

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)