

Letter from Sir Walter Raleigh to his wife.

Exam question*: look at the following words. Consider what the letter might be about and what the spelling reveals about the time when it was written.

Gonne

poore

knowth

God Almightye

Misery

persecutors

forgeve

devided

Blesse

mercy

cutt us asunder

Death

* This question using this letter was on the AQA spec A exam paper 'Unit 5: Language Variation and Change' in June 2006:
<http://www.aqa.org.uk/qual/gceasa/qp-ms/AQA-ENA5-W-QP-JUN06.PDF>

Read the letter carefully several times.

Whilst doing so, look out for:

- ★ Imperatives
- ★ Inflections from Old English
- ★ Spellings of words that have changed
- ★ Some standardisation albeit different from our spelling
- ★ Semantic change
- ★ Words from the semantic field of separation
- ★ Tone which is reminiscent of the Lord's Prayer
- ★ Use of personal pronouns
- ★ Parallelisms
- ★ Contrasting pairs
- ★ References to God
- ★ Capitalisation

When I am gone, no doubt you shall be sought unto by many, for the world thinks that I was very rich. But take heed of the pretences of men, and of their affections; for they last but in honest and worthy men, and no greater misery can befall you in this life, than to become a pray, and after to be despised. I speak it (God knows) not to dissuade you from marriage, - for that will be best for you - both in respect of God and the world. As for me, I am no more your's, nor you myne. Death hath cutt us asunder; and God hath devided me from the world, and you from me.

Remember your poore childe for his father's sake, that comforted you, and loved you in his happiest tymes.

Gett those letters (if it bee possible) which I writt to the Lords, wherein I sued for my lief but God knoweth that itt was for you and yours that I desired it, but itt is true that I disdain myself for begging itt. And know itt (deare wife) that your sonne is the childe of a true man, and who, in his own respect, despiseth Death, and all his misshapen and ouglie formes. I cannot wright much, God knowes how hardlie I stole this tyme, when all sleep; and it is tyme to separate my thoughts from the world, beg my dead body, which living was denyed you; and either lay it at Sheborne if the land continue, or in Exeter church, by my father's side, wher I can wright noe more. Tyme and Death call me awaye.

The everlasting, infinite powerfull, and inscutable God, that Almightye God, that is goodnes itself, mercy itself, the true life and light keep and yours; and have mercy on me, and teach me to forgeve my persecutors and false accusers; and send us to dwell in His glorious kingdome. My true wief farewell. Blesse my poore childe; pray for me. My true God hold you both in His armes.

Written with thy living hand of sometyme thy Husband, but now (alasse!) overthrowne

Your's that was; but nowe not my owne,

W Rawleigh

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From your analysis, what can you deduce about:

Context:

Purpose:

Audience:

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