

Nahum Tate

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Nahum Tate was an Irish poet and playwright born in 1652 in England, while his father was minister to a parish near Cambridge. His father, Faithful Teate, was a minister in the Church of Ireland with puritan leanings, who supported Cromwell during the Republican period. Following Tate's graduation from Trinity College Dublin in 1672 with a Bachelor of Arts, he moved to London to become a professional writer. Nahum Tate was a Royalist, and he may have changed the spelling of the family name to distance himself from his Republican father. Tate was reputed to be an extremely modest and quiet man, known more for his theatre adaptations and translations than his own poetic works, with the exception of his most well-known, mock-heroic poem *Panacea: A Poem upon Tea*. In 1681, Tate published *The History of King Lear*, an adaptation of Shakespeare's tragedy. Controversy surrounded Tate's version of *King Lear* in response to his addition of a romance and a revised ending in which Lear and Cordelia survive. Though this is his most frequently discussed work, his poetry career was significant enough to earn him the Poet Laureateship of England in 1692, a position which he held until his death in 1715. Tate is not remembered for being an exceptionally skilled writer, however, with much of his work "pilloried by Pope, Parnell, and Swift, and...subjected to almost universal contempt" (Hopkins).

"The Escape" is included in one of his first collections, *Poems by N. Tate*, published in London in 1677. The poem is in iambic tetrameter couplets, with each stanza ending in an iambic pentameter triplet. Most of the poems in this collection are pastoral, but romance is "generally painful for Tate's shepherds": According to Richard Spencer, "The Escape" provides a characteristic example of this inescapable, painful love as the fisher "in her eagerness to land her catch...lets him escape with a permanently painful jaw" (45). This unique contribution to eighteenth-century poetry can be considered a warning against the imprisonment of over-eager romantic pursuit.

Further Reading

Massai, Sonia. "Nahum Tate's Revision of Shakespeare's 'King Lear.'" *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, vol. 40, no. 3, 2000, pp. 435–50.

References

Hopkins, David. "Tate, Nahum (c. 1652–1715), Poet, Playwright, and Translator." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 2008.

Spencer, Christopher. *Nahum Tate*. Twayne, 1972.

The Escape¹

ON a Stream's Bank I saw her stand,
 A plyant² *Angle*³ in her Hand.
 I markt how she disguis'd the Hook,
 And cast her Bait into the Brook.
 The sport succeeded to her wish, 5
 For strait she hung a pondrous⁴ *Fish*,⁵
 But too too eager on her Prey,
 Refus'd to give the Captive Play
 Till Tir'd, himself he woud resign;
 But trusting to her slender Line, 10
 The struggling *Animal* enrag'd,
 With the rude check soon Disengag'd
 His wounded Jaws; but whilst He thus Regains
 His Liberty, the bearded⁶ wire remains
 And galls his tender Gills with restless Pains. 15

Is't not enough inhumane Maid,
 That *we* are by thy Wiles betray'd,
 But you your Treach'ry must employ,
 The Flood's Inhabitants to destroy?
 This *Fish* has my hard fortune shar'd, 20
 When first by thy false Charms Ensnar'd;

¹ *Poems by N. Tate*. London, 1677, pp. 45–46. *Eighteenth-Century Poetry Archive*

² *plyant* flexible

³ *angle* a fishing rod

⁴ *pondrous* ponderous, something that is slow or awkward because of its heavy weight

⁵ *pondrous Fish* in a later edition, changed to “master-fish”

⁶ *bearded* referring to a fishhook with a barb

For so I gorg'd ⁷the *Bait* you threw;
 Whilst (on your game too Eager) you
 Came violently to seize your Prey,
 Which with hard struggling broke away.
 But to what purpose am I Free,
 Living in *painful Liberty*?

25

In vain I boast, that I survive the Dart
 Whose *Venom'd Pile*⁸ lies *festringly*⁹ in my *Heart*,
 And (tho it kill not) galls¹⁰ with *restless smart*.¹¹

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⁷ *Gorg'd* engorged, swallowed whole

⁸ *Pile* a pointed stake driven into something

⁹ *festringly* festering, rotting or becoming infected

¹⁰ *galls* irritates

¹¹ *smart* intense or stinging pain