

William Shenstone (1714-63)

2 *The Rape of the Trap*

A Ballad

- 1 'Twas in a land of learning,
The Muse's favourite city,
Such pranks of late
Were play'd by a rat,
As — tempt one to be witty. 5
- 2 All in a college study,
Where books were in great plenty;
This rat would devour
More sense in an hour,
Than I could write — in twenty. 10
- 3 Corporeal food, 'tis granted,
Serves vermin less refined, Sir;
But this, a rat of taste,
All other rats surpass'd,
And he prey'd on the food of the mind, Sir. 15
- 4 His breakfast, half the morning
He constantly attended;
And when the bell rung
For evening song,
His dinner scarce was ended! 20
- 5 He spared not even heroics,
On which we poets pride us,
And would make no more
Of King Arthurs, by the score,
Than — all the world beside does. 25

- 6 In books of geography
He made the maps to flutter;
 A river or a sea
 Was to him a dish of tea;
And a kingdom, bread and butter. 30
- 7 But if some mawkish potion
Might chance to overdose him,
 To check its rage,
 He took a page
Of logic — to compose him — 35
- 8 A Trap, in haste and anger,
Was brought, you need not doubt on 't,
 And, such was the gin,
 Were a lion once got in,
He could not, I think, get out on 't. 40
- 9 With cheese, not books, 'twas baited;
The fact — I 'll not belie it —
 Since none — I tell you that —
 Whether scholar or rat,
Minds books when he has other diet. 45
- 10 But more of Trap and bait, Sir,
Why should I sing, or either?
 Since the rat, who knew the sleight,
 Came in the dead of night,
And dragg'd them away together. 50
- 11 Both Trap and bait were vanish'd
Through a fracture in the flooring;
 Which though so trim
 It now may seem
Had then — a dozen or more in. 55
- 12 Then answer this, ye sages!

- Nor deem I mean to wrong ye,
Had the rat, which thus did seize on
The Trap, less claim to reason,
Than many a skull among ye? 60
- 13 Dan Prior's mice, I own it,
Were vermin of condition;
But this rat, who merely learn'd
What rats alone concern'd,
Was the greater politician. 65
- 14 That England's topsyturvy
Is clear from these mishaps, Sir;
Since Traps, we may determine,
Will no longer take our vermin,
But vermin take our Traps, Sir. 70
- 15 Let sophs, by rats infested,
Then trust in cats to catch them,
Lest they grow as learn'd as we
In our studies; where, d' ye see,
No mortal sits to watch them. 75
- 16 Good luck betide our captains,
Good luck betide our cats, Sir,
And grant that the one
May quell the Spanish Don,
And the other destroy our rats, Sir. 80

1737

(From *The Poetical Works of William Shenstone*. With Life, Critical Dissertation, and Explanatory Notes by the Rev. George Gilfillan. Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1854)