

# [Allusion and its effects in pope and johnson](https://assignbuster.com/allusion-and-its-effects-in-pope-and-johnson/)

In some eighteenth century works, the emphasis on alluding to and drawing inspiration from the past proved to be one of the most effective methods in composing a satirical piece. Appearing in two forms, Juvenal or Horatian, a satire is “ a poem, or in modern use sometimes a prose composition, in which prevailing vices or follies are held up to ridicule” (Drabble). Alexander Pope’s The First Satire of the Second Book of Horace Imitated alludes to the past as well as the present in a piece representative of Horatian satire. Serving as the example of Juvenalian satire is Samuel Johnson’s London: A Poem, In Imitation of the Third Satire of Juvenal. The significance of the allusions present in both pieces is central to understanding the overall intention of each satire.

Alexander Pope’s The First Satire of the Second Book of Horace Imitated, published in London in 1733, is Pope’s endeavor to defend himself and his satirizing works, by writing yet another satire (Pope 1-14). In the poem, he defends himself by alluding to some of his previous victims and subjects, declaring satire to be the truth as well as his guilty pleasure and if he ceased to write he would “ think/ and for my Soul I cannot sleep a wink/…Fools rush into my head, and so I write” (Pope 29). Writing, particularly of the follies and vices of others is his primary passion. The poem is written as a dialogue between Pope and a friend who acts as his “ council learned in the Law” and as Pope justifies his satire, the friend attempts to convince him of the dangers of his writing (Pope 27). Having the piece written as a dialogue allows the reader a chance to hear an outsider’s opinions as the text jumps from the friend’s main concerns followed by Pope’s justifications. Incorporating dialogue between Pope and another into the poem adds an extra dimension to it by allowing the reader to place themselves into the text as a second character in the dialogue.

The controversial nature of his allusions and subjects are the source of the displeasure towards his poems. Arguably, the “ precise question is whether Pope’s verses constitute satire or libel” (Maresca 366). Is he merely making a mockery of those included in his works, or is he in fact guilty of slander against them? Pope defends his earlier works, referencing when he wrote satires that seemed “ too bold/ Scarce to wise Peter complaisant enough/ And something said of Chartres much too rough” (Pope 27). Pope affirms he wrote satire and not libel since both references were to guilty men, thus Pope “ undermines the charge of libel in the very act of presenting it by referring to his attacks” (Maresca 367). Pope believes he is not guilty of libel when the words he wrote were that of public opinion.

He satirizes the traditional poets methods of writing merely for the pleasure and satisfaction of others such as the poet “ Sir Richard, rumbling, rough and fierce/ With Arms and George, and Brunswick crowd the Verse”, who writes what Pope considers to be shallow poetry written purely for the affections of royalty (Pope 29). Pope refers to what he sees as lesser poets thus providing an example to further defend that he must be the one to satirize the truth otherwise no one will. The friend encourages Pope to use his poetry to “ Let Carolina smooth the tuneful Lay/ Lull with Amelia’s liquid Name the Nine/ And sweetly flow through all the Royal Line” because in immortalizing the royal family he has the greater possibility of immortalizing his own writing (Pope 31). Pope writes poetry in order to give insight into the human condition and to uncover the flaws that exists in everyone. When comparing Pope’s satire to Horace’s original, and in regards to writing poetry for the glorification of royalty, Pope’s and Horace’s “ excuse for not writing heroic poetry is literally true of them; their talents are insufficient” (Maresca 386). Pope deems royalty unworthy of such immortalization without just cause.

Pope further alludes to the past when professing his dedication to remaining honest and true in his works:

My Head and Heart thus flowing thro’ my Quill,

Verse-man or Prose-man term me which you will,

Papist or Protestant, or both between,

Like good Erasmus in an honest Mean. (Pope 33)

Erasmus was one of the great sixteenth-century scholars, known for a number works including translations of the Bible and classics that helped revolutionize European literary culture (Drabble). In alluding to Erasmus, Popes draws a comparison between himself and another great intellectual. Erasmus authored The Praise of Folly in 1511 which satirized church dignitaries and theologians (Drabble). Erasmus satirized others and was still considered ‘ good’ and ‘ honest’, traits which Pope himself wishes he and his satires can be associated with as well. Pope draws from the past in order to compare and relate them both with one another, allowing for the association to positively impact Pope’s own reception with his readers.

Pope further defends his use of satire in the lines:

I only wear it in a Land of Hectors,

Thieves, Supercargoes, Sharpers, and Directors,

Save but our Army! and let Jove incrust

Swords, Pikes, and Guns, with everlasting rust! (Pope 35)

Pope has alluded to the past as well as the present here in order to defend his satire. He uses satire against the “ Land of Hectors/ Thieves, Supercargoes, Sharpers, and Directors” who represent the “ corrupt and vice-ridden England” that exists in the present (Maresca 390). His inclusion of the government arises from his use of the term “ Minister” which “ emphasizes the fact that the court is principally responsible for the disorder of England and so indirectly responsible for Pope’s compulsion to write satire” (Maresca 391). Pope cleverly brings the satire full circle in claiming those who criticize his use of it are the sources of his material for writing it. His ultimate defense is that he must write it. Along with these present allusions, Pope’s use of “ Jove” alludes to the the ancient Roman god, also known as Jupiter. Jove is the king of the gods, and the allusion to him emphasizes the power Pope places in the notion of peace. He asks for peace in asking Jove to destroy the weapons of their armies, in the same way he asks for peace from his readers.

Samuel Johnson’s London: A Poem, In Imitation of the Third Satire of Juvenal was published in London of 1738 (Johnson 1). This poem employs Juvenal satire to express Johnson’s disappointment and disgust over the present state of his beloved city of London. As Pope did, Johnson also alludes to the past and the present, though since the poem is Juvenal satire, the allusions are less playful and more abrasive and critiquing (Drabble). Having the poem be an imitation of the Third Satire of Juvenal immediately associates the poem with the past. In constructing his poem this way, each line though different from the original, still bears some connection to it. The structures and ideas within the lines of Johnson’s London were written in a manner reflective of the original, bringing the past to his new poem.

Within the first stanza of the poem Johnson emphasizes the poor state of London:

I praise the Hermit, but regret the Friend,

Who no resolves, from Vice and London far,

To breathe in distant Fields a purer Air,

And, fix’d on Cambria’s solitary Shore,

Give to St David one true Briton more. (Johnson 3)

His use of the phrase “ from Vice and London far” presents the reader with the association between vice and London essentially equating one with the other. London has become so corrupt and broken that it is nearly synonymous with the term vice. Even a “ true Briton” can no longer take up residence there, seeking relief where there is a “ purer Air” (Johnson 3). His use of “ true Briton” to describe the personae of the speaker, Thales, in the poem implies a strong sense of pride, but even that pride is not powerful enough to make one stay in London. Thales acts as “ a stereotype of the good man ‘ harass’d’ by the vileness of his city…[who] must endure the agony of exile in order to survive as a ‘ foe to vice’” (Bloom 116). Johnson draws such a critical distinction between Thales and the vice-ridden Londoners. In presenting the image of this fractured London, Johnson reveals how society has “ in itself the elements of its own destruction, an enemy within which will subvert and betray it” (Varney 204). When Johnson asks “ For who would leave, unbrib’d, Hibernia’s Land/ Or change the Rocks of Scotland for the Strand” he draws subtle allusions of the past in using more classical names Cambria and Hibernia to refer to Wales and Ireland (Johnson 4). These more classical terms imply a sense of history or the overall passing of time.

Some of the most powerful allusions to the past are included in the third stanza of the poem:

Struck with the Seat that gave Eliza Birth,

We kneel, and kiss the consecrated Earth;

In pleasing Dreams the blissful Age renew,

And call Brittannia’s Glories back to view;

Behold her Cross triumphant on the Main,

The Guard of Commerce, and the Dread of Spain. (Johnson 5)

The suggestion of the “ consecrated Earth” where Queen Elizabeth was born brings up what is considered one of the greatest reigns of England. Elizabeth I ruled from 1558 to 1603, and during her successful reign was immortalized in countless works of literature and art (Drabble). Her inclusion in the poem draws a clear distinction between the present London of Johnson’s poem, and London back in its days of greater glory. In alluding to Elizabeth I Johnson begs the reader to consider the seriousness of his poem in forcing the reader to make their own comparisons between London of the present and the past.

Since the poem refers to one of the most renowned political figures of England, it draws a stark contrast between past and current administrations. Politics has a heavy hand in influencing London and many of the downfalls Johnson see within it. London “ reflected and contributed to the volatile political atmosphere of 1738 and its popularity was undoubtedly bolstered by its fiercely engage content and tone”, thus making it one of Johnson’s most publicized works (Varney 203).

Further emphasis on the political issues in London in 1738 are brought up as Johnson asks readers to “ call Britannia’s Glories back to view/ Behold her Cross triumphant on the Main/ The Guard of Commerce, and the Dread of Spain” (Johnson 5). Looking to the past is necessary to comprehend Johnson’s insistence that London is rapidly falling apart. When compared to “ Britannia’s Glories” of the past, London in 1738 appears in even greater shambles. He reminds readers of the days when the English army was triumphant and defeated the Spanish Armada, drawing another comparison to its present lack of victories. The depth of Thales’ pain for London’s downfall is evident as he “ is more shaken by the world he decries and may even have taken on something of its fated and self-destructive character. He is more a product of the world he lives in and less independent” (Varney 205). This description reveals the level of involvement of Thales, how unbearable and destructive the nature of things are. If London falls, all of its people will fall with it. Johnson cannot stress the importance enough.

The allusions used by Pope and Johnson serve primarily to add a new dimension and depth to their satires, whether Horatian or Juvenal. Drawing from the past in order to make a point about the present proves a successful means for each. In his First Satire of the Second Book of Horace, Pope defends himself over his use of satire. He sharply defends himself where others have found reason to critique him, not for the quality of his writing, but for his subjects. In his writing Pope believes in “ the virtuous intent of his satire, and points out that under other kings satirists, not flatterers, had been rewarded with royal favor” (Maresca 391). Pope alludes to Erasmus to bring similarities between the two of them, with the hopes of receiving the same respect Erasmus received. Drawing from the past brings an element of time to the work. Pope connects the past and present, almost questioning why Erasmus was so well received for his satire while Pope is so harshly judged. This all relies on the distinction between satire and libel, and in walking the fine line between the two, Pope is making himself subject to such criticisms.

Johnson’s efforts to draw inspiration and allusion from the past seems to have a greater and more profound effect upon his work than on Pope’s. His allusions come from a variety of areas whether historical, political, mythological, or cultural. In order to emphasize the social and political issues occurring in London in 1738, he takes advantage of these allusions to stress the changes that have changed London from the most wonderful city, to a decrepit and fallen city. He uses historical political figures such as Elizabeth I and Edward III to remind prideful Londoners of the glory their nation once possessed. In addition to reminiscing about better days, he reveals what he believes are the problems with London at present- from vanity, to poverty, to shame, and all the vices employed therein. London is such a success “ not just because of the accuracy, mordancy, and poetic brilliance with which Johnson has suited Juvenal’s satire…but because Johnson fuses with his public satire a deeply impassioned presentation of the mind in distress” (Varney 204). Johnson’s Thales is so passionate about the city he loves that it effects his actual being; it is not just about the city of London, but of the physical and emotional state of Londoners themselves. He possesses a strong love for London, even in its current troubled state, and his words serve to reignite such spirit in his fellow Londoners.

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