

# Richard Shepherd

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Richard Shepherd was born to Henry and Suzanna Shepherd and was baptized in 1732. Shepherd was well educated as he obtained both a Bachelor's and Master's of Arts, as well as a Bachelor's and Doctorate of Divinity. At one point, he had considered joining the army but ultimately decided to join the church. After becoming ordained, Shepherd was a chaplain to Bishop Thomas Thurlow, and it may have been in this period he wrote "Ode on Envy." Shepherd became a fellow of the Royal Society in May of 1781 and later became a lecturer at Oxford in 1788.

Shepherd published some poetic works separately and in a collection with others' work printed by G. Pearch before collecting them in *Miscellanies in Two Volumes* (1775). Considered "not unsuccessful" (Courtney & Major), he continued to work within the Church of England while publishing theology until his passing in 1809. Due to his mild popularity during his life, Shepherd is now an obscure poet.

"Ode on Envy" was originally published in 1770 in the second edition of *A Collection of Poems in Four Volumes by Several Hands*, volume one. In 1776, Shepherd published *Miscellanies* which includes a revised version of the poem, with changes in lines 29 to 33. A Pindaric ode, "Ode on Envy" contains a mix of iambic trimeter, tetrameter, and pentameter lines and has an irregular rhyme scheme. Shepherd would have studied Envy as one of the Seven Deadly Sins while in divinity college, and classical history and mythology as part of his university training. The poem makes references to mythological figures associated with envy such as Medusa, as well as real-life people including Francis Bacon, Edward Hyde, and Thomas Osborne, each of whom had been the victim of envy during his life.

## Further Reading

Langum, Virginia. "Envy." *Medicine and the Seven Deadly Sins in Late Medieval Literature and Culture*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, pp. 105–18

Vrabel, Jennifer K. "Seven Deadly Sins." *Encyclopedia of Personality and Individual Differences*, Springer International, 2020, pp. 4851–55.

### **Reference**

Courtney, W.P. and Emma Major. "Richard Shepherd." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 2004.

Ode On Envy<sup>208</sup>

## I .

BENEATH yon chain of barren rocks,  
 Where niggard<sup>209</sup> Nature ne'er unlocks  
     One hoard of chearful green;  
 The brown yew<sup>210</sup> forms a gloomy shade,  
 The blasted oak<sup>211</sup> erects its head, 5  
     A dreary wasteful scene.  
 O haste, O fly th' accursed<sup>212</sup> cell,  
 Where Envy's fiendly faction<sup>213</sup> dwell!  
 Else shall her glance, malignant<sup>214</sup> cast,  
 The fairest shoots<sup>215</sup> of Merit blast: 10  
 He risks his ease, who ventures nigh  
 The baleful<sup>216</sup> witchcraft of her eye.

## II .

Ev'n<sup>217</sup> now from her infernal dark abyss,  
     At Merit's name she lifts her head,  
     At Merit's name prepar'd to shed 15

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<sup>208</sup> first published in 1770 by G. Pearch in the second edition, volume one, of *A Collection of Poems in Four Volumes by Several Hands*, pp. 292–294; *Eighteenth-Century Poetry Archive*

<sup>209</sup> *Niggard* miserly

<sup>210</sup> *Yew* tree associated with churchyards and the dead

<sup>211</sup> *Blasted oak* oaks were symbolic of strength and fertility, so one hit by lightning has an opposite connotation

<sup>212</sup> *Accursed* cursed

<sup>213</sup> *Faction* small group, can be a political group

<sup>214</sup> *Malignant* dark, almost vengeful

<sup>215</sup> *Shoots* young plants

<sup>216</sup> *Baleful* malicious

<sup>217</sup> *Ev'n* even

Their influence all her snaky tresses<sup>218</sup> hiss.  
     Ev'n now the languid<sup>219</sup> mind opprest,  
     Droops under horrors damp and chill,  
 Whilst heaves the sigh from the distended breast,  
 Slow winds the tide of life along each azure<sup>220</sup> rill. 20  
 Arise, my Muse, the chorded shell<sup>221</sup> prepare,  
     Awake the drowsy string;  
 For thou canst lull the gathering storms of Care,  
 Thou canst disarm dire Envy of her sting,  
 And smooth the haggard brow of fell Despair. 25

## III.

Ah strange reverse of honest joys!  
     The pale-ey'd fiend elate  
 Smiles, if Adversity annoys  
     Her neighbour's hapless state.<sup>222</sup> 30  
 Yet Spleen oppressive marrs her chear,  
     And signs the bitter day:  
 For Envy drops the scalding tear,  
     When all the world is gay.  
 The tenant of some narrow mind,  
     She bids Suspicion launch the dart; 35  
 Whilst all her secret powers combin'd

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<sup>218</sup> *Snaky tresses* locks of hair, reference to Medusa

<sup>219</sup> *Languid* weak, almost fading

<sup>220</sup> *Azure* blue

<sup>221</sup> *Chorded Shell* lyre, a stringed instrument associated with poetry

<sup>222</sup> *State* in the 1775 edition, lines 29–33 read: “Or lowly cot, of dome of state. / The cloud withdrawn, if fortune chear / The house of woe with kindlier ray; / Malignant Envy drops the tear, / To see the scene so gay.”

Excite the poignant smart.<sup>223</sup>  
 Slow halts Ill-nature in the rear,  
 That poisons as she probes the wound,  
 And Rumour's noisome<sup>224</sup> breath is near,  
 To waft the poison round. 40

I . 1.<sup>225</sup>

Say, Theron,<sup>226</sup> yet shall torpid<sup>227</sup> Fear  
 Obstruct thy virtue's high career,  
 Shall Envy's menace wrest  
 Thy merit's well-directed aim,  
 And quench the noble thirst of fame 45  
 That warms thy youthful breast?  
 O no! pursue the glorious road  
 A Bacon, Hide, and Osborne<sup>228</sup> trod:  
 Her snaky head tho' Envy rear,  
 Fame's eagle wing thy name shall bear 50  
 O'er<sup>229</sup> black Oblivion's frozen sea,  
 Rank'd with great chiefs of old in immortality.

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<sup>223</sup> *Poignant Smart* sharp pain

<sup>224</sup> *Noisome* offensive, obnoxious

<sup>225</sup> Not IV, as we might expect

<sup>226</sup> *Theron* possibly Theron of Acragas, a Greek historical tyrant

<sup>227</sup> *Torpid* weak and fatigued

<sup>228</sup> *Bacon, Hide, and Osborne* Francis Bacon, Edward Hyde, and Thomas Osborne

<sup>229</sup> *O'er* over



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