

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)