

The Athenian Mercury:

Saturday, December 5. 1691.

Quest. 1. **W** Hom do you think the best Dramatick Professor in this Age?

Ans. We suppose the Question is intended to reach our own Nation only, wherein too have been many Writers, and that some of the first rate, who yet han't been Professors of the Drama, nor wou'd think themselves much honour'd in being call'd so, some few of whom may be yet living. But not to run back as far as Sir William Davenant, who really had a vast Genius, and a stile fit for the Theatre, tho' something inclin'd to extravagant and Romantick, (perhaps if well considered no great fault) nor to mention Mr. Comley, who as he was incomparable in all things, has left us one Comedy which bears his Name not at all unlike its Father; nor agen to touch on him whose untimely Death none can think on without a sigh, who loves either Wit or Vertue, and whose *Valentinian* shall outlast, as it does outweigh whole Cartloads of theirs whose persons have survived him: To let these alone, together with poor *Orway*, who deserv'd better Fortune, and Mrs. Behns, whose *Rovers* are pretty natural things, as well as some others, ---and Madam Phillips, whose sence was as strong and masculine, as her Soul virtuous and noble; there are those still living who have deserv'd very well of the Drama in those different Characters wherein they have written. And first, if true Comedy, and perhaps the best that comes on our Stage, cou'd justly entitle to the Laurel, he may be said to merit it best who now wears it, for which we have not only his Testimony who is held *Infalible* among our English Writers, but that of our own Sences, in many or most of his Plays that might be named:—Tho' the truth is, we find few of 'em too full of *Virtuous Characters*, which are now almost confin'd to Tragedy, and there seldom or never appear, unless to be miserable. As for his Predecessor, we doubt not but Mr. Laureat himself has the justice to own him his Master in many parts of Poetry, and the *numerousness* of his Verse among other things, we suppose hee'l scarce dispute with him, since 'tis really almost Musick but to hear a page of him read, and Mr. Drydens Heroick Verse is undoubtedly the sweetest in the World. As for the controversie between him and some great persons, we may without injury to his Poetical Fame, believe he was overmatch'd in't, having a stronger Genius than his own to struggle with, and besides odds against him as to number; and if he has bin dealt with by 'em a little severely, 'tis with so much Wit, that we dare believe Mr. Dryden himself cou'd hardly ever see the *Rehearsal* without being pleas'd with't. And tho' there might be some Reason in what they there drive at, and he being then but a Young Poet, might begin to dictate too soon, and assume that as his right, which both Experience and merit now give him; yet none that pretends to judge must deny that his Plays are some of the best on the English Stage. His *Oedipus*, tho' its true another had a share in't, is indeed incomparable, and even in those which are most spoken against, his very Faults are so bright that there's few can imitate 'em, much less reach his Beauties. His Enemies must acknowledge that he has all the ART of Poetry, and whether or no his Fancies are his own, he dresses 'em so well, that one else dares own 'em. Two things there are wherein both the Life and Excellency of the Drama is chiefly seen; preparing Incidents, and raising and managing Passions; in both which we need go no further than his *Sebastian* to confess him inimitable. The Incest of *Sebastian* and *Almeyda*, and the Discovery on't, is preparing from the very beginning of the Play, old *Alphonso* is sav'd in the Battel, taken Prisoner, sav'd from the Sacrifice on purpose to discover it, which he attempts several times before he compleats it; some few Rays of Truth darting

out of his expressions to prepare the fatal Secret. Then for a Passion, never was one finer wrought than that of *Sebastian* and *Dorax* — When he has brought 'em together, when he has discover'd the cause of *Dorax's* resentment, and arm'd 'em both, and given their Characters, one breathing nothing but Revenge, the other generous to the heighth; it sets one upon the wrack to think how the Old man will ever bring 'em off agen when he has got 'em so near together, and we question whether almost any other Poet cou'd have don't without murdering 'em both half a dozen times over. And then for his last Play, there needs no more to be said in its Commendation, (which wee'l be so just to give him notwithstanding his *One out of Ten*,) than that his *Enchanted Forrest* exceeds even *Tasso's* himself, from whom 'tis copy'd. On the whole, we need say no more than as we did in the last Mercury, that in general Mr. Dryden is in our Judgment by far the most compleat Dramatick Writer not only of our Age, but of all the English Poets that went before him.

Quest. 2. I can with a four-ounce Hammer drive a double Ten into a thick Plank up to the Head, but if I take four Tun weight, and poizing it exactly, put it upon the same Nail in the same Plank, it will not force it up to the Head: What may be the Reason of this Difference?

Ans. The Reason is, that one is a Dead-weight, we mean the Tuns, the other we may call a Living one, the Hammer being enforc'd by the Hand of him that manages it, in which case there's not only motion, which has of it self a vast force, but even a Spring too in the Mans Arm, and the strength of his Body besides put to it, all which concurr to the *vis impressa* communicated to the Nail, and all together much more than countervail the sluggish weight of the Tuns placed exactly upon it, which we now for Discourse sake take for granted, will not force the Nail up to the Head, as the Querist tells us. Let any one who wou'd have further satisfaction consult Mr. Boyl of the effects of Motion.

Quest. 3. How big are Spirits, since 'tis said, that our Saviour cast a Legion of 'em out of one man?

Ans. 'Tis a very incongruous Question, and we might as well have been ask'd how broad a Thought is, or what colour the Taste is of? Spirits as we have said, are no more than Cogitative Substances, and by consequence not at all subject to the grosser Terms of Magnitude, Longitude, Place, &c. The Learned tell us, That a thousand Angels may dance upon a point: 'Tis a merry thought, but not at all erroneous. But for all such as are Curious in Questions of this Nature, we referr 'em to a Book entituled, *The Visions of the Soul before it comes into the Body*, by a Member of the Athenian Society. 'Tis Sold by John Dunton at the Raven in the Roultry. The 14th. Dialogue of this Book resolves most of those Curious Questions that can be stated about the Nature of Spirits, as to their speaking, thinking, loving or hating, Self-moving, moving Matter, and many more such like.

Quest. 4. A Gentleman and a Lady in the Countrey, being Neighbours, not under Parents or Guardians, but both free, and at their own Disposals, did settle their Affections each on other, in order to Marriage; and it not suiting with their present circumstances, very well known to both, they agree to delay to solemnize their marriage publicly for some time, but do solemnly in the presence of God privately (without any condition or reservation) take each other to Husband and Wife, using the very form of words prescribed in the Church Liturgy for publick Marriage, and for some time after continue as dear and familiar as Man and Wife, bedding only excepted: Query, Whether this be a Marriage consummate, or may be broken off, or whether one being willing to part, not giving a reason for it, the other may be free, &c. they being not married by a Priest?

Ans.

Ans. Our Opinion is, that Marriage is not consummated before an *Actual knowledge* of each other. Not but that a promise under such Circumstances as are mentioned in the Question is obligatory, and not to be broke by either, under the penalty of the breach of the third Commandment; but if either breaks the Vow, the other is as much at liberty as ever. A publick Marriage signifies no more before God than a private Contract, if no act ensues either; only here's the difference, the first gives a satisfaction to the World, and renders the party proper Subjects of the Law as to Estates, &c. Contracts are a matter of greater Moment than is commonly believ'd, and ought to be as warily effected (if at all) as publick Marriage.

Quest. 5. An intimate Friend of mine after having strong desires to, and promise of Marriage had been made him by his Mistress, receiv'd a very unkind Letter from her, which threw him into such a violent passion, that upon the reading on't, his Nose gush'd out with Blood, and his eyes with Tears, he lay four or five nights together without sleep, or any manner of rest: His Mistress hearing of this, ran almost distracted, and to make him amends for what she had done, promised to marry him as soon as he wou'd; married they are, and have been so several days, and infinitely fond of each other, but nothing further: He is not above 30. and she about 24. a pretty as well accomplish'd a Woman in all respects as ever I knew, and yet it has no manner of effect upon him, tho he loves her, and she him most passionately: He thinks himself bewitch'd, and earnestly desires your Opinion of so strange and sudden an alteration in his Constitution: I tell him I fancy the Violence of the Passion his Mistress's Letter putting him into, causing him to lye so many Nights without sleep, (eating very little in the day time too) might be the Cause of this disorder: This is not satisfactory to him, and I can give him no better reason for 't, and therefore 'tis our desires you'd be pleas'd to give your Opinion of this matter as soon as possibly you can, together with your Advice, what he shall take to help him in that Affair; he sweats extreamly, cannot sleep without 40 or 50 drops of Laudanum, eats very little, and in all other respects is very strong and hearty?

Ans. We cou'd give you an Account what the Learn'd have said upon the Tying the point, a certain sort of Ceremony us'd by some malicious person in the words of Marriage, which by Gods permission, and the Assistance of the Devil has given us many Instances of Effects much like these in the Question; but so differing in some material Circumstances, that we are really perswaded that this last is nothing of that Nature but what is very frequent, and the Effect of another cause. Surprizes have caus'd gray hairs in one nights time, distraction, nay sometimes Death it self in a Moment: Our Advice is this, that the Gentleman bleed, purge, and use abstemious Dyet, and the disorders of Nature will be soon removed. One thing which continues it is his great dissatisfaction under his Condition, which he must avoid, and to this end it won't be amiss, that he converse much with other persons, and think little of the matter; perhaps it may be also convenient to sleep asunder, if it is to be born, till he finds the case alter'd.

Quest. 6. About the Year 83. I found at Richmond upon Thames a living Creature in the water, the form of it was as follows. It was about two inches long, it had a head as of a Man, with Eyes, Nose, Mouth and Ears, without any Hair: Upon the Head was a Crown joyned to the Head; it had no Arms but knobs, like the joynted Babies; it had two Breasts like a Woman, and the marks of Ribbs. About half an inch below the Breasts it parted, and made a streak down the Tail, all which was like polish'd Gold; (and if you had seen it your selves, you could hardly have discerned it from polish'd Gold;) then it had a Tail about an inch long, soft, and white, and at the end thereof, was a thin thing, which it did spread as broad as the top of ones little finger: It was every way proportionable, and as well made as could possibly be; it was alive when I took it up, and did leap about, and remained so the space of a day; but when I had taken it out of the water, I gave it to a Gentlewoman in the Town, who put it into Cotton, which killed it, and when it dyed, it changed black, almost the whole Town came to see it, but none could tell what it was: Query, What it was, and how it came there, and whether if it had been put into water, 'twou'd have lived?

Ans. We have not seen any such Creature met with any such description in History; but if any person is able to give a further Account of this Nature, we promise to oblige the World by publishing it.

Quest. 7. In the first of Genesis 'tis said, That on the first day God ordain'd the day and night, &c. and on the fourth day he made two great Lights, the Sun and Moon, &c. Pray what was that Light or Day, before the Sun was made, since we generally suppose the Day to proceed from the light of the Sun, &c.

Ans. There's an Innate Light in the Heavens; thus rotten Wood, Glow-worms, and many other things give light without the help of Reflexions. The Learn'd believe it was a Circumrotation of their own Light.

The Supplement to the Fourth Volume of the *Athenian Mercury*, is now publish'd, containing an Account of the Design and Scope of the most Considerable Books **NEWLY PRINTED IN ENGLAND**, and in the Foreign Journals, &c. and of the Quality of the Authors, if known; with impartial Remarks upon their Undertaking and Performance. These Supplements will be continued constantly by several Learned Persons, and comprehend a **BRIEF IDEA** of all valuable Books publish'd from time to time. Printed for John Dunton at the Raven in the Poultry. Where are to be had the 1st. 2d. and 3d. Volumes of the *Athenian Mercury*, and the Supplements to 'em: And also the Preface, Index, and 12 Numbers alone, that Compleat the first 18 Numbers of the 3d. Volume; in which 12 Numbers are Answered many of the Questions lately sent us.

* * We have receiv'd some Questionous written in Poetry, when we have receiv'd enough to fill a Mercury, they shall be publish'd all together with Poetical Answers to 'em, but think not **Bombastick Doggeril** worth taking notice of.

* * Mr. F. A. is desired to take notice for the future, that no Letters will be taken in whose postage is not paid for.

|| The Questions concerning the Scripture, and Men before Adam, &c. are in our three First Volumes already answered, as also several other Questions lately sent us.

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Advertisement.

There is now publish'd, at Stationers-Hall, London, Mr. PARKER's Almanack, with Monthly Observations for the Year 1692. Wherein the Planets Places are Calculated (*de Novo*) from the *Carolus Tables*; a compleat Table of Houses; the Suns true Declination for every Day in the Year, for the use of all Mariners and Dialists: A Table of the Equation of Time, shewing how much a true going Clock or Watch ought to be faster or slower than a true Sun-Dial. Also a Correct Table of Tides, shewing the true times of High water at London-Bridge both Morning and Afternoon: With several other Varieties of singular Use. The like never published before.

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