

Jonathan Swift (1667-1745)

2 *A Ballad, to the Tune of, the Cut-Purse*

I.

Once on a time, as old stories rehearse,  
A friar would need show his talent in Latin;  
But was sorely put to 't in the midst of a verse,  
Because he could find no word to come pat in:  
Then all in the place 5  
He left a void space,  
And so went to bed in a desperate case:  
When behold the next morning a wonderful riddle!  
He found it was strangely filled up in the middle.  
CHO[R]. Let censuring criticks then think what they list on 't; 10  
Who would not write verses with such an assistant?

II.

This put me the friar into an amazement:  
For he wisely consider'd it must be a sprite;  
That he came through the keyhole, or in at the casement;  
And it needs must be one that could both read and write: 15  
Yet he did not know  
If it were friend or foe,  
Or whether it came from above or below:  
However, 'twas civil, in angel or elf,  
For he ne'er could have fill'd it so well of himself. 20  
CHOR. Let censuring, *etc.*

III.

Even so master doctor had puzzled his brains  
In making a ballad, but was at a stand:  
He had mixt little wit with a great deal of pains,  
When he found a new help from invisible hand. 25  
Then, good doctor Swift,  
Pay thanks for the gift,  
For you freely must own, you were at a dead lift:  
And, though some malicious young spirit did do 't,

You may know by the hand it had no cloven foot.

30

CHO[R]. Let censuring, *etc.*

1699

(From *The Works of the Rev. Jonathan Swift*. Arranged by Thomas Sheridan, with Notes, Historical and Critical. A New Edition, in Nineteen Volumes, Corrected and Revised by John Nichols. Vol. 8. London, 1801)