoic and Epicurean beliefs, dwelling on the theme that death marks an eternal parting, without hope for reunion in the afterlife. Unlike Virgil, who traversed the realms of the dead with hope, Horace's acceptance of mortality is underscored with a gentle melancholy, acknowledging that no philosophy makes parting from life easier, yet emphasizing the importance of patience and acceptance.

The author admires Horace's ability to cherish life's joys—the serene landscapes of Italy, the pleasures of friendship, and the modest contentments of wine and leisure. Horace's poetry, rich with the appreciation for the present, reflects a balance between enjoying life's pleasures and accepting life's end with a resigned good-humor. The letter highlights Horace's love for his homeland, Italy, and his profound affection for its landscapes, suggesting that such love, alongside his respect for Rome's heroes and gods, defines a true patriot.

Furthermore, the letter explores Horace's personal beliefs, particularly his reverence for the simpler, traditional forms of worship and his respect for the rustic gods and spirits that imbue the Roman countryside with a sense of the sacred. This personal piety, rooted in tradition and a connection to the land and its ancestors, is presented as a core aspect of Horace's character.

In closing, the author bids Horace farewell with affection, praising his humanity and the universal friendliness that has endeared him to generations of readers. The letter is a thoughtful examination of Horace's works and philosophy, celebrating his wisdom, his acceptance of mortality, and his enduring legacy as a poet who deeply understood and cherished the beauty of life and the tranquility of the natural world.