

# To Sir John Lade, on His Coming of Age

<http://virginia-anthology.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Lade.mp3>

Johnson included this poem in a letter to Hester Thrale, his friend and John Lade's aunt. This poem commemorates Lade's twenty-first birthday, when Lade was to inherit his father's property. In the poem, Johnson gives Lade advice on what to do with the fortune he is about to receive. Johnson's advice did not take. Lade squandered his wealth, though this took place many years after Johnson's death. Although the poem seems lighthearted, the tone is, in fact, quite sarcastic, as Johnson warns Sir John about the folly of wealth.

The poem appears to be in trochaic tetrameter, which enhances the playful tone. Upon closer examination, however, it becomes clear that the poem is actually made up of alternating eight syllable and seven syllable lines. Thus, the expected tetrameter second line is incomplete, possibly signifying a lack of sincerity on the part of the poet. The rhyme scheme is an alternating rhyme, ABAB. The final line of the poem, which does not fit the rhyme scheme but is a slant rhyme (waste/last), further exemplifies this notion of incompleteness. This slant rhyme encourages the reader to stop and reread the shocking final line of the poem, which expresses the poet's true intentions.

Johnson never gave the poem a title. The working title here, "To Sir John Lade on His Coming of Age," was a title given by editors. This poem has also been titled "A Short Song of Congratulation."



Sir John Lade, as  
pictured in around 1778.  
(Wikimedia Commons)

Long-expected one and twenty  
Lingering year at last is flown,  
Pomp and pleasure, pride and plenty,  
Great Sir John, are all your own.

Loosened from the [minor's tether](#),  
Free to mortgage or to sell,  
Wild as wind, and light as feather  
Bid the slaves of thrift farewell.

[Call the Bettys, Kates, and Jennys](#)  
Every name that laughs at Care,  
Lavish of your grandsire's guineas,  
Show the spirit of an [heir](#).

All that prey on vice and folly  
Joy to see their quarry fly,  
Here the [Gamester](#) light and jolly,  
There the lender grave and sly.

Wealth, Sir John, was made to wander,  
Let it wander as it will;

See the jockey, see the Pander,  
Bid them come, and take their fill.

When the bonny Blade carouses,  
Pockets full and spirits high,  
What are acres? What are houses?  
Only dirt , or wet or dry.

If the guardian or the mother  
Tell the woes of wilful waste,  
Scorn their counsel and their pother,  
You can hang or drown at last.