

Sneyd Davies

Alyssa Embree, Simon Fraser University

Sneyd Davies was a poet, a clergyman, and a valued friend. Davies was born on 30 October 1709 and baptized in St. Mary's Church, Shrewsbury. He was the third child born to John and Honora. Davies's father John was a rector²⁰⁸ and patron in Kingsland, Herefordshire and St. Asaph, Denbigshire. He married Sneyd's mother Honora, whose maiden name was Sneyd. Davies's Christian name derives from his mother's family, pronounced s-NEE-d. The family was well off and possessed an estate in the Vale of Clwyd, near St. Asaph (Hardinge 11).

As a young boy, Davies attended Eton College, a public school²⁰⁹ located in Berkshire, England, along the River Thames. Attending school away from home gave Davies the opportunity to develop deep and lasting friendships with his classmates. One of these significant friendships was with Charles Pratt (b.1717), later the first Earl of Camden. The two attended Eton together and were later admitted to Cambridge.

While Davies was attending Cambridge University, his father passed away. Sneyd Davies was the sole beneficiary of his father's will. Consequently, at the age of twenty-three, Davies inherited the family estate. In 1733, a year after his father's death, Sneyd joined the clergy. He was ordained as a priest and assumed his father's position as a rector.

Davies and Pratt accomplished their bachelor's and master's degrees at Cambridge University. Davies completed his Doctor of Divinity in 1739, while Pratt became a lawyer and politician. Charles Pratt is the muse for Davies's poem titled "To C*** P****, Esq;" as confirmed by Pratt's nephew George Hardinge (Creasy 255), who is the author of Davies's biographical memoir.

It was at Cambridge University where Davies acquired his poetic inspirations. His works often imitated John Milton, Johnathan Swift, and, most importantly, the Roman poet Horace. Horace wrote verse epistles,²¹⁰ which addressed moral and philosophical themes and often counselled friends. We see Davies's care for his friendships through his writing of letters, many of which are preserved in his biographical memoir, and verse epistles such as "To C*** P****, Esq." This poem is in blank verse (unrhymed iambic pentameter), which is unusual, as eighteenth-century verse epistles are typically made up of rhyming couplets. The

²⁰⁸ *Rector*: a member of the church clergy, a priest in charge of a country parish. Rectors could not be forced out and had the right to the land and income for life. Many rectors would pass down the position to their first son. The bulk of their income came from church tithes.

²⁰⁹ *Public schools*: emerged in the eighteenth century, as certain grammar schools' reputations grew beyond their neighbourhood, they began accepting pupils, regardless of locality, who could afford resident fees. In North America, these would be referred to as private schools.

²¹⁰ *Verse epistles*: letters written in poetic form.

poem showcases themes of friendship, aging, and memory. It functions as a beautiful tribute to Davies's youth and lasting friendship with Pratt.

Sneyd Davies never married, but, while he ignored romantic relationships, he pursued and valued male friendships. Sneyd spent the remainder of his life secluded in the private library of his inherited estate, accompanied by his pipe, writing correspondence to his friends (Hardinge 29–30). Sneyd Davies passed away on 20 January 1769. He is remembered as an accomplished scholar and “the most amiable of human beings; cheerful, though modest; and pious, without parade of his religion; – friendly, humane, public-spirited, and virtuous in every sense of the word” (Hardinge 23).

Further Reading

Overton, Bill. *The Eighteenth-Century British Verse Epistle*. Palgrave, 2007.

Dowling, William C. *The Epistolary Moment: The Poetics of the Eighteenth-Century Verse*. Princeton UP, 1991.

References

Creasy, Edward S. *Memoirs of Eminent Etonians: With Notices of the Early History of Eton College*.

Richard Bentley, 1850, p. 255.

Hardinge, George. *Biographical Memoirs of the Rev. Sneyd Davies, D.D.: Canon Residentiary of Lichfield*. Nichols, Son, and Bentley, 1817.

To C*** P****, Esq;²¹¹

FROM friendship's cradle up the verdant²¹² paths
 Of youth, life's jolly spring; and now sublim'd²¹³
 To its full manhood and meridian²¹⁴ strength,
 Her latest stage, (for friendship ever hale²¹⁵
 Knows not old age, diseases, and decay, 5
 But burning keeps her sacred fire, 'till death's
 Cold hand extinguish) at this spot, this point,
 Here P***, we social meet, and gaze about,
 And look back to the scenes our pastime trod²¹⁶
 In nature's morning, when the gamesome hours
 Had sliding feet, and laugh'd themselves away. 10
 Luxurious season! vital prime! where Thames²¹⁷
 Flows by Etona's²¹⁸ walls, and cheerful sees
 Her sons wide swarming; or where sedgy²¹⁹ Cam²²⁰
 Bathes with slow pace his academic grove,
 Pierian²²¹ walks! — O never hope again, 15
 (Impossible! untenable!) to grasp
 Those joys again; to feel alike the pulse
 Dancing, and fiery spirits boiling high:

²¹¹ *A Collection of Poems in Six Volumes: By Several Hands.* edited by Robert Dodsley, Vol. VI, printed by J. Hughes, 1763, pp. 265-6. *Eighteenth-Century Poetry Archive*.

²¹² *Verdant*: rich with grass or other greenery.

²¹³ *Sublim'd*: "to raise up or on high; to cause to ascend" (*OED*).

²¹⁴ *Meridian*: "the point or period of highest development or perfection, after which decline sets in; culmination, full splendour" (*OED*).

²¹⁵ *Hale*: strong and healthy.

²¹⁶ *Trod*: walked a path.

²¹⁷ *Thames*: a river that flows through Southern England.

²¹⁸ *Etona's*: the word comes from the motto of Eton College, Floreat Etona, which means "may Eton flourish."

²¹⁹ *Sedgy*: covered or bordered with sedges, a grass-like plant.

²²⁰ *Cam*: the river after which the University of Cambridge is named.

²²¹ *Pierian*: "of or belonging to Pieria, a district of the Greek region of Macedonia just north of Mount Olympus, regarded as the home of the Muses in Greek and Roman mythology. Hence: of or relating to the Muses, or (by extension) poetry and learning; poetic" (*OED*).

Or see the pleasure that with careless wing
 Swept on, and flow'ry garlands toss'd around 20
 Disporting!²²² Try to call her back — as well
 Bid yesterday return, arrest the flight
 Of Time; or musing by a river's brink,
 Say to the wave that huddles swiftly by
 For ever, from thy fountain roll anew. 25
 The merriment, the tale, and heartfelt laugh
 That echo'd round the table, idle guests,
 Must rise, and serious inmates²²³ take their place.
 Reflection's daughters, sad and world-worn thoughts
 Dislodging Fancy's²²⁴ empire — Yet who knows 30
 Exact the balance of our loss and gain?
 Who knows how far a rattle may outweigh
 The mace or scepter? But as boys resign
 The play-thing, bauble²²⁵ of their infancy,
 So fares²²⁶ it with maturer years: they sage,²²⁷ 35
 Imagination's airy regions quit,
 And under Reason's banner²²⁸ take the field,
 With resolution face the cloud or storm,
 While all their former rainbows die away.
 Some to the palace with regardful step, 40
 And courtly²²⁹ blandishment²³⁰ resort, and there

²²² *Disporting*: a lively and entertaining activity

²²³ *Inmates*: "in relation to other persons: One who is the mate or associate of another or others in the same dwelling; one who dwells with others in a house." (*OED*)

²²⁴ *Fancy's*: imagination's.

²²⁵ *Bauble*: a toy, often a rattle.

²²⁶ *So fares it*: so it happens.

²²⁷ *Sage*: they, now wise, leave off imagination and join the forces of reason.

²²⁸ *Banner*: a flag used to signify and identify one's loyalty to a person, place, ideology, etc.

²²⁹ *Courtly*: elegant, refined, formal behaviour.

²³⁰ *Blandishment*: pleasing and alluring speech or action, flattery.

Advance obsequious;²³¹ in the sunshine bask
 Of princely grace, catch the creating eye,
 Parent of honours: — in the senate some
 Harangue²³² the full-bench'd auditory, and wield 45
 Their list'ning passion (such the pow'r, the sway
 Of Reason's eloquence!) — or at the bar,
 Where Cowper,²³³ Talbot, Somers, Yorke before
 Plead their way to glory's chair supreme,
 And worthy fill'd it. Let not these great names 50
 Damp,²³⁴ but incite: nor Murray's²³⁵ praise obscure
 Thy younger merit. Know, these lights, ere yet
 To noon-day lustre²³⁶ kindled, had their dawn.
 Proceed familiar²³⁷ to the gate of Fame,
 Nor think the task severe, the prize too high 55
 Of toil and honour, for thy father's son.



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²³¹ *Obsequious*: “compliant with the will or wishes of another” (*OED*).

²³² *Harangue*: the making of a long and often argumentative speech to an audience.

²³³ *Cowper*: William Cowper 1st Earl Cowper (1665-1723), Lord High Chancellor of Great Britain, not the poet William Cowper

²³⁴ *Damp*: dampen down, limit.

²³⁵ *Murray*: William Murray (b.1705), also known as the most powerful British jurist of the century.

²³⁶ *Lustre*: “the quality or condition of shining by reflected light” (*OED*).

²³⁷ *Familiar*: belonging to a household or group