

# Miniver Cheevy



## POEM TEXT

1 Miniver Cheevy, child of scorn,  
 2 Grew lean while he assailed the seasons;  
 3 He wept that he was ever born,  
 4 And he had reasons.  
  
 5 Miniver loved the days of old  
 6 When swords were bright and steeds were prancing;  
 7 The vision of a warrior bold  
 8 Would set him dancing.  
  
 9 Miniver sighed for what was not,  
 10 And dreamed, and rested from his labors;  
 11 He dreamed of Thebes and Camelot,  
 12 And Priam's neighbors.  
  
 13 Miniver mourned the ripe renown  
 14 That made so many a name so fragrant;  
 15 He mourned Romance, now on the town,  
 16 And Art, a vagrant.  
  
 17 Miniver loved the Medici,  
 18 Albeit he had never seen one;  
 19 He would have sinned incessantly  
 20 Could he have been one.  
  
 21 Miniver cursed the commonplace  
 22 And eyed a khaki suit with loathing;  
 23 He missed the mediæval grace  
 24 Of iron clothing.  
  
 25 Miniver scorned the gold he sought,  
 26 But sore annoyed was he without it;  
 27 Miniver thought, and thought, and thought,  
 28 And thought about it.  
  
 29 Miniver Cheevy, born too late,  
 30 Scratched his head and kept on thinking;  
 31 Miniver coughed, and called it fate,  
 32 And kept on drinking.



## SUMMARY

Miniver Cheevy was somebody who was always wretchedly unhappy and full of contempt. Miniver wasted away while complaining about the passage of time. He cried over the fact that he was ever even born, and he believed he had valid reasons for this.

Miniver loved the olden days, when chivalrous heroes carried gleaming swords and rode around on noble horses. The mere sight of a brave historical warrior would make Miniver giddy with delight.

Miniver expressed sadness and despair over all the things that didn't exist anymore, and spent his time fantasizing instead of working. He fantasized about the ancient city of Thebes and King Arthur's mythical court at Camelot, as well as about the Greeks who defeated Priam (the king of Troy) in the Trojan War.

Miniver grieved over the fact that that modern times lacked the sense of respect and admiration that once gave so many historical figures such lasting reputations. He grieved for romance, now treated like frivolous enjoyment, and for art, which had no home or support in the modern world.

Miniver was obsessed with the Medici family, a rich and influential Italian dynasty, despite the fact that he had never actually met any of them. He would have done endless terrible things if it meant he could join the ranks of that family.

Miniver hated all the ordinary, everyday parts of the modern world, despising things like khaki military uniforms, which he believed could never measure up to the eloquence of medieval suits of armor.

And even though Miniver hated the idea of having to chase after money, he was also very unhappy without it. As such, he ended up spending all his time thinking about money.

Miniver Cheevy was born in the wrong era. Instead of doing anything with his life, though, Miniver puzzled over his discontent and coughed. He blamed his misfortune and unhappiness on fate, relieving himself of any responsibility, and went on drinking and wallowing in despair.



## THEMES



### THE DANGERS OF ROMANTICIZING THE PAST

The poem shows that excessive nostalgia can get in the way of a person's ability to enjoy the present. Miniver

Cheevy—the fictional character at the center of the poem—is so obsessed with the past and all of its apparent splendor that he simply cannot accept the conditions of his own life in the modern era. Instead of accepting his reality, then, he spends his time wishing he were in “the days of old / When swords were bright and steeds were prancing.”

By romanticizing experiences he'll never have, Miniver ends up cutting himself off from the world and living a stagnant, unengaged life. In turn, the poem implies that idealizing the past is a form of escapism that not only makes it harder to enjoy the present, but also leads to an unproductive, aimless existence.

Miniver Cheevy is especially attracted to what he sees as the valor and glamour of life in the past. However, he doesn't seem to make much of a distinction between specific historical periods. Rather, he glorifies life in ancient Greece right alongside life in medieval England, indicating that what he's mainly interested in is the general *idea* of “days of old.” He covets the vague idea of leading a life that is respectable and superior to everyday existence in modern times. And for this reason, he “mourn[s]” the loss of the gallantry and “renown” he associates with olden times, apparently unwilling to even entertain the idea that such things might still exist in his own century.

This thinking has clearly led Miniver to view himself as too good for his own time period. Having romanticized epochs ranging from antiquity to medieval times, Miniver acts as if he belongs to a superior era, believing that he was “born too late.” All in all, this is a pretty pretentious way to move through the world! This mindset enables Miniver to convince himself that he's better than his contemporaries, despite the fact that he's done nothing to actually prove this.

Miniver's obsession with the past and his complete disinterest in the present has clearly kept him from even *trying* to do something worthwhile with his life. “Miniver cursed the commonplace / And eyed a khaki suit with loathing,” the poem's speaker notes, implying that Miniver scorns the idea of dressing in the normal, drab clothing one might wear to an office (or, alternatively, the idea of joining the military, which used to issue khaki uniforms). This, in turn, suggests that Miniver thinks he's too good to work a steady job or generally go through the necessary motions of sustaining himself in modern times.

Instead, Miniver spends his time drinking and lamenting his so-called misfortune, cursing “fate” instead of actually doing anything to improve his life. In this way, it becomes clear that Miniver's preoccupation with the past—along with his sense of superiority over his contemporaries—keeps him from actively participating in the surrounding world. The poem thus warns against the dangers of overly romanticizing the past, which can lead to a sense of apathy and pompousness that completely divorces people from their own lives and realities.

### Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-32



## LINE-BY-LINE ANALYSIS

### LINES 1-4

*Miniver Cheevy, child of scorn,  
Grew lean while he assailed the seasons;  
He wept that he was ever born,  
And he had reasons.*

The poem's opening line introduces Miniver Cheevy as someone who has been disdainful of life ever since he was a child. The phrase “child of scorn” suggests that Miniver is and always has been highly critical of the world, though it's not yet clear why, exactly, he has such a disapproving outlook on life.

Building upon the conception of Miniver Cheevy as an unhappy, grouchy man, the second line suggests that he does not live a prosperous life. He is “lean,” suggesting that he's underfed and poor. In turn, the speaker subtly associates Miniver Cheevy's negative outlook on life with hardship and struggle.

At the same time, Miniver seems too distracted by his scornful attitude to pay attention to his health or well-being, an idea implied by the fact that he spends his time “assail[ing] the seasons” while he gets poorer. To “assail” means to attack or assault, and as such this phrase hints that Miniver hates the passage of time—an idea that will become clearer in the second stanza. For now, though, it's evident that Miniver is an unhappy man with a pessimistic worldview that keeps him from properly taking care of himself.

The opening stanza also establishes the poem's interesting meter. The first and fourth lines follow [iambic](#) tetrameter, meaning they contain four iambs—metrical feet made up of an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable (da-DUM). While these lines thus have eight syllables in total, the second line in each stanza actually has nine—ending each time with a final unstressed beat. To get fancy about it, this is something called [catalectic](#) iambic pentameter; it leaves the reader hanging, expect that final DUM.

The fourth line in each stanza is then *also* catalectic, featuring an incomplete line of iambic trimeter. This just means that it is made up of two iambs followed by just the *first half* of a third iamb. This might all seem confusing, so take a look at lines 2-4 to see how this changing meter affects the pace and feel of the poem:

Grew lean | while he | assailed | the sea- | sons;  
He wept | that he | was ev- | er born,  
And he | had rea- | sons.

Line 3 is a perfect line of iambic tetrameter, containing four iambs. Lines 2 and 4, on the other hand, end with those dangling unstressed beats, those strange half iambs. This makes the stanza feel a bit off-kilter and uncomfortable. Although the speaker claims that Miniver has "reasons" for being so scornful, the incomplete rhythmic quality of this line makes the speaker sound somewhat unsure and skeptical. As a result, it feels unlikely that Miniver actually has good reasons for being so negative.

This stanza also establishes the poem's ABAB [rhyme scheme](#): the first and third lines rhyme with each other, as do the second and fourth lines. The second and fourth lines also feature what's known as [feminine rhymes](#), or rhymes in which multiple syllables rhyme with each other. For instance, the first syllable of the word "seasons" rhymes with the first syllable of the word "reasons," while the final, unstressed syllables of each word also rhyme with each other: "seasons" and "reasons."

### LINES 5-8

*Miniver loved the days of old  
When swords were bright and steeds were prancing;  
The vision of a warrior bold  
Would set him dancing.*

At this point, the speaker reveals the reason that Miniver Cheevy is so unhappy: he's obsessed with "the days of old," or the olden days. This, apparently, is why he "assail[s] the seasons," hating the changing seasons because this only reminds him of his inability to turn back the hands of time and live in a period "when swords were bright and steeds were prancing." This [alludes](#) to an idealized image of chivalrous knights.

That Miniver fantasizes about "bright" swords and "prancing" horses is notable because it suggests that he has a rosy, glorified image of history. Rather than thinking about the many ways in which life in previous time periods was more difficult than life in the modern era, Miniver idealizes history by thinking only about the impressive aspects of things like knighthood. He romanticizes images of brave fighters so much that he would start "dancing" if he were to ever see one. Miniver's glorification of the past makes sense of his discontent with this own life; after all, it's difficult to live a life full of swords and "steeds" in modern times (and life certainly wasn't easy in the age of knights either!).

These lines are very [consonant](#), making the language sound strong and decisive. In particular, the speaker leans heavily on the /w/ sound, using it to create [alliteration](#) in lines 6 through 8:

When swords **w**ere bright and steeds **w**ere prancing  
The vision of a **w**arrior bold  
Would set him dancing.

This prominent /w/ sound combines with the speaker's use of

[sibilance](#) to create a well-balanced overall sound. Indeed, the speaker features the /s/ sound in words like "swords," "steeds," "prancing," "set," and "dancing." In turn, the softness of this hissing sound pairs well with the rounded but still strong /w/ sound, making the speaker's words sound measured and poetic.

### LINES 9-12

*Miniver sighed for what was not,  
And dreamed, and rested from his labors;  
He dreamed of Thebes and Camelot,  
And Priam's neighbors.*

Unable to go back in time and live in the periods he loves so much, Miniver Cheevy does nothing but pine for a life he'll never be able to have. Lines 9 and 10 cast him as a dreamer who is completely disengaged with his own life. Miniver "rest[s] from his labors," meaning that he can't be bothered to work in order to sustain himself. Instead of "labor[ing]" for a better life, he fantasizes about the past, thinking about Thebes, Camelot, and Priam.

Thebes is an important place in Greek mythology, as it served as the backdrop for famous tales about well-known figures (like, for instance, [Oedipus](#)) and their many adventures and conflicts. Camelot, on the other hand, is the idyllic, legendary castle associated with King Arthur, a (most likely) fictional figure from the fifth and sixth centuries. Lastly, Priam was the king of Troy during the Trojan War.

These [allusions](#) to various historical and legendary figures and events hint at the fact that Miniver's obsession with the past is, when it comes down to it, unreasonable and even somewhat delusional. For instance, most of the stories from Greek mythology that are based in Thebes are full of violence and tragedy. And yet, Miniver thinks only about "bold" warriors and "bright" swords.

Most historians agree that Camelot was a fictional castle, and though there are a number of delightful legends that take place in King Arthur's court, few people consider these stories to be historically accurate. And while historians do think the Trojan War may have actually happened in some form, the stories about it are all the stuff of myth and legend (passed down in works like [The Iliad](#)). In this way, the poem subtly reveals that Miniver's fascination with history is out of touch with reality, as he romanticizes these things without fully stopping to think about them.

What's more, it's worth noting that Miniver conflates multiple periods of history with one another, jumping from thoughts about ancient Greece all the way to the sixth century, when King Arthur was supposedly active. This makes it clear that Miniver is not necessarily intrigued by specific eras, but instead captivated by the vague *idea* of the past. It's fair to say that his interest in the past has more to do with a desire to escape the present than with an actual fondness of history.

At this point in the poem, readers should notice the speaker's use of [repetition](#), which gives the lines a feeling of consistency. Each stanza begins with an [anaphora](#), as the speaker places Miniver's name at the beginning of the stanza's opening line. The speaker uses more anaphora in lines 10 and 11 by repeating the word "dreamed" near the beginning of both phrases. In doing so, the speaker emphasizes the fact that Miniver's thoughts about the past are nothing but dreams, once again casting him as an idle person who is disengaged from modern life.

The emphasis placed on the word "dreamed" is further accentuated by the repetition of the [assonant](#) /ee/ sound, which appears not only in both instances of "dreamed," but also in "Thebes." The speaker thus manages to make this stanza sound musical while also underlining the extent to which Miniver is distanced from reality.

### LINES 13-16

*Miniver mourned the ripe renown  
That made so many a name so fragrant;  
He mourned Romance, now on the town,  
And Art, a vagrant.*

The poem's fourth stanza focuses on Miniver's belief that the past is superior to the present. This is why he "mourn[s]" things like the "ripe renown / That made so many a name so fragrant." In other words, Miniver wants to be respected (or "renowned") in the same way that gallant knights and heroic figures are praised and held in high esteem by society. He wants his name to have the same appeal and influence as the historical figures he covets.

However, he apparently doesn't think it's actually possible to gain such prestige in modern times. Instead of trying to do something that might earn him respect, then, he merely laments the state of the world, acting as if everything he values has been lost to the times.

Miniver even goes so far as to bemoan the loss of "Romance" and "Art," acting as if these virtuous things aren't what they used to be. "Romance" likely refers to chivalrous and epic tales of courtly love. Whereas romance in the past was something deeply serious and meaningful, now it's "out on the town"—a phrase implying that, in Miniver's estimation, modern dating is overly frivolous and concerned with instant gratification and fun.

At the same time, the mention of art in the following line suggests that "Romance" could be an [allusion](#) to the Romantic movement in art and literature. To be fair, then, the kind of "Romance" Miniver is thinking of actually *would* be dead, at least considering the fact that the Romantic movement ended in the late 18th century!

The idea that Romance is "now on the town," though, suggests that Miniver thinks that the lofty values set forth during the

Romantic era—which championed things like beauty, nature, and tranquility—have been debased and ruined by the everyday hustle and bustle of city life, ultimately transformed into common and unremarkable ideas.

To further illustrate this point, the speaker uses [personification](#) indicating that Miniver thinks art has become a "vagrant." Vagrants are people who have no home and, consequently, wander from one place to the next. Characterizing art in this way implies that what was once seen as refined, thoughtful, and respectable has now taken on a low-brow existence, implying that Miniver has a very poor opinion of what art has become. The modern world, Miniver thinks, has no place in it for real art.

All these beliefs demonstrate just how pretentious Miniver Cheevy is. While it's true that art changes and that various artistic movements come to a close, to "mourn" art suggests that it might as well be dead. It's thus clear just how poorly Miniver thinks of the time period he lives in—an idea that aligns with the fact that he seems to think it's impossible to gain the kind of "renown" he yearns for in modern times. Of course, readers know that it is possible to win respect in the modern era; the problem, though, is that Miniver is completely uninterested in trying to do this, instead investing himself in the past.

These lines are very [alliterative](#) and [consonant](#), as the speaker plays with the /m/, /n/, and /r/ sounds in particular:

*Miniver mourned the ripe renown  
That made so many a name so fragrant;  
He mourned Romance, now on the town,  
And Art, a vagrant.*

These sounds are a mouthful and they slow readers down. This is significant in a poem with such a bouncy [iambic](#) rhythm and short, rhyming lines, all of which encourage readers to move quickly through the words. Here, though, the speaker uses strong consonance sounds to reign in the pace, and this reflects Miniver's mournful, unhappy attitude. Although the poem has a cheerful lilt to it, then, brief moments of dense consonance help convey a sense of discontent that matches Miniver's dim view of the world.

### LINES 17-20

*Miniver loved the Medici,  
Albeit he had never seen one;  
He would have sinned incessantly  
Could he have been one.*

The speaker mentions "the Medici" at the beginning of this stanza, [alluding](#) to a famous Italian family that came to prominence in the 15th century. The [Medici](#) family established the largest bank in Europe in the 1400s and eventually became monarchs. Four popes and two queens of France also belonged to the family. In short, the Medicis were very, very powerful.

As such, it makes perfect sense that Miniver would obsess over them. In particular, Miniver's apparent love of art aligns with his interest in the Medicis, since one of the family's most impactful legacies is that they funded and sponsored some of the greatest art and architecture to come out of the Renaissance.

Despite Miniver's obsession with the Medici family, though, it's worth noting the speaker's assertion that Miniver has "never seen one" of the family members. After all, the Medici dynasty fell in the 18th century, causing the family's influence to drop off. For all intents and purposes, the family died out and doesn't exist in any meaningful way in Miniver's time.

All the same, the speaker insists that Miniver "would have sinned incessantly" if it meant he could be part of the Medici family. Once again, this shows the extent to which Miniver is out of touch with reality. Although it would mean essentially nothing to be part of the Medici family in modern times, Miniver is still obsessed with the idea of being associated with such a wealthy and influential clan of the past. This also implies that Miniver desires political power, and would do whatever it takes to get it.

The [assonant](#) /ee/ sound is very prominent in this section, appearing in words like "Medici," "Albeit," "seen," and "incessantly." The [alliterative](#) /m/, meanwhile, connects "Miniver" to "the Medici" family he so loves. Finally, [sibilance](#) adds an appropriately sinister hiss to the phrase "sinned incessantly."

## LINES 21-24

*Miniver cursed the commonplace  
And eyed a khaki suit with loathing;  
He missed the mediæval grace  
Of iron clothing.*

In this stanza, readers see the extent to which Miniver rejects and criticizes modern-day life. Because he's so obsessed with the past, he sees his own circumstances as uninteresting and inferior. The fact that he spurns "the commonplace" implies that he thinks he's too good for the current time period, clearly believing that he's above doing things like wearing a "khaki suit."

While this may in part refer to what he sees as the boring working outfit of the modern man, it's also a specific [allusion](#) to military uniforms, which often use the material—the drabness of khaki Miniver then contrasts with the shiny gleam of suits of armor. Miniver has romanticized battle and warfare throughout the poem—with his praise of swords, knights, and the Greeks' destruction of Troy—but it seems modern military holds no interest for him.

This is an important aspect of the poem, since it reveals that Miniver's romanticization of the past is more than a simple interest in history—it's also a pretentious preoccupation that enables Miniver to see himself as better than his supposedly unremarkable contemporaries.

There is also a certain amount of [irony](#) in this stanza, since there are few things with less "grace" than a medieval suit of armor. After all, the primary definition of the word "grace" has to do with ease of movement, and suits of iron *definitely* aren't easy to move in! Combined with the antiquated spelling of the word "medieval," then, it becomes clear that the poem is mocking Miniver Cheevy and his absurd worldview.

It's also worth pointing out that Miniver's distaste for khaki suits aligns with line 10's assertion that he "dreamed" and "rested from his labors." In addition to being used in military uniforms, Khaki suits are the kind of clothing that a person might wear to a modern office.

The fact that Miniver abhors them supports the notion that he has rejected the entire prospect of working in order to sustain himself; he has "rested from his labors," apparently deciding that he's too good to go through even the most necessary motions of modern life. In turn, readers see that his fixation with the past has led to a certain kind of arrogance and pompousness that will ultimately keep him from ever succeeding.

Lines 21 and 22 feature the [alliteration](#) and [consonance](#) of the /k/ sound (sometimes appearing as a hard /c/), which gives the beginning of this stanza a biting, harsh tone:

Miniver cursed the commonplace  
And eyed a khaki suit with loathing

The [sibilance](#) here, also highlighted above, adds to the sense of bitterness, making it seem as though the words are being spat out. This conveys Miniver's absolute disdain for "the commonplace" and things like khaki suits. The sound of the language reflects the depths of Miniver's discontent.

## LINES 25-28

*Miniver scorned the gold he sought,  
But sore annoyed was he without it;  
Miniver thought, and thought, and thought,  
And thought about it.*

Although Miniver has no interest in actually working to sustain himself, he still needs money. The speaker highlights this dynamic by saying, "Miniver scorned the gold he sought," suggesting that Miniver dislikes the fact that he's forced to seek out money even though he doesn't want to work.

If he doesn't make an income, he is "sore annoyed," since without money it's impossible to lead the lavish, outdated lifestyle he yearns to live. Nonetheless, even this doesn't seem to motivate him to actually get to work; instead, he simply *thinks* about money, spending his time cursing his misfortune and wishing for a different life.

The use of [diacope](#) and [epizeuxis](#) in lines 27 and 28 helps call attention to Miniver's lack of concrete action. By repeating

"thought" four times over the course of two short lines, the speaker emphasizes the fact that, although he's unhappy, all Miniver does is *think* about his predicament. Accordingly, Miniver is presented as a complacent, lazy person who would rather complain than do anything to improve his life.

The repetition of the word "thought" also builds up a certain tension as readers work their way through line 27 toward the conclusion of the stanza at the end of line 28. This, in turn, makes the incomplete feeling of line 28's meter even more noticeable, since it's technically a line of trimeter but it lacks the final syllable in the last foot:

And **thought** | **about** | it.

The omission of a final stressed syllable gives this phrase a defeated, falling sound that captures Miniver's idle, inactive way of moving through life. After the narrator builds up tension by repeating the phrase "and thought" multiple times with brief [caesuras](#) between each one, this line feels mildly disappointing with its incompleteness and somewhat awkward rhythm. As a result, the poem's sound reflects Miniver's ineffectual, fairly pathetic personality.

## LINES 29-32

*Miniver Cheevy, born too late,  
Scratched his head and kept on thinking;  
Miniver coughed, and called it fate,  
And kept on drinking.*

The final stanza builds upon the idea of Miniver Cheevy as an idle man who, despite his discontent, is unwilling to do anything to improve his situation. Of course, this is partially because the root of his discontent is that he was "born too late," something that cannot be changed.

This, however, is not to say that Miniver is justified in his wallowing. [Ironically](#) enough, Miniver's belief that splendor and glory have been lost to history is *exactly* what keeps him from embodying such virtues in the modern era. In other words, by spending all his time obsessing over how the past was better than the present, Miniver ensures his own unhappiness.

To that end, Miniver sits there thinking about how he would have been happier in a different time period. Rather than leading a productive life, he dwells upon what he sees as his misfortune, and this thought process causes him to do little more than scratch his head.

Meanwhile, his life deteriorates around him, as evidenced by the fact that he appears to be in poor health, since he has a cough. Instead of paying attention to this and taking charge of his own life, though, he blames "fate," once again demonstrating his laziness. In keeping with this, he goes on drinking, drowning in his own misery rather than accepting his circumstances and actually doing something worthwhile with himself.

The [repetition](#) in "Miniver Cheevy" once more comes to the forefront of the poem when the speaker uses Miniver's full name in line 29. This recalls the first line of the poem, thereby giving this final section a feeling of circularity and, in turn, conclusion. This is heightened by the [caesura](#) after the speaker's repetition of Miniver's name, since this brief pause causes readers to slow down as they make their way through the poem's final lines.

The same thing is true of the caesura in line 31, which segments the rhythm and makes the line sound slower and, therefore, more conclusive: "Miniver coughed, || and called it fate." This helps the speaker tightly control the pace of the poem, which ultimately creates the expectation that the final line will also sound measured and final.

However, line 32 is yet another incomplete ([catalectic](#)) line of trimeter, meaning that it has an unbalanced, falling sound. As such, the very last line of the poem isn't nearly as satisfying as readers might expect it to be, and this aligns with Miniver's defeatist attitude. In the same way that Miniver has resigned himself to drinking his problems away, then, the poem's rhythm simply trails off.



## SYMBOLS



### WAR AND BATTLE

Miniver's obsession with brave warriors of the past represents his desire to be seen as a respected hero. In his imagination, gallant knights used to carry around "bright" swords while galloping on impressive "steeds"—an idea that makes him giddy with excitement. Similarly, he spends his time dreaming about the sites of mythical and legendary battles, fantasizing about places like Camelot, where King Arthur's Knights of the Round Table used to live and fight. He also seems to have an interest in the Trojan War, judging by the fact that he enjoys thinking about the Greeks who defeated Priam in Troy.

Given his interest in old, legendary battles, one would think that Miniver would be eager to prove himself as a modern-day warrior. However, he rejects what he sees as the unremarkable station of a 20th-century soldier, despising the military's drab khaki uniforms and wishing he could dress in the impressive suits of armor that chivalrous knights used to wear.

In turn, it becomes clear that Miniver's preoccupation with battle isn't about the actual act of fighting, but about the glory and honor he believes comes along with such things. Accordingly, the idea of soldierly combat comes to [symbolize](#) Miniver's superficial way of moving through the world, ultimately spotlighting his vain desire for prestige and renown.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Lines 6-8:** "When swords were bright and steeds were prancing; / The vision of a warrior bold / Would set him dancing."
- **Lines 11-12:** "He dreamed of Thebes and Camelot, / And Priam's neighbors."
- **Lines 21-24:** "Miniver cursed the commonplace / And eyed a khaki suit with loathing; / He missed the mediæval grace / Of iron clothing."



## POETIC DEVICES

### REPETITION

[Repetition](#) is built into the poem because the speaker begins every stanza by stating Miniver's name, which creates an [anaphora](#). This enhances the poem's feeling of consistency, but it also draws attention to the absurd nature of Miniver's name. A "miniver," after all, is a white fur that lines certain kinds of fancy clothing. By repeating Miniver's name so often, then, the speaker increases the likelihood that readers will note the absurdity of this man's name—which is fitting, since Miniver clearly likes to see himself as the kind of person who would wear lavish, expensive clothing.

The speaker also uses repetition within single stanzas, often making use of anaphora to create a parallel structure between the first and second halves of a stanza. For example, the fourth stanza features the word "mourned," which appears at the beginning of the first and third lines:

Miniver **mourned** the ripe renown  
That made so many a name so fragrant;  
He **mourned** Romance, now on the town,  
And Art, a vagrant.

In this case, the stanza's third line mirrors the construction of its first line, making it possible for the speaker to build upon the general idea by clarifying the *actual* things Miniver thinks have disappeared or deteriorated over time (namely, "Romance" and "Art").

The speaker uses anaphora again in lines 10 and 11:

And dreamed, and rested from his labors;  
He dreamed of Thebes and Camelot,

This repetition stresses the extent to which Miniver loses himself in fantasies of the past. In this way, repetition helps the speaker depict Miniver as somebody who is out of touch with reality.

In keeping with this image of Miniver as an out-of-touch dreamer, the speaker uses both [diacope](#) and [epizeuxis](#) in lines 27 and 28:

Miniver thought, and thought, and thought,  
And thought about it.

The repetition of the word "thought" is a diacope, as the speaker uses the word multiple times within the span of just two lines. The complete phrase "and thought," though, is an epizeuxis because the speaker repeats it three times in a row with no intervening words. Once again, then, the speaker's repetition accentuates Miniver's tendency toward inaction, inviting readers to consider this idle man's inability to do anything but sit there and think about his unhappiness.

### Where Repetition appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "Miniver Cheevy"
- **Line 5:** "Miniver"
- **Line 9:** "Miniver"
- **Line 10:** "dreamed"
- **Line 11:** "dreamed"
- **Line 13:** "Miniver," "mourned"
- **Line 15:** "mourned"
- **Line 17:** "Miniver"
- **Line 21:** "Miniver"
- **Line 25:** "Miniver"
- **Line 27:** "thought," "and thought," "and thought"
- **Line 28:** "And thought"
- **Line 29:** "Miniver Cheevy"
- **Line 30:** "and kept on"
- **Line 32:** "And kept on"

### ALLITERATION

The poem's use of [alliteration](#) adds to its musicality and also draws readers attention to certain words and phrases. In fact, there isn't a single stanza in the poem that doesn't have some form of alliteration!

Sometimes this alliteration is concentrated and brief, like when the speaker repeats the /ch/ sound in the first line: "Miniver Cheevy, child of scorn." This repeated sound gives this opening line a cutting, abrasive feel. In turn, the poem's initial sound matches Miniver's bitter outlook on life.

In other moments, though, alliteration simply enhances the poem's musicality. This is the case in the second stanza, when the /w/ sound alliterates multiple times in lines 6 through 8:

When swords **w**ere bright and steeds **w**ere prancing;  
The vision of **w**arrior bold  
**W**ould set him dancing.

This /w/ sound makes the stanza feel cohesive and particularly poetic. The /w/ sound is rounded and pleasant, helping the speaker call attention to Miniver's affinity for the past and all of its supposed splendor.

By contrast, the hard /c/ sound in the last two lines—"Miniver coughed, and called it fate, / And kept on drinking"—conveys an unpleasantness that parallels Miniver's discontent and poor health. Throughout the poem, then, the speaker uses alliteration not only to make the poem sound cohesive and musical, but also as a way of matching the sound to Miniver's various emotions and circumstances.

#### Where Alliteration appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "Cheevy," "child"
- **Line 3:** "He," "wept," "he," "was"
- **Line 4:** "he," "had"
- **Line 6:** "When," "were," "were"
- **Line 7:** "warrior"
- **Line 8:** "Would"
- **Line 9:** "what," "was"
- **Line 13:** "Miniver," "mourned," "ripe," "renown"
- **Line 14:** "made," "many"
- **Line 15:** "mourned"
- **Line 17:** "Miniver," "Medici"
- **Line 18:** "he," "had," "seen"
- **Line 19:** "He," "have," "sinned"
- **Line 20:** "he," "have"
- **Line 21:** "cursed," "commonplace"
- **Line 22:** "khaki"
- **Line 23:** "missed," "mediæval"
- **Line 25:** "scorned," "sought"
- **Line 26:** "sore," "was," "without"
- **Line 27:** "thought," "and," "thought," "and," "thought"
- **Line 28:** "And," "thought"
- **Line 30:** "his," "head"
- **Line 31:** "coughed," "called"
- **Line 32:** "kept"

## ASSONANCE

"Miniver Cheevy" is a very [assonant](#) poem. This becomes clear as early as the first stanza, which spotlights the long /ee/ sound:

Miniver Cheevy, child of scorn,  
Grew lean while he assailed the seasons;  
He wept that he was ever born,  
And he had reasons.

The sheer number of times that this sound appears in just four lines (eight, to be exact) makes the speaker's words seem particularly poetic—almost like a song or well-known nursery rhyme. This assonance also gives the stanza a unified sound that draws readers from one line to the next, creating a certain sense of consistency that offsets the fact that the poem's meter varies a bit from line to line.

In other moments assonance reflects a line's content, such as when the speaker repeats the /ay/ sound in line 14:

That made so many a name so fragrant

This form of assonance adds to the pleasantness of the line, making it sound tight-knit and rich. The /ay/ sound builds up until the speaker finally says the word "fragrant." In turn, the assonance here accentuates the line's most important word, emphasizing that Miniver wishes his *own* name had the same appeal as the "fragrant" names of famous, renowned historical figures.

Similarly, a phrase like "sinned incessantly" (which appears in line 19) benefits from assonance, which calls special attention to the words. In this case, the short /ih/ sound stands out in the word "sinned" before echoing immediately afterwards in the word "incessantly." In turn, this assonant echo stresses the idea that Miniver wouldn't just commit small sins if it meant he could join the Medici family; rather, he would sin *incessantly*, going to great lengths and doing terrible things just to be a member of a respected dynasty.

The use of assonance—combined with the hissing /s/ [sibilance](#) here—brings this idea to the forefront of the poem, enabling the speaker to push the matter in a subtle but still noticeable way. All in all, then, assonance not only enhances the poem's texture and elevates its language, but also helps carve out important ideas.

#### Where Assonance appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "Cheevy"
- **Line 2:** "lean," "he," "seasons"
- **Line 3:** "He," "wept," "he," "ever"
- **Line 4:** "he," "reasons"
- **Line 6:** "swords"
- **Line 7:** "warrior"
- **Line 10:** "dreamed"
- **Line 11:** "dreamed," "Thebes"
- **Line 14:** "made," "name," "fragrant"
- **Line 15:** "now," "town"
- **Line 17:** "Medici"
- **Line 18:** "Albeit," "he," "seen"
- **Line 19:** "sinned," "incessantly"
- **Line 20:** "he," "been"
- **Line 22:** "eyed"
- **Line 24:** "iron"
- **Line 25:** "scorned"
- **Line 26:** "sore"
- **Line 30:** "his," "head," "kept," "thinking"
- **Line 31:** "Miniver," "coughed," "called," "it"
- **Line 32:** "drinking"

## CONSONANCE

"Miniver Cheevy" is filled with [consonance](#), making it feel musical and memorable throughout. Take, for example, the first line:



Miniver Cheevy, child of scorn.

The /v/ sound in "Miniver" reappears in both "Cheevy" and "of" (which, despite its spelling, creates a subtle /v/ sound). Likewise, the /ch/ sound in "Cheevy" can be found in "child." Lastly, both the /r/ and /n/ sounds in the word "scorn" recall the /r/ and /n/ sounds in "Miniver." The dense consonance here adds a sort of chewiness or toughness to this opening line, reflecting the pessimistic character at hand.

Throughout, the use of devices like consonance, [assonance](#), and [alliteration](#) add to the sense that the poem is trying to impart some sort of lesson to readers. These shared sounds elevate the poem's language, making it feel like a popular song or nursery rhyme that people might repeat as a cautionary tale about the dangers of romanticizing the past.

Consonance also at times reflects the specific content of a line or phrase. Note, for example, the [sibilance](#) and [consonant](#) /n/ of "sinned incessantly." The /s/ here creates a sinister hiss, while the /n/ causes a clenching of the mouth. Altogether, the consonance here evokes the dastardly depths to which Miniver is willing to go for power. That these words are also assonant (on the short /ih/ sound) makes them stand out all the more strongly.

Sibilance again appears in lines 21-23, here alongside the sharp /k/ sound:

Miniver cursed the commonplace  
And eyed a khaki suit with loathing;  
He missed the mediæval grace

Again, these sounds add a bitter, biting hiss to the lines that reflects Minister's resentful outlook on the world. The /m/ consonance adds to the lines' intensity as well, boosting the volume on the poem, in a sense.

Later, the flutter of /m/ and /n/ sounds in "made so many a name" evokes that multitude of names. The phrase itself sounds "fragrant," or pleasant and memorable.

The poem's final stanza is dense with consonance as well, particularly on that sharp /k/ sound. Again, this adds to the biting bitterness of Miniver's outlook on life, as does the subtler /t/ sound and the /ch/ of Cheevy's own name. And, finally, the shared /f/ sound of "coughed" and "fate" connects Miniver's poor well-being to his refusal to take responsibility for his happiness (defaulting instead to "fate"):

Miniver Cheevy, born too late,  
Scratched his head and kept on thinking;  
Miniver coughed, and called it fate,  
And kept on drinking.

### Where Consonance appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "Miniver," "Cheevy," "child," "of," "scorn"
- **Line 2:** "lean," "while," "assailed," "seasons"
- **Line 3:** "wept," "was"
- **Line 4:** "he," "had"
- **Line 5:** "Miniver," "loved," "days," "of," "old"
- **Line 6:** "When," "swords," "were," "bright," "steeds," "were," "prancing"
- **Line 7:** "vision," "of," "warrior," "bold"
- **Line 8:** "Would," "set," "dancing"
- **Line 9:** "what," "was"
- **Line 10:** "dreamed," "labors"
- **Line 11:** "dreamed," "Thebes," "Camelot"
- **Line 12:** "Priam's," "neighbors"
- **Line 13:** "Miniver," "mourned," "ripe," "renown"
- **Line 14:** "made," "many," "name"
- **Line 15:** "mourned," "Romance," "now," "on," "town"
- **Line 16:** "Art," "vagrant"
- **Line 17:** "Miniver," "loved," "Medici"
- **Line 18:** "had," "never," "seen," "one"
- **Line 19:** "sinned," "incessantly"
- **Line 20:** "been," "one"
- **Line 21:** "Miniver," "cursed," "commonplace"
- **Line 22:** "khaki," "suit," "with," "loathing"
- **Line 23:** "missed," "mediæval," "grace"
- **Line 24:** "iron," "clothing"
- **Line 25:** "Miniver," "scorned," "gold," "sought"
- **Line 26:** "sore," "annoyed," "was," "without"
- **Line 29:** "Miniver," "Cheevy," "too late"
- **Line 30:** "Scratched," "his," "head," "kept," "thinking"
- **Line 31:** "Miniver," "coughed," "called," "fate"
- **Line 32:** "kept," "drinking"

### ALLUSION

Because the poem centers around Miniver's romanticization of the past, it contains a handful of [allusions](#) to various historical periods.

The first one that appears is somewhat vague, as the speaker references a time "when swords were bright and steeds were prancing." Although this mention of swords and horses doesn't evoke a specific year in history, it is still an allusion to the days when chivalrous knights rode around acting like brave "warrior[s]." This makes it clear that Miniver is charmed by the kind of gallantry and heroism that were prominent during the Medieval and the Renaissance periods.

This affinity for the past becomes more specific in the second stanza when the speaker lists off the things Miniver spends his time fantasizing about—namely, Thebes, Camelot, and the Greeks who wrought destruction on Troy. The mention of Thebes is an allusion to a Greek city where many of the tales from Greek mythology take place. The reference to Camelot, however, jumps forward in time by quite a bit, speeding into the

Medieval Period and referencing the castle and court where the famous (but most likely fictional) King Arthur hosted his Knights of the Round Table. Lastly, the mention of "Priam's neighbors" is an allusion to the ancient Greeks who won the Trojan War (Priam was the king of Troy at the time of the war).

These allusions are wide-ranging in terms of the vast amount of history they cover. This, in turn, sheds light on the nature of Miniver's obsession with the past: rather than fixating on a specific historical period, Miniver is enthralled by the entire idea of "the days of old." All he wants, it seems, is to go back in time to *any* period in which there were "bold" warriors and "renown[ed]" figures.

This outlook makes sense of the poem's allusion to the Medici family, a rich and powerful Italian dynasty that lasted from the 15th century to the 18th century. Over this time, this family produced four popes and two queens of France, among other influential figures. The vast scope of this family's success, then, is exactly the sort of thing that would interest Miniver. Rather than latching onto and idolizing specific people from the Medici family and modeling himself after them, Miniver merely daydreams about somehow *being* a Medici—an unrealizable dream that is, above all, unproductive.

The speaker's mention of Miniver's disdain for "khaki suit[s]" is also likely an allusion to the military uniform U.S. soldiers wore in the early 20th century. With this in mind, the allusion clarifies Miniver's aversion to the idea of committing himself to the life of a modern soldier, despite the fact that he supposedly reveres warriors.

In reality, the only warriors Miniver idolizes are knights who wore iron suits during Medieval times. Yet the mention of "grace" implies that what Miniver is *most* interested in is the impressive *look* of the knights' armor—not the courageousness of the men themselves. And, of course, this idea is quite ridiculous altogether; it was certainly very difficult to move with grace in a heavy suit of armor!

As such, Miniver's exaltation of history comes to seem empty and superficial, and the allusions to the past made throughout the poem show that he's only interested in history because he has romanticized selective elements of the past without considering the everyday trials and tribulations that are always part of life, regardless of the time period.

#### Where Allusion appears in the poem:

- **Lines 6-8:** "When swords were bright and steeds were prancing; / The vision of a warrior bold / Would set him dancing."
- **Lines 11-12:** "He dreamed of Thebes and Camelot, / And Priam's neighbors."
- **Lines 17-20:** "Miniver loved the Medici, / Albeit he had never seen one; / He would have sinned incessantly / Could he have been one."

- **Lines 22-24:** "And eyed a khaki suit with loathing; / He missed the mediæval grace / Of iron clothing."

## PERSONIFICATION

The speaker [personifies](#) "scorn," a word that describes the feeling of contempt or disdain. In this context, "scorn" is cast as a Miniver's parent (or parents). This, in turn, sets readers up to see Miniver as a bitter and chronically unhappy man. After all, if he emerged from scorn as a child, it would be quite unlikely that he'd have a positive, rosy worldview as an adult.

The speaker also uses personification in the fourth stanza, saying that Miniver "mourned Romance, now on the town, / and Art, a vagrant." This use of personification provides a window into how Miniver views romance and art. Miniver believes that things like courtly love and epic romance have become commonplace and unremarkable. Romance has lost its meaning and significance, becoming worthless in the everyday life of the modern era. It is, Miniver believes, like any old person "on the town," walking without prestige through the streets.

Similarly, the personification of art as a "vagrant" suggests that there is no place for it in modern culture. Art is thus forced to wander around looking for a home even though people used to uplift and celebrate it.

In this way, the personification in "Miniver Cheevy" helps the speaker depict Miniver's disposition and worldview more vividly. By using personification to both describe Miniver and to unveil his pessimistic perspective, the speaker gives readers a more thorough understanding of this unpleasant man.

#### Where Personification appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "child of scorn"
- **Lines 15-16:** "He mourned Romance, now on the town, / And Art, a vagrant."

## IRONY

Miniver believes that he was "born too late," apparently thinking he could have been a great and revered man if only he'd been alive in the "days of old." However, he clings so tightly to this belief that he ends up justifying a very unimpressive lifestyle in modern times. As a result, [irony](#) sits at the center of the poem, since Miniver's regret that he can't be a great figure of the past is exactly what keeps him from actually making something of himself in the present.

This dynamic is exemplified by the second and third stanzas. The second stanza is all about how Miniver loves the idea of "bright" swords and brave warriors, suggesting that he likes the excitement and bravery generally associated with gallant knights. In the third stanza, though, it becomes clear that Miniver is an extremely inactive person who spends all his time

wishing he were born in another era. In fact, he even "rest[s] from his labor," suggesting that he can't even be bothered to work a regular job because he's too busy wishing he lived in a different period.

The irony, then, is that his fantasies about historical greatness keep him from engaging with the surrounding world, thereby making it impossible for him to achieve the modern equivalent of this greatness.

There are other moments of irony in the poem that are smaller and more specific, like when the speaker says that Miniver "would have sinned incessantly" if it meant he could join the Medici family. This is ironic because the Medici family produced four popes over the years. With this in mind, the fact that Miniver would sin so egregiously just to be part of the Medici family suggests that he's not interested in the family's values; rather, he's solely interested in their prestige.

Another instance of irony comes when the speaker notes that Miniver hates khaki suits and yearns for the "mediæval grace / Of iron clothing." The idea that a suit of armor could ever be considered graceful is downright ridiculous, since such an outfit constricts movement so severely. Accordingly, it's once again clear that Miniver's obsessions are deeply impractical.

#### Where Irony appears in the poem:

- Lines 5-32

## CAESURA

The speaker sometimes uses [caesuras](#) to disrupt the rhythmic flow of the poem. This is clear in the very first line, when the speaker briefly pauses after stating Miniver's name:

Miniver Cheevy, || child of scorn

Combined with the fact that the word "child" is a stressed syllable, this caesura makes the opening line sound choppy and abrupt.

In other moments, the speaker's use of caesura simply slows down the poem's rhythm and pacing. For example, consider the caesura in line 10 after the word "dreamed":

Miniver sighed for what was not,  
And dreamed, || and rested from his labors

This caesura inserts a natural pause between the first and second feet of line 10, thereby creating space in the line while also urging readers to go along at a steady pace. And this, in turn, creates a calm feeling that reflects Miniver's dreamy, disengaged state of mind. In this way, the speaker's use of caesura breaks up what might otherwise feel like a fast-paced poem, managing to segment lines in ways that reign in the overall sound while simultaneously adding subtle overtones to

the actual words.

#### Where Caesura appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "Cheevy, child"
- **Line 10:** "dreamed, and"
- **Line 15:** "Romance, now"
- **Line 16:** "Art, a"
- **Line 27:** "thought, and," "thought, and"
- **Line 29:** "Cheevy, born"
- **Line 31:** "coughed, and"



## VOCABULARY

**Miniver** (Line 1, Line 5, Line 9, Line 13, Line 17, Line 21, Line 25, Line 27, Line 29, Line 31) - "Miniver" is the name of the poem's central character, but it's also a word for a white fur that lines or adorns certain kinds of fancy clothing.

**Scorn** (Line 1, Line 25) - A feeling of contempt or disdain that is usually directed at somebody or something that a person thinks is deplorable.

**Lean** (Line 2) - Skinny and/or poor.

**Assailed** (Line 2) - Criticized. In this context, the word describes Miniver's tendency to complain.

**Seasons** (Line 2) - The periods of time that divide a year into four parts. Miniver doesn't complain about the specific seasons, but rather the passage of time that they represent.

**Steeds** (Line 6) - Horses.

**Thebes** (Line 11) - A city in Greece that factors heavily into many tales in Greek mythology.

**Camelot** (Line 11) - The castle where the legendary King Arthur held his famous court. Camelot is featured in many medieval tales of romance and chivalry.

**Priam** (Line 12) - The king of Troy at the time of the city's defeat during the Trojan War.

**Ripe renown** (Line 13) - This phrase refers to the appealing sense of respect and honor that Miniver yearns for so intensely.

**Fragrant** (Line 14) - For something to be "fragrant" means that it has a sweet, pleasing smell. In this context, though, the word refers to Miniver's belief that the honor and respect that famous figures garnered in the olden days ultimately saturated their legacies with appealing, positive associations.

**Vagrant** (Line 16) - A person who doesn't have an established home and who wanders from one place to the next while begging for food or money.

**Medici** (Line 17) - The name of a famous and deeply influential Italian family that enjoyed a staggeringly powerful political dynasty from the 15th to the 18th century.

**Albeit** (Line 18) - A conjunction that is equivalent to the phrase "even though."

**Incessantly** (Line 19) - The word "incessantly" refers to something unpleasant that a person does without stopping.

**Mediaeval** (Line 23) - An antiquated spelling of "medieval."

**Grace** (Line 23) - A word that describes a certain ease of movement imbued with eloquence.



## FORM, METER, & RHYME

### FORM

"Miniver Cheevy" is a 32-line poem broken into eight quatrains. Each stanza begins with an anaphora, as the speaker repeats Miniver's name in the first line before saying something new about him. The steadiness of these short stanzas—combined with the poem's dependable [rhyme scheme](#) and regular meter (both discussed separately in this guide)—makes the poem feel predictable and dispassionate. This combines with the speaker's deadpan delivery to evoke Miniver's detachment from modern life and to underscore the poem's sense of [irony](#). Though Miniver dreams about exciting and heroic eras, his actual life is predictable and mundane.

### METER

The predominant meter in the poem is [iambic tetrameter](#). This meter consists of four iambs, or metrical feet made up of an unstressed syllable followed by a **stressed** syllable (four da-DUMs), for a total of eight syllables per line. That said, the meter in "Miniver Cheevy" is interesting because, while very consistent *across* stanzas, no two *consecutive* lines actually have the same rhythm.

In each stanza, the first and third lines are written in iambic tetrameter, the meter defined above. Take, for instance, lines 1 and 3:

Miniv- | er Chee- | vy, child | of scorn,  
[...]  
He wept | that he | was ev- | -er born

The first foot here is actually a [trochee](#) (DUM-da) because of the pronunciation of the name "Miniver." This variation occurs at the start of every stanza, however, making it a sort of consistent inconsistency as Miniver asserts his presence throughout the poem. Broadly speaking, though, the meter of the poem is strongly iambic, creating a steady bounciness throughout.

However, as noted above, the second and fourth lines of each stanza feature a variation on tetrameter—which, remember, has a total of eight syllables per line. The second line has an *extra* syllable (nine in total), while the fourth is *missing* one

(seven in total). The ends of both lines thus trail off rather unceremoniously.

Let's take a closer look at these variations. The second line of every stanza is written in something called [catalectic iambic pentameter](#), which simply means that the line is in iambic *pentameter* (five iambs rather than the four of *tetrameter*) but is missing the final expected **stressed** syllable (which is what "catalectic" means). For example, line 2 lacks the last syllable that would complete the fifth iamb, the fifth da-DUM:

Grew lean | while he | assailed | the sea- | sons;

The lack of a final stressed syllable at the end of this phrase gives the line a falling sound, almost as if the speaker has drifted off into an awkward silence before finishing the thought.

The last line of every stanza also features catalexis. This time, though, it's an incomplete line of iambic *trimeter*; "tri" means three, so this is a line of three iambs. Again, though, the fourth line of each stanza is catalectic because it contains only *two and a half* iambs, as that last iamb once again lacks its final **stressed** syllable. Line 4 is a perfect example of this:

And he | had rea- | sons.

Once again, the absence of a stress after the phrase's last syllable makes the line sound unbalanced and odd, unfinished, especially since the speaker alternates the catalectic lines with lines of iambic tetrameter.

By switching back and forth in this way, the speaker manages to establish the general *feel* of iambic tetrameter before breaking away from that rhythmic pattern in the catalectic lines. As a result, the poem's rhythm and pacing often sounds shaky and disjointed—an effect that matches Miniver Cheevy's overall incompetence and laziness. It's as if the speaker's unwillingness to stick to just one meter reflects Miniver's unwillingness to commit to and invest in his present reality. In other words, Miniver's wishy-washiness creeps into the sound and texture of the poem.

### RHYME SCHEME

Each stanza in "Miniver Cheevy" follows an alternating [rhyme scheme](#) that can be mapped out like this:

ABAB

This rhyme scheme runs throughout the poem, giving the stanzas a musical, predictable quality.

The second and fourth lines of each stanza feature [feminine rhymes](#), which are rhymes in which each syllable of a word or phrase rhymes with the corresponding syllable in another word or phrase. For example, both syllables in the word "labors" rhyme with both syllables in the word "neighbors."

The speaker adheres so closely to this pattern that the poem comes to sound light, comical, and musical—so musical, in fact, that it almost makes the story of Miniver Cheevy sound like a much-repeated nursery rhyme or cautionary tale.



## SPEAKER

There is no identifying information about the speaker of "Miniver Cheevy." The only thing that is discernible is the speaker's thinly veiled judgment of Miniver Cheevy and his inability to embrace life as it is. This, in turn, suggests that the speaker is somebody who recognizes the futility of thinking about the past so much that it ruins the present. And because there's so little information about this speaker, many readers will perhaps choose to attribute the words to Robinson himself.



## SETTING

"Miniver Cheevy" is most likely set at some point in the 20th century, considering that Robinson published it in 1910. One thing that's certain is that the poem does *not* take place in any of the time periods Miniver fantasizes about, thereby ruling out all antiquity, medieval times, and even the Renaissance period (when the Medici family was active). In all likelihood, Miniver lives at the beginning of the 20th century, when U.S. soldiers wore khaki uniforms.

This, then, would place him roughly 70 years after the Industrial Revolution, which means that Miniver likely lives in a world that has already undergone and adjusted to significant change and groundbreaking technological advancements. For somebody who has romanticized the past so thoroughly, this period would be especially bothersome, as society in the early 1900s remained intent upon making progress instead of dwelling on antiquated ways of life. In this regard, Miniver is at odds with the world around him.



## CONTEXT

### LITERARY CONTEXT

"Miniver Cheevy" is often considered alongside Arlington's poem "[Richard Cory](#)," which was published in 1897—13 years before "Miniver Cheevy." The two poems are frequently compared because they are both relatively short, use [quatrains](#) and [iambic](#) meter, and focus on deeply unhappy men. In some ways, "Miniver Cheevy" can be seen as the inverse of "Richard Cory," at least in that the character Richard Cory has everything he could ever want but is still depressed; conversely, Miniver Cheevy is depressed precisely because he *doesn't* have the life he wants. In the end, both poems shed light on the existential and restless discontent that many people began to

experience in the 20th century.

Although "Miniver Cheevy" and "Richard Cory" have proved to be Arlington's most enduring poems, he was also celebrated for writing much longer, more serious poems. His book-length poem *Tristram*, for example, won the Pulitzer Prize for poetry in 1927. Interestingly, *Tristram* centered on the medieval themes of Arthurian legend, suggesting that "Miniver Cheevy"—whose central character is obsessed with such stories—might be a work of self-parody, as Arlington mocks himself and his own interest in such old tales.

On the whole, Arlington's work stood out from the poetry that was popular in the early 20th century. Whereas the majority of well-known poets were beginning to experiment with [free verse](#), Arlington remained committed to meter and form. Even his short poems like "Miniver Cheevy" and "Richard Cory" adhere to convention, using meter and a tight ABAB [rhyme scheme](#).

Whereas famous poets like T. S. Eliot experimented with a mixture of verse and free verse in poems like "[The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock](#)," Arlington continued to work with formal limitations while also keeping the narrative poem alive in the time of Modernism, which was otherwise more interested in using realism and vivid [imagery](#) to simply portray life as it was. In this sense, Arlington's poetry sometimes feels like a nod to the kind of story-based poetry that was popular in Medieval times, sharing certain narrative and humorous sensibilities with works like Geoffrey Chaucer's [The Canterbury Tales](#).

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

"Miniver Cheevy" was published in the United States in 1910. Around that time, the country—and, for that matter, the world at large—was undergoing a number of changes, many of which were continuations of the Industrial Revolution that took place roughly between 1760 and 1840. For instance, the Wright brothers executed the first successful flight of a powered airplane in 1903, marking a huge turning point in the way the public viewed the possibility of air travel. Similarly, the Ford Model-T automobile was released on the US market in 1908, quickly transforming the country by opening up a new realm of transportation and accessibility.

With all of these advancements afoot, Miniver Cheevy's reluctance to embrace the present is especially striking. After all, people were generally excited about all of this progress, so Miniver's attachment to the past is especially notable.

The early 1900s also saw the proliferation of workers' unions and the fight for fair labor practices. In this context, Miniver's apparent unwillingness to work to support himself seems particularly lazy and dishonorable, since one of the core tenants of labor unions is that people deserve to be treated well in exchange for their hard work. To not work at all, then, undercuts such demands.



## MORE RESOURCES

## EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- [A Reading of the Poem](#) – Check out this recording of a dramatic reading of "Miniver Cheevy."  
([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IP\\_81iuMmh0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IP_81iuMmh0))
- [Camelot](#) – Read more about Miniver's beloved Camelot, the legendary castle and court where King Arthur hosted his Knights of the Round Table.  
(<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Camelot-Arthurian-legend>)
- [About the Author](#) – To learn more about Edwin Arlington Robinson, take a look at this overview of his life and work.  
(<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/edwin-arlington-robinson>)
- [The Medici](#) – The Medici family was one of the most influential Italian dynasties in the Renaissance period, and their story makes for an interesting read!

(<https://www.history.com/topics/renaissance/medici-family>)

## LITCHARTS ON OTHER EDWIN ARLINGTON ROBINSON POEMS

- [Richard Cory](#)



## HOW TO CITE

## MLA

Lannamann, Taylor. "Miniver Cheevy." *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 2 Aug 2019. Web. 4 Sep 2020.

## CHICAGO MANUAL

Lannamann, Taylor. "Miniver Cheevy." LitCharts LLC, August 2, 2019. Retrieved September 4, 2020. <https://www.litcharts.com/poetry/edwin-arlington-robinson/miniver-cheevy>.