



# An accident in 1726

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## An Accident in 1726

IT is both uncomplimentary and fallacious to assume that our own age is responsible for the emergence of accidents on the highway. In the early eighteenth century when an entire family crowded into a coach bound for the country, it became necessary at times to perch a maid on the box beside the coachman, where she clung insecurely as the heavy vehicle lumbered over the uneven cobble pavements. And if the maid fell off, and the broad rim of a wheel passed over her — and such things did happen — the results were gruesome. Nor was one safer on the ill-kept country roads — though perhaps one need not fully credit the overturning of 'a fashionably high phaeton' that wrecked the health and happiness of two young females in Jane Austen's burlesque *Love and Freindship*.

It was a country accident that in 1726 nearly cost the life of the greatest poet of the day, Alexander Pope. On 22 September 1726 Lord Bolingbroke wrote to Swift narrating the episode, which had occurred early in the month as Pope returned after dark from Bolingbroke's magnificent place near Uxbridge, called (in keeping with his lordship's pose of expectant Cincinnatus) Dawley Farm. Let his Lordship report:

Have you heard of the accident which befel poor Pope in going lately from me? a Bridge was down, the coach forc'd to go thro' the water, the Bank Steep, an hole on one Side, a block of timber on the other, the night as dark as pitch. in short he overturn'd, the fall was broke by

the water, but the glasses were up, & he might have been drown'd if one of my men had not broke a glass & pull'd him out thro' the window, his right hand was Severely cut, but the Surgeon thinks him in no danger of losing the use of his fingers. however he has lately had very great pains in that arm from the shoulder downwards, which might create a Suspicion that some of the glass remain'd Still in the flesh. St André says there is none. . . .<sup>1</sup>

St André was a famous surgeon: Pope knew and used most of the best medical men. Dr Arbuthnot, who also saw the wound, specified in a letter to Swift, with elaborate allusion to Horace,<sup>2</sup> that it was the *left* hand that was injured. Pope, he writes, 'had that common with Horace, that it was occasioned by the trunk of a tree but it was trunco Rhaeda illapsa neque faunus ictum dextra levabat for he was wounded in the left hand.'<sup>3</sup> Gay, also writing the news to Swift, votes for the right hand.<sup>4</sup> Voltaire himself, who in November was at Dawley, sent effusive condolences which seem to confirm the right hand as injured: 'That water you fell in was not Hippocrene's water, otherwise it would have respected you. . . . Is it possible that those fingers which have written the Rape of the Lock, and the Criticism, which have dressed Homer so becomingly in an English coat, should

<sup>1</sup> British Museum Add. MS 4805, fol. 124.

<sup>2</sup> Ode xvii of Book II.

<sup>3</sup> British Museum Add. MS 4805, foll. 122-123.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, foll. 120-121.

have been so barbarously treated?'<sup>6</sup>

The pains in Pope's arm persisted, but Dr Arbuthnot reassured friends with his opinion that they were altogether rheumatic. Because of rheumatism Pope had at times—and at other times than the autumn of 1726—to use an amanuensis. Probably the pains came and went; for although on certain days he used an amanuensis, on other days he wrote with his own hand. Notably, on 23 September 1726 he addressed in his own hand a quatrain, never included in his *Works*, presenting a copy of his recently published translation of the *Odyssey* to the distinguished man of law, Nathaniel Pigott. Pigott lived at Whitton near the river Cran, where the accident took place, and to his house Pope evidently had been carried after the accident. This copy of the *Odyssey*, recently added to the treasures of the Harvard College Library, contains, pasted in, holograph versions of the prose epitaph which Pope composed after the death of Pigott in 1737, and contains also on a fly leaf the presentation verses, which are written in Pope's customarily clear hand and dated, as follows:

The Muse this one Verse to Learn'd Pigot addresses,

In whose Heart, like his Writings, was never found flaw;

Whom Pope prov'd his Friend in his two chief distresses,

Once in danger of Death, once in danger of Law.

Sept. 23. 1726.

Curiously enough another document bearing upon this accident has recently turned up and has been acquired by

<sup>6</sup> Pope's *Works* (ed. Elwin-Courthope), X, 132.

Harvard. It is an unpublished letter from Pope to John Brinsden, and it recommends for employment the footman who had pulled Pope from the coach when, as Gay put it, the water 'was up to the knots of his periwig.' The name of this heroic friend of English poetry is thus preserved, and the letter, slight as it is, deserves printing:

I beg you to forward the Inclosed by the safest hand you can. I have never been in town since we met, but intend soon to try to find you, Who am always sincerely, / Y<sup>r</sup> affectionate / humble Serv<sup>t</sup>, / A. Pope

There is a Man who formerly serv'd my Lord, who I think saved my Life in the Accident I had in the River at Whitton his name is Phil. Hanaus, of Brussels, he wants a footman's place & I wish you c<sup>d</sup> help him to one, if you know his Character not a blameable one.

The letter is addressed to 'Mr Brinsden, in Durham yard,' and all of the date except 'Nov<sup>r</sup>' is torn away. Brinsden had long been in the employment of Lord Bolingbroke, and if, as is conceivable, the letter was written in November, 1738, when Dawley was for sale and its staff of servants perhaps looking for new places, it is natural that the poet should turn for help to my lord's secretary.

It is pleasant to find Pope remembering his benefactor of years before; but those who know the poet well, know that he may frequently be found doing such kindnesses. In October, 1738, for example, he had moved Swift to promise William Lamb, son of George Lyttelton's nurse, a full place in Swift's cathedral choir; and in return Pope recommended Counsellor M'Aulay to Lyttelton and the Prince of Wales. It

would very likely be at this time or soon after that Pope was stirring Lord Gower to get a young poet, Samuel Johnson, made a Master of Arts by Dublin (which in 1765 made him a Doctor). This last gesture was un-

successful. One hopes Pope had better luck with the footman Phil. Hanaus, who had saved his life in the accident of 1726.

GEORGE SHERBURN

## A Letter in English by Stendhal

**A** COLLECTION of autographs now deposited in the Harvard College Library includes the letter printed below for the first time:

my dear, I shall be in the night of the 3 November at the door of the house of Mr. Cholat at Latour dupin. Write to this man. I shall spend Some hours with thee at your Seat of tuelins. The 4 I shall go out for Grenoble and the 5 for Paris were [sic] I ought to be th[c] first november.

'tis also possible that my departure from Milan being retardée, j could not be at Cholat's that the 4 november at midnight.

le jeune Beyle

24 october 1811

This clear if not fluent message is written *currente calamo*, in a larger hand than is customary with the writer, on a single and rather irregular sheet of white paper, measuring about 16.5 x 21.3 centimeters, and slightly torn across the right margin. Vertically, across the left margin, the following postscript is added:

I write have written from Roma to our good grandfather.

The outer side of the letter carries, along with the remnants of a red seal, two postmarks which respectively indicate the point of departure and the postal route — 'R. I. / MILANO' and

'R[OY]AUME D'ITALIE PAR CHAMBÉRY.' The address is as follows:

madame  
madame Pauline Perier  
rue de Sault,  
a Grenoble.  
Dept. de l'Isère

The young Henri Beyle, who signed his name here with a characteristic flourish, utilized a vast number of pseudonyms, and ultimately won his fame as Stendhal. The recipient of this note was his favorite sister Pauline, who three years previously had married the banker, François Périer-Lagrangé. She and Dr Henri Gagnon, the maternal grandfather mentioned in the postscript, were the only members of young Henri's family with whom he remained in close touch. Perhaps the fullest sequence of his letters is that which, especially through the earlier half of his career, he addressed to Pauline. With her he also liked to play the pedagogue, passing along bits of worldly knowledge as he acquired them. Partly for her instruction, partly for his privacy, he often dropped into English or quasi-English expressions. On 28 April 1810, for example, he wrote her a short letter entirely in English, quoting and recommending

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