

Compare the  
character and writing  
of



Samuel Pepys and Robert Merivel have similar backgrounds, with neither of them being born into the social positions they achieved. Pepys` father was a tailor, his mother a butcher`s sister and he was the fifth of eleven children. Merivel`s father was a reputable glovemaker, and little is known of his mother beyond the fact she was kind and dreamed he would have a `splendid future`. It is never stated whether or not he has any siblings, but if so they are not mentioned in the book. Both attended what would become Cambridge University: Pepys attended Magdalene College and Merivel studied medicine at Caius College.

Pepys achieved social advancement through an acquaintance of his, Edward Montagu the Earl of Sandwich, although it was something he had to work hard for as one of the principal officers of the Navy. Merivel`s social progression was born of a combination of luck, the King`s pity and his personality. He was appointed as court physician following the King sending for him, `Out of my affection and admiration for your late father I have summoned you Merivel, ` and after he had completed the King`s task through a combination of basic medical knowledge and luck. He retained his position at court due to his personality, which he discovered, `was in every particular well suited to life at Court.

.. my fondness for gossip and laughter...made me one of the most popular men at Whitehall.

` They also had different opinions of court life, with Merivel adoring every aspect of it whilst Pepys found it less endearing, ` I find that there is nothing almost but bawdry at Court from top to bottom, as, if it were fit, I could

instance, but it is not necessary. `Pepys and Merivel lived in a time where, to fit in as a gentleman, it was important to dress like one. As such clothing and fashion are mentioned frequently throughout their respective stories. Of the two of them Merivel was more fond of clothing, embracing it as a part of his new lifestyle, `I hit upon an idea for ensuring that the guests, in whose company I would withdraw into this room, would not sully it with drabness...

I would order a dazzling collection of scarlet sashes, bilberry shawls, ruby slippers and pink bonnets with which to adorn my invitees. ` Whilst Pepys accepted the need for fine clothing he was not as fond of it as Merivel, seeing it as more of a necessity than a pleasure, `I was not being neat in clothes, which I find in great fault of me. `They held similar attitudes towards women, and were both fond of pursuing them, although they differ in their achievement with women. With the exception of his wife Celia, Merivel is successful in his pursuit of various women throughout the novel, so much so that his relationship with several of them develops beyond a sexual one to the point that they become confidants to his various problems. Pepys is equally as ardent in his chase of women, however he is not quite so successful as Merivel, often not achieving what he set out to do, ` I stood by a pretty, modest maid, whom I did labour to take by the hand and the body; but she would not, but got further and further from me.

.. And then I fell to gaze upon another pretty maid in a pew close to me, and she on me; and I did go about to take her hand, which she suffered a little and then withdrew. ` Both men did marry, although Pepys married for love and Merivel for convenience (the king's not his own), and continued to keep mistresses after their individual marriage`s, as was considered normal at the

time, 'Tell me Merivel do you have many mistresses? Naturally, I am a man of my time. 'Another love Pepys and Merivel shared was the arts, music and painting in particular.

Merivel tried his hand at both playing the oboe and portrait painting, though despite his fascination with both he never achieved the skill he would have liked at either. Pepys was a keen amateur musician; he sang, could play several instruments and composed. He compared his love of women and music, both things which enthralled him, 'Music and woman I cannot but give way to, whatever my business is.' Merivel and Pepys were both interested in aspects of science, and despite having no formal scientific training Pepys was admitted to the Royal Society (a group of like minded philosophers and mathematicians who believed in the advancement of scientific knowledge) in 1662, and was made president of it in 1681. Merivel is a student of medicine, though he ends up with only a half completed medical education. He also loves astronomy, though more so the telescope itself than what it can show to him, 'I find greater order restored to my brain from the placing of my hands round this instrument of science than from what its lenses reveal to my eye.

'Both of their voices come across in manner which appears almost unintentionally amusing, and often it is their self-righteousness in regards to their recounting particular situations that is funny as opposed to the event itself, 'it being a very great trouble to me that I should have a sister of so ill a nature, that I must be forced to spend money upon a stranger when it might better be upon her, if she were good for anything. ' They also both come across as rather self centred. The character of Merivel admits to his

self involved ways throughout the book, `So, to me again - whither my thoughts are extremely fond of returning,` and this personal awareness of his fault makes it a more endearing personality trait. Pepys vanity makes itself known in the need he felt to record his life and how distressed he was when he had to give it up due to eyesight problems,` And thus ends all that I doubt I shall ever be able to do with my own eyes.

.. which is almost as much as to see myself go into my grave.`