

"An Ode [Rule, Britannia]"

By James Thomson

Correction, editorial commentary, and markup by Students and Staff of Marymount University

- [TP for Alfred: A Masque] -

- 42 -

An *ODE* . [Rule, Britannia]

1.

1 When *Britain* first, at heaven's command,
2 Arose from out the azure main,^{main};
3 *This* was the charter,^{charter} of the land,
4 And guardian Angels sung *this* strain:
5 "Rule *Britannia*,^{britannia}, rule the waves;
6 "*Britons* never will be slaves."

2.

7 The nations, not so blest as thee,
8 Must, in their turns, to tyrants fall:
9 While thou shalt flourish great and free,
10 The dread and envy of them all.
11 "Rule, &c.

3.

12 Still more majestic shalt thou rise,
13 More dreadful, from each foreign stroke:
14 As the loud blast that tears the skies,
15 Serves but to root thy native oak,^{oak}.
16 "Rule, &c.

4.

17 Thee haughty tyrants ne'er shall tame:
18 All their attempts to bend thee down,
19 Will but arouse thy generous flame;
20 But work their woe, and thy renown.
21 "Rule, &c.

5.

22 To thee belongs the rural reign;
23 Thy cities shall with commerce shine:
24 All thine shall be the subject main,
25 And every shore it circles thine.
26 "Rule, &c.

6.

27 The Muses, still with freedom found,
28 Shall to thy happy coast repair:
29 Blest isle! with matchless beauty crown'd,
30 And manly hearts to guard the fair.
31 "Rule, *Britannia*, rule the waves:
32 "*Britons* never will be slaves.

Footnotes

- main According to the OED (main, n.5a), the "main" is the open sea--the azure or blue sea, in this case.
- [TH]
- charter A charter is a founding document, but more specifically, a document from a sovereign source "granting privileges to, or recognizing the rights of,...certain classes" or groups of people (OED, n.1a). What entity grants these rights in the poem?
- [TH]
- britannia Britannia is a figurative, allegorical representation of Britain as a female warrior carrying a trident and a shield, often accompanied by a lion. The trident is the weapon of Neptune, the ancient Roman god of the sea, and in the 19th century, she became a vivid symbol of empire. We might keep in mind the role that white femininity might play in "civilizing" others. In the 1778 painting shown here, we see an unhelmeted Britannia accepting offerings from "the East" (*The East Offering its Richest to Britannia* , via [Wikipedia](#)).

- [TH]
- oak The native English oak tree (*quercus robur*) has long been a symbol of strength and justice ("[Oak Symbolism in the Light of Genomics](#)").
- [TH]