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## English Literary Criticism 1726-1750

S. J. Sackett  
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*S. J. Sackett*

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1726-1750**

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Dr. S. J. Sackett

### *Biographical Sketch of the Author*

Dr. Samuel John Sackett received the doctorate from the University of California at Los Angeles in 1956. He specialized in English literature of the Neoclassical period and in the history of literary criticism; the title of his dissertation was "The Place of Literary Theory in Henry Fielding's Art." He is now Associate Professor of English in charge of the sophomore literature program at Fort Hays Kansas State College, where he has served since 1954.

Dr. Sackett was co-editor, with William E. Koch of Kansas State University, of *Kansas Folklore* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1961); he also serves as Book Review Editor of *Western Folklore* magazine. He provided the introduction for the edition of *The Voyages of Mr. Job Vinegar*, by Henry Fielding, which was published by the Augustan Reprint Society in 1958. In addition he has published a number of articles, reviews, essays, short stories, and poems.

**English Literary Criticism  
1726-1750**

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## Preface

The need for a collection of English literary criticism from the second quarter of the eighteenth century first became apparent to me while I was doing research for my dissertation, "The Place of Literary Theory in Henry Fielding's Art." The three-volume *Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century*, by Joel E. Spingarn, was of course an invaluable source of background materials; and I also profited greatly from Willard H. Durham's *Critical Essays of the Eighteenth Century 1700-1725*. But there was nothing for the second quarter of the century, and it was that period in which I was, of course, especially interested, for it was there that Fielding did most of his best work.

I asked my advisers, H. T. Swedenberg, Jr., and the late E. N. Hooker, why there was no work in my period comparable to those of Spingarn and Durham. I was told that the difficulties in the way of compiling such a work were insuperable. To begin with, many of the best essays were too long; a thorough compilation would have to be as long as that in which Spingarn included the best critical productions of an entire century. Secondly, it was hard to find essays that stood out above their contemporaries, and thus selecting from among them was difficult. Third, many interesting essays were buried in obscure periodicals.

It became my ambition to see whether I could not overcome these difficulties. Advantageous though it might be to include the full texts of all the essays of this period, it seemed to me that half a loaf, or even less, might be better than none. A judicious condensation of an essay, stripping it to its most significant ideas, might be of as much service to all but a few scholars as the whole text. In this way not only could the criticism of the quarter-century be encompassed in one volume, but also all the most significant works could be represented at least in part. The third difficulty was probably the easiest to overcome. The search for materials for my own thesis had led me through many of the periodicals of the time, including of course the *Gentleman's Magazine*, which reprinted the most interesting and important periodical essays which were published after its founding in 1731.

In practice only one type of criticism proved intractable to the treatment I proposed: the work of textual critics. Regretfully, therefore, both Theobald's *Shakespeare Restor'd* (1726) and John-

son's *Miscellaneous Observations on the Tragedy of Macbeth* (1746) have been omitted. Both consist almost entirely of passages from Shakespeare with editorial comment, and as such they defy condensation. At first I thought that I could choose representative selections to serve as illustrative examples; but I soon saw that, while I could find typical annotations, these, however much they might be of interest to a desultory reader, could have no value to a scholar who would turn to my collection for source materials. Both essays, therefore, were excluded; the prefaces to Theobald's edition of Shakespeare and to Bentley's edition of *Paradise Lost* remain, however, to give the principles and aims of criticism of this type.

Perhaps one further omission needs to be apologized for. The reader will look here in vain for Mark Akenside's *The Pleasures of the Imagination* (1744) and may be surprised at its absence in view of the facts that its argument for descriptive and emotional poetry certainly classifies it as literary criticism and that it is reprinted, at least in part, in a number of collections of eighteenth-century poetry. The reason is simple; its exclusion is the result of a judgment with which not all my readers may agree, but which was deliberately made. The more I read Akenside's tedious and prolix effusion, and the more I compared it with other essays of the quarter century, the more it seemed to me that it was neither valuable nor significant enough to warrant inclusion.

A number of purely technical matters need to be explained. First, I felt it would be advantageous to indicate how much of a work was being omitted and hit on the idea of giving page numbers in brackets. While this device would not be desirable in a collection printing full texts, I felt it necessary here. Second, I found that on a few occasions it was easier to summarize in my own words some less important passages, in order to keep the thread of the argument, than to condense the original. Where this has been done, my summary is presented in brackets. Brackets are also used for the correction of obvious typographical errors. While great pains have been taken to present impeccably accurate texts, even to some of the typographical peculiarities of eighteenth-century printers and orthographical and mechanical eccentricities of eighteenth-century authors—for which, by the way, my apologies are here and now publicly tendered to the printers of the present volume—still it seemed better to have a readable text than to perpetuate obvious misprints. Brackets have been used, therefore, though sparingly, to restore missing punctuation marks and to correct textual corruptions.

I have a considerable debt of gratitude to many people who have helped in one way or another with the compilation of this volume. First, to Mr. Paul K. Friesner, who encouraged me to complete it; to Mr. Marc T. Campbell, who obtained books for me on inter-library loan; and to the staff of the William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, Los Angeles, who were courteous and helpful to me when I was doing the initial research for this project. Nearly all the texts included here are derived from copies in the Clark Library. Other libraries contributed texts of essays not available in the Clark or provided microfilms or photocopies of essays or loaned me their original copies so that I could verify the accuracy of texts; these, for whose assistance I am grateful, include the Newberry Library and the libraries of Colorado College, Harvard and Yale Universities, and the Universities of Arizona, California (Los Angeles), Chicago, Colorado, Illinois, Michigan, and Texas. Finally I should like to express thanks publicly to my wife, who helped me to plan this publication, who cheered me on when the task seemed impossible, who helped me revise the introduction, and who never grudged the many hours I have spent on this study.

S. J. SACKETT



## Introduction

It has become a joke in English departments that all periods are transitional. Like the pigs in George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, however, who were more equal than the other animals, some periods are more transitional than others. That the quarter century between 1726 and 1750 was one of these in literary criticism can be seen by looking at the eighteenth-century critical essays most frequently reprinted in anthologies and textbooks. The most important production between 1700 and 1725 was Pope's *Essay on Criticism*, one of the fundamental documents of Neoclassicism. The most important between 1751 and 1775 was Johnson's preface to his edition of Shakespeare, in which he effectually destroys the whole structure of rules which had been laboriously erected by generations of neo-Aristotelian critics since the sixteenth century; and next in importance was Young's *Conjectures on Original Composition*, in which he spurns one of the most basic of all Neoclassical doctrines, the importance of learning to a creative artist. Something must have been happening between 1726 and 1750 to establish a ground for what otherwise seems like a sudden revolution in criticism; there must have been some prophets crying in the wilderness to prepare the way for the acceptance of Johnson and Young. It is our intention here to investigate this second quarter of the eighteenth century to see what currents can be detected and to see whether the forerunners of Johnson and Young at this time can be identified.

We shall find that a large number of critics accepted Neoclassicism and its assumptions wholeheartedly, and that a great many were concerned with an issue that had been bequeathed to this period from the past, that of the defense of wit. But we shall also find that new ideas, looking ahead to those of Johnson and Young—and even beyond them, to those of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, and Keats—were being expounded even by such generally conservative critics as Thomas Blackwell, James Dalacourt, Henry Baker, Corbyn Morris and Henry Fielding; and that James Thomson, Henry Pemberton, John Upton, Jonathan Richardson (father and son), and Samuel Say were in fact committed to a view of literature which had more in common with what followed them than with what preceded.



## Chapter I

# Neoclassical Tendencies

Since the mode of literary expression which we have come to call "Neoclassical" dominated the eighteenth century, we should expect to find what we do in fact find: that the critics who upheld Neoclassical ideals were in the majority during the quarter century we have under discussion.

The major work in this tradition is *The Art of Sinking in Poetry*. While this essay will be discussed here as though it were the sole work of Alexander Pope, and while all the evidence indicates that his was the main hand concerned in its composition, there is also evidence that two of Pope's close friends, fellow members of the Scriblerus Club, may also have had a share—how much of one it is now impossible to determine. There are some indications that Jonathan Swift had something to do with it, perhaps no more than simply suggesting the design; and part of the work itself may have been written by Dr. John Arbuthnot. (On such problems see the 1952 edition of the work by Edna Leake Steeves.)

Pope's method was ironical: by seeming to praise authors who had committed various deviations from the standards of the Neoclassical ideal, he both condemned the authors and upheld the standards.

The targets of his attacks need to be identified. Mrs. Aphra Behn was a literary lady of the Restoration, now known chiefly for her novels and secondly for her plays. Sir Richard Blackmore, a popular and successful physician, was the author of several interminable epics; Pope referred to *Prince Arthur*, *Job*, and some versifications of the psalms. Tom Brown was a popular hack writer of the turn of the eighteenth century. Colley Cibber became poet laureate in 1730; he was a good actor, a clever playwright, a vapid versifier, and a personal enemy of Pope. John Cleveland, a contemporary of Milton, was assuredly one of the worst poets ever to

use the English language and is notable for his carrying of the metaphysical style beyond its utmost limits. Daniel Defoe was, of course, a great novelist; but, while he did write some good verses, on the whole his poetry was only a little better than Pope rated it. Laurence Eusden preceded Cibber in the laureateship and became it no better. Nathaniel Lee was a popular if bombastic playwright, a contemporary of Dryden's; the work referred to here is a tragedy, *Sophonisba*. Ambrose Philips was a contemporary and rival of Pope's whose style gave the expression "namby pamby" (coined by Henry Carey) to the language. Nahum Tate became poet laureate after Dryden; he was a man of no talent who was responsible for some badly mauled acting versions of Shakespeare's plays, including one of *King Lear* that had a happy ending. Thomas Tickell, a friend of Addison's, had the misfortune to translate the first book of the *Iliad* in competition with Pope; both Pope's contemporaries and subsequent critics have felt his translation had little to commend it, but Pope could never forgive his having made the attempt. Edward Ward, usually called "Ned," was no poet but a lively journalist whose *London Spy*, though scorned by Pope, still makes good reading. Leonard Welsted was a mediocre poet, but his criticism was sometimes forward-looking and far-seeing; it deserves to be better known than it is.

In addition to Pope's scorn for these writers (as well as others not mentioned in the passages reprinted here), *The Art of Sinking in Poetry* displayed its author's ability to laugh at himself. Of the quotations marked "Anonymous," or those unmarked, while some were written especially for the occasion by Pope himself to demonstrate the faults he was discussing, many came from his own juvenile verses; and he was at least as hard on his own youthful productions as he was on any other poems.

But to us *The Art of Sinking in Poetry* is less significant for the personal attacks it made than for what it reveals about the standards Pope held and the assumptions he made about poetry. We can learn then that he was a poet of the intellect, of reason, insisting that figures of speech be logical and not far-fetched. We learn that, like Imlac in Johnson's *Rasselas*, he believed that the poet had no business numbering the streaks of the tulip, that descriptions should be general rather than particular. We learn that he objected to the use of colloquial language in poetry—and we are interested to observe in passing that many of the usages he condemned are now perfectly acceptable. We learn that he felt diction should be suitable to the subject. We learn that his poetic ideals were plainness, simplicity, clarity, and brevity.



Most important, we learn that something is false which is commonly believed about the Neoclassical critics and poets by people who don't know them well: it becomes unmistakable from *The Art of Sinking in Poetry* that Pope by no means felt that all one had to do in order to succeed as a poet was to follow the rules established by the neo-Aristotelian critics. No significant poet or critic—though perhaps a few hacks—would have agreed with such a notion. Although it may seem, therefore, that in *The Art of Sinking in Poetry* Pope attacked the rules which he praised so highly in the *Essay on Criticism*, and thus that he contradicted himself, that is not true. In the *Essay on Criticism* as well as fifteen years later in *The Art of Sinking in Poetry*, Pope was adhering to the elemental Neoclassical position which he derived from Dryden, Boileau, Rapin, Dacier, and Bossu, and which they in turn derived from Castelvetro and other Italian commentators upon Aristotle. This position held that genius was absolutely indispensable to the writer and that without it no adherence to the rules would help him. But by the very nature of genius it was nothing that could be usefully discussed: one either had it or didn't. Thus it was profitless to waste time talking about it. If a poet did have genius, however, then the rules could help him do better than he could without them. What Pope attacked in *The Art of Sinking in Poetry* was not the rules themselves but writers who lacked the prerequisite to their successful use and tried to use them anyway in the vain attempt to overcome their deficiency. To that extent, then, this work complements the *Essay on Criticism* by emphasizing a side of the Neoclassical attitude toward the rules which in that poem was less fully developed.

The same comment may be made about Pope's treatment of the Neoclassical doctrine of imitation. From the *Essay on Criticism* it is possible to conclude that Pope advocated a slavish copying of the ancients; from *The Art of Sinking*, however, it becomes evident that Pope scorned close imitation. Yet there is no inconsistency between the two positions, and reading the *Essay on Criticism* in the light of what he says in *The Art of Sinking* will help us to understand that he never approved mimicking the ancients; rather he advocated ascertaining the rules which they followed successfully and obeying these.

We can find the same ideals held by Pope celebrated also in James Miller's *Harlequin-Horace*, which, like the *Art of Sinking*, was written ironically. It is small wonder to find Miller following Pope; he was a younger writer making his fledgeling flight shortly

after the publication of the *Dunciad*, and he was painfully eager to prove to Pope that he was an ally and not an enemy. Miller knew all the right things to do. You paid Pope an elaborate personal compliment, as Miller did in Sect. 6; you attacked Pope's principal antagonists, as Miller did by letting fly at Dennis, Gildon, Theobald, etc.; and you lamented that most of the productions of the age fell far short of Pope's ideals of harmony, correctness, clarity, and learning, as Miller did in the sections reprinted here.

The Neoclassical attitude toward genius is exemplified in *A Prospect of Poetry*, by Pope's Irish imitator, James Dalacourt. "Without some genius," he wrote, "fame will ne'er ensue." The works of genius might be improved by learning and by following the rules, but without genius it was impossible to profit by them; without it, "those rules are ill apply'd." This matter is worth clarifying because of the significance of the idea of original genius in the development of pre-Romanticism. From Pope and from Dalacourt we can learn that both Neoclassicists and pre-Romantics were agreed on the prime and fundamental importance of genius to a writer; where disagreement occurred was over the extent to which genius alone, without the assistance of learning and the rules, could succeed.

Another of Dalacourt's points also derived from Pope—that the sound must seem an echo to the sense. Nothing, indeed, so emphatically shows Pope's brilliance as a poet than a comparison of the famous passage on that subject from the *Essay on Criticism* with Dalacourt's lengthy imitation of it, only a small portion of which has been reproduced here. Usually it is simply impossible to tell what effect Dalacourt was aiming at; sometimes it is possible to tell that he was committing blunders that would have made Pope cringe, as when he described a "purling rill" in a line that alliterated on P—hardly a liquid consonant—or when he described a "freezing fountain" in a line that was wholly regular except for one pyrrhic foot, so that it moved rapidly rather than slowly.

Finally, in general, one may say that Dalacourt's emphasis on proportion, polish, regularity, design, labor, and study, showed his devotion to those qualities which we can consider characteristically Neoclassical and thus reflected the standards of Pope.

Pope's insistence on reasonableness in poetry was also echoed by Fielding in his preface to *The Tragedy of Tragedies*. Where Pope had adopted the *persona* of Martinus Scriblerus, Fielding chose to disguise himself as H[enricus?] Scriblerus Secundus and to present his attack on fustian not as a treatise but as a pretended edition of a previously unpublished Elizabethan play. Fielding

was equally hard on the two extremes of bad writing: the attempt to inflate emotion, which results in bombast and fustian and which he equated ironically with the Sublime, and the inability to express any emotion at all, of which the specific example that he gave was *The Earl of Essex*, by John Banks. It should perhaps be pointed out that Fielding did not really object to the Sublime itself; as a good Neoclassicist, he was as willing as anyone else to try to yoke Aristotle and Longinus together to the Muses' chariot. What he objected to was authors who strained after the Sublime to no purpose: who, having no genius and but little talent, blew up their thoughts into "big sounding Words" and called this the Sublime.

Much the same point was made by Henry Baker, who used the pen-name "Henry Stonecastle," in No. 184 of his *Universal Spectator*. His target, like that of Fielding, was not the Sublime itself but what might be called the False Sublime. His objection, in a clever satire which briefly foreshadows Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility*, was that the poetry which aspired to sublimity achieved incomprehensibility instead. He used two works published in 1732 as illustrations: *The Blazing Comet* was a product of the mad Samuel Johnson of Cheshire, better known as the author of *Hurlo-thrumbo*; *The Married Philosopher* was a comedy by John Kelly.

What underlay Isaac Hawkins Browne's *Essay on Design and Beauty*, an early production of its author though not published until posthumously in 1768, were the same Neoclassical assumptions about reason which one finds in the other critics we have discussed. Beauty may exist in nature, but until it has been ordered and arranged into a design by a controlling human intelligence, it counts for nothing.

From Mind alone delightful Order springs,  
She tempers and adjusts the mass of things . . . .

These lines might serve as an epigraph for the Neoclassical movement.

Yet another assumption of Pope's appeared in Upton's *Critical Observations on Shakespeare*. The Neoclassicist was interested in the species rather than in the individual; thus Upton, like Pope, insisted that "'tis the human creature in general should be drawn, not any one in particular." For this reason he condemned Shakespeare for drawing the character of Richard III; that such a man actually existed was no excuse, in his opinion, because such men are very seldom met with.

As a sidelight, we may observe that one of Pope's techniques—and, interestingly enough, one which burlesqued too close a de-

pendence on the Neoclassical rules—was imitated several times in the critical essays of the second quarter of the century. Henry Baker used the technique twice in the *Universal Spectator*; in No. 218 he offered a recipe for writing tragedies, and in No. 339 “A Recipe to Make a Modern Critic.” Both imitated Pope’s “Receipt to Make an Epic Poem.”

## Chapter II

# The Genres

One of the foundations of Neoclassical criticism was the doctrine of the *genres*—the parceling out of literature into a number of specific kinds or forms, such as tragedy, comedy, epic, etc. It is not surprising for us to find among the essays of the second quarter of the eighteenth century some statements regarding the nature of the traditional *genres*, as well as of the new *genre* of the novel which was coming to maturity in just this very period.

Neo-Aristotelian critics had been divided over whether the epic or the tragedy was the most important of the *genres*; most of them favored the latter because it had been the subject of Aristotle's *Poetics*. Yet between 1726 and 1750 there was very little of significance written on tragedy. It is difficult to explain why, but perhaps the subject had already been so thoroughly treated by so many critics that there was simply nothing new to say. The epic drew considerably more attention. Comedy was almost universally ranked third in importance, and critics accorded it some interest during the second quarter of the century. Of the minor *genres*, only satire was the subject of much concern. The most noteworthy element in the generic criticism of the period was the development of the theory of the novel.

*Tragedy.* Although Aaron Hill declared that contemporary tragedies matched those of the Greeks, Henry Baker was correct in lamenting, in the *Universal Spectator*, No. 218, that tragedies of the 1730's were not worth attending; moreover, he revealed, though inadvertently, one reason: the common misapprehension of the purpose of tragedy as moral improvement. As long as would-be tragic dramatists tried to work according to a theory which held that tragedy was the most rational of all entertainments, instead of that which most deeply moved the emotions, their failure was foreordained. This assumption, which Marvin T. Herrick has identified

as a moral interpretation of Aristotelian catharsis, can be seen also in No. 79 of the *Prompter*, in Corbyn Morris's description of the purpose of tragedy, and in Samuel Foote's brief discussion.

*The Epic.* The heroic age was over, and the eighteenth century was no time for epic poems. Establishing this point was the chief business of that landmark in the development of historical criticism, Thomas Blackwell's *Essay on the Life and Genius of Homer*; making, as he did, the greatness of the Homeric poems a kind of happy accident arising from a concatenation of fortuitous circumstances, one of which was the Homeric age itself, Blackwell implied on nearly every page that epics were beyond the capacity of his contemporaries. Another reason why it was impossible to write epics at this period was demonstrated by Aaron Hill's essay on the subject in No. 71 of the *Prompter*; he insisted on defining an epic poem as a "noble and particular *Instruction in Morality*" (italics his). A poet who would undertake a new *Iliad* under that definition would be defeated before he began.

Despite this, however, Henry Pemberton was optimistic concerning the ability of eighteenth-century poets to produce epics. Part of the reason was the peculiar circumstances that called forth his *Observations on Poetry*. In 1737 Richard Glover had published his epic *Leonidas*, which for political reasons was at once cried up by the members of the Opposition to Sir Robert Walpole. Pemberton's work, which appeared the following year, was intended to justify Glover's poem by laying down certain precepts, most of which—though Pemberton did not admit this—were in fact derived from Glover's practice, and then showing that *Leonidas* did indeed follow those principles which had been extracted from it in the first place. Thus Pemberton was committed to showing that a great epic poem could be written in the 1730's because he was obliged to prove that *Leonidas* was one.

Although this account of the derivation of Pemberton's work may predispose us to view his ideas as specious, or at least may give us cause to doubt his intellectual integrity, the fact remains that *Observations on Poetry* took a number of striking and original positions which will impress a twentieth-century reader as sound, reasonable, interesting, and advanced; it was by no means a negligible production, and its contributions in a number of areas are discussed elsewhere in this introduction. These strong points, however, do not include what was, after all, its principal intention, the discussion of the epic *genre*, and after reading all that Pemberton has to say about how an epic poet can still reach heights "by just representations of life and manners; by sublime descriptions"; by "striking

incidents"; and "above all by sublimity of sentiment"—as after reading *Leonidas* itself—we must conclude that Blackwell was right and that the time was not propitious for epics. Pemberton must, though, be credited with trying to place epic instruction on less naive grounds than one finds in Hill.

It is, perhaps, a sign of the changing times that neither Blackwell nor Pemberton, nor in fact anyone who treated the epic at any length during this quarter century, produced the kind of weary neo-Aristotelian "Receipt to Make an Epic Poem" that Pope properly ridiculed.

*Comedy.* Samuel Foote's remarks on comedy are interesting in that they show a man who clearly had imbibed all the neo-Aristotelian doctrine of the three unities yet who cheerfully and blithely threw them over in favor of a fourth, which he asserted was worth all the rest (and proved it by Shakespeare's example)—unity of character. Although Foote treated the unities thus cavalierly, however, he did insist on the strict separation of tragedy and comedy, rejecting the notion of tragi-comedy in principle. This is significant in view of the development of the sentimental comedy between Steele's *The Conscious Lovers* (1722) and Moore's *The Foundling* (1748).

While Fielding's remarks on comedy in the preface to *Joseph Andrews* were not, like Foote's, concerned with comedy as a form of theatrical representation, they are of great interest in considering comedy in its broader sense of a mode of writing which can be expressed in either dramatic or narrative form. The first thing to notice about them is that Fielding left wit entirely out of his consideration; he was interested only in affectation, which, since it is a quality of a character or personality, must be considered a type of humour. This is hardly the place to inquire whether Fielding succeeded in isolating the qualities of humour, in the eighteenth-century sense of the term, which are appropriate to comedy, as distinct from those which today we should merely call "characterization" and which we should consider equally appropriate to tragedy; but at least it should be pointed out that Fielding's ideas have not been thoroughly investigated from this point of view and that a thoughtful testing of them might yield fruitful results.

One might also consider that Fielding's theory bears some relation to that developed in the next century by William Hazlitt; certainly Fielding's illustration of his theory by a "dirty Fellow" descending from a coach and six is equally apt as an example of Hazlitt's discovery of the source of comedy in incongruity. Hazlitt's is probably the better theory; it is broader, because it is not limited

to the moral basis which was important to Fielding, and therefore it includes Fielding's. Yet Hazlitt's superiority is by no means entirely certain, for it is possible to imagine incongruities which are not inherently ridiculous. This, then, is another area in which the importance of Fielding's ideas cannot be evaluated until they have been more thoughtfully examined.

And finally it should be pointed out that some commentators on the preface to *Joseph Andrews* have seriously misunderstood it. When Fielding said, "From the Discovery of . . . Affectation arises the Ridiculous," he did not necessarily restrict this to the discovery (finding out) of one character's affectation by the other characters, as has been held by some critics, who apparently confuse Fielding's use of the term "discovery" with the technical sense in which Aristotle used it. While the sentence does not exclude the possibility of this reading, it does not necessarily mean more than simply that the writer discovers (exposes) the character's affectation to the reader; even though other characters may remain ignorant of the affectation, the scene may yet be ridiculous. Fielding's practice in *Joseph Andrews* and elsewhere supports the latter, broader interpretation of his theory.

Although William Whitehead's remarks on comedy are not so significant as Fielding's, they are of interest. Aristophanes, while not mentioned by name, was praised for having attacked vicious contemporaries and thus taught youth to avoid their vices, but condemned for having later debased his talent by using the same techniques for "private Piques" instead of public benefit. It was to avoid such sinking of comedy to slander that Whitehead advised either of two devices: disguising the character aimed at by placing him in an invented situation, or making the characters more universal by borrowing traits from several real persons to make up one character. This latter technique, while the less likely to degenerate into libel, was also the less likely to do any good along the lines of moral reformation.

Whitehead also suggested that he was somewhat disillusioned with one of the traditional claims of comedy, that it was capable of changing a man's character:

Hope we to mend him? Hopes, alas, how vain!  
He feels the Lash, not listens to the Rein.

The same attitude of disenchantment with the old idea that comedy could change men's natures, an idea which underlay Theobald's brief discussion of the *genre*, was shown in a short scene on p. 55 of Fielding's *Journey from This World to the Next* (not re-



printed here), in which Judge Minos was determining which souls were virtuous enough to gain entrance into the Elysian Fields and which must be punished by being sent back to Earth to go through another existence:

SHE was succeeded by a Spirit, who told the Judge, he believed his Works would speak for him. What works? answered *Minos*. My Dramatic Works, replied the other, which have done so much Good in recommending Virtue and punishing Vice.—Very well, said the Judge, if you please to stand by, the first Person who passes the Gate, by your means, shall carry you in with him: but if you will take my Advice, I think, for Expedition sake, you had better return and live another Life upon Earth.

*Satire*. The most important discussion of the quarter-century was Walter Harte's *Essay on Satire*, one of several works produced by young writers after Pope's *Dunciad* with the apparent purpose of enrolling themselves on Pope's side and showing the world by this means, if it could not be discovered by any other, that they were not dunces. Harte's conclusion (p. 38) is especially abject:

Oh POPE, and Sacred *Criticism!* forgive  
A Youth, who dares approach your Shrine, and live!

Harte's essay is of principal value for its discussion of what Dryden had called Varronian satire and what Harte called variously epic satire and mock-epic. He argued for the superiority of narrative as against argumentative satire on the grounds that the former was more concrete and more animated, and pointed out that because of the small scope of mock-epic, which did not allow the poet space for the erection of great beauties which would overcome small faults, it had to follow the rules very closely. For the same reason it needed to get its effects with economy and deftness. Harte defined the mock-epic tone as "low things exprest/ In high-raisd terms" and flattered Pope by saying that it was as hard to write a *Dunciad* as an *Aeneid* and that nobody could succeed with the former who was not capable of the latter. A good deal of the essay was similarly flattery of Pope—even its author could hardly claim that his purpose in the *Dunciad* was "to be *candid*, *modest*, and a *Friend*"—and attacks on Pope's enemies, Blackmore and others; but there were elements of a serious discussion of satire, and it is the best such discussion that we have from this period.

Corbyn Morris also glanced at satire; his comparison of it with raillery is of some interest, especially in its conclusion that not only was Juvenal a better satirist than Horace, but even that what Horace wrote was raillery and not satire at all.

*The Novel*. Despite the immense significance of the contributions of Richardson and Smollett to the practice of writing novels, clearly

it is Fielding's contributions to theory which are of most value. These contributions have been discussed thoroughly in Ethel M. Thornbury's *Henry Fielding's Theory of the Comic Prose Epic*. Fielding saw the novel as a kind of epic poem; his chief aim in insisting on this point was to distinguish what he was doing from the romances of authors like de Scudéry and La Calprenède, "which contain," to use his words, "very little Instruction or Entertainment." The novel differed from the epic, in his view, chiefly in that it was written in prose; his illustration here was Fénelon's *Télémaque*, apparently the only serious novel of which he approved. His own work, unlike Fénelon's, was comic; but this, too, had classical sanction, since Homer was said to have been the author of a comic epic, now lost. He visualized himself as standing in the same relation to this lost comic epic of Homer's as Fénelon did to the *Odyssey*.

The theory of the comic prose epic was developed further in Fielding's preface to his sister Sarah's novel, *David Simple*. Here he distinguished between two types of plot structure for the epic, whether serious or comic: those which, like the *Iliad*, had an action which was "entire and uniform," and those which, like the *Odyssey*, were rather "a Series of Actions, all tending to produce one great End." Fielding found *David Simple* an example of the latter type; we may find *Joseph Andrews* one also, and may go on to wonder whether *Tom Jones* was not intended as an illustration of the former.

Fielding's remarks on the novel in the preface to *David Simple* raised another interesting point: the "End or Scope" of the comic epic poem in prose. It was generally agreed by most critics, though not all, that the end of tragedy was to produce pity and fear, the end of comedy was to raise laughter, and the end of the epic was to arouse admiration. What was the end of the comic prose epic? According to Fielding, the end should "be at once amiable, ridiculous and natural"; that is, it should stir affection for the main characters, provoke laughter at affectation, and stimulate a recognition of its truth to human nature. We can imagine that if a reader finished a comic prose epic fond of its hero, laughing at the vanity and hypocrisy it exposed, and saying, "Yes, I've seen people act exactly like that," the book would have fulfilled all its expectations. What, then, of novels which "set before us the odious instead of the amiable"? As we read Fielding's answer to this question, we should remember that he was the author of *Jonathan Wild*, in which he attempted "by the help of Irony at least to represent the Aim and Design of [his hero] in a favourable and agreeable Light." This paragraph might well be taken as Fielding's excuse for having writ-

ten *Jonathan Wild*; if so, one must confess that his argument fails to convince. The irony in *Jonathan Wild* did not make its hero amiable; it served to throw his odiousness into even sharper light, as Fielding evidently intended it to do.

The chief contribution Fielding made to the theory of the novel occurs in *Tom Jones*, in the introductory chapters to the eighteen books of that novel, each of which was an essay and many of which dealt with the art of fiction. A number of points may be made here about his ideas. In the first place, he drew both on the theory of the epic and on that of historical writing for his discussion of the nature of the novel; this fact has been pointed out by Robert M. Wallace. In *Tom Jones* a novel was not only a comic epic poem in prose; it was also a private history. While public histories might rely for their authenticity on documentation and common knowledge, a private history could not be believed unless it were probable; "it is no Excuse for a Poet who relates what is incredible," Fielding cited from some source he had forgotten, "that the thing related is really Matter of Fact." For this reason, the novelist was barred from depicting the supernatural; "Man . . . is the highest Subject . . . which presents itself to the Pen of our Historian." Moreover, the actions described must be probable not only in general human terms but also probable "for the very Actors and Characters themselves to have performed." Fielding did not describe the methods by which this realism might be achieved, but apparently he considered that the novelist would draw upon his experience and observation for his characters and incidents, including actual people and actual occurrences as much as possible, unless truth should be so much stranger than fiction that it would be incredible.

This interpretation is borne out by his analysis of the requirements of a novelist. Genius he defined as "Invention and Judgment," and "Invention" he defined as "a quick and sagacious Penetration into the true Essence of all the Objects of our Contemplation." He specifically rejected any definition of invention which would make it "a creative Faculty"; the business of invention was not to make things up but to observe characters and actions and come to an understanding of their "true Essence"—what they really were, rather than what they pretended or appeared on the surface to be. Again, he made actual experience of human nature an important requisite to the novelist; and in Bk. XIV, Ch. i, he wrote, "Imitation . . . will not do the Business. The Picture must be after Nature herself." The novelist must actually draw from life.

Yet Fielding was clear that he did not mean that the novelist must deal only in the "trite, common, or vulgar; such [events] as happen in every Street, or in every House"; the wonderful (in its true sense), the surprising, and the unfamiliar were necessary to engage the reader's attention and to charm him. As long as the novelist adhered to probability, as Fielding defined it, he might, indeed should, use these freely "and is then intitled to some Faith from his Reader, who is indeed guilty of critical Infidelity if he disbelieves him." It would be tempting to rephrase that last sentence, "and is then intitled to that willing suspension of disbelief which constitutes poetic faith," and by so doing suggest that when Coleridge, an admirer of Fielding's, formulated his famous phrase, he had this passage in his mind. An article by Nettie S. Tillett explores this possibility.

When we come to Johnson's essay on the novel in the *Rambler*, No. 4, we notice something strange. So far as the form of the novel is concerned, all Johnson's points were echoed from Fielding. Johnson's term "the Comedy of Romance" to describe eighteenth-century fiction could easily have been derived from the prefaces to *Joseph Andrews* and *David Simple*; his scorn for seventeenth-century romances reflected the former of those prefaces and also Bk. IX, Ch. i, of *Tom Jones*; and the emphasis on realism, "general Converse," and observation seems drawn from the introductory chapters of Bks. VIII, IX, XIII, and XIV of the latter novel. Yet Johnson's low opinion of Fielding is well known and has been examined in detail by R. E. Moore. To see why Johnson objected to Fielding's practice, though he embraced his theory, we must turn to the second half of Johnson's essay. If we imagine that Johnson had Fielding's novel specifically in mind in writing his admonitions against works that describe the world promiscuously, it is possible to see that each of his proscriptions can be made to apply to *Tom Jones*. Yet Fielding's aim, as expressed in his dedication, was identical with what Johnson maintained the aim of fiction must be: "to increase Prudence without impairing Virtue." The disagreement between Fielding and Johnson must therefore lie in two areas: whether Tom's reformation succeeded in accomplishing Fielding's purpose, and whether the seriousness of Tom's vices was great enough to merit Johnson's censures. As usual, Johnson's criticism succeeds in provoking the reader to consider carefully his own stand with regard to the questions raised.

Turning from the specific application of Johnson's strictures to *Tom Jones*, we can see in this *Rambler* an illustration of a dilemma which David Daiches, on pp. 85-87 of his *Critical Approaches to*

*Literature*, has pointed out as basic to Johnson's criticism. Johnson praised realism and the accurate observation of life, yet he condemned writing which showed immorality in a light which it often has in real life. Should a work of realism be condemned for immorality if reality itself is not always moral? To use Johnson's own example in this essay: what if, as often happens, vice is united with "the Graces of Gaiety, or the Dignity of Courage"? Johnson felt that the writer had a duty to select from reality only what would demonstrate a moral point. But when the reader finds in reality people and occurrences which lead him to contrary conclusions, will not his disillusionment cause him to reject the moral teachings that he reads? Again Johnson's position raises questions that stimulate us to think for ourselves.



## Chapter III

# Wit and Humour

As E. N. Hooker has pointed out in his seminal essay, "Pope on Wit," the concept of wit, and even literature itself, was under attack on moral and religious grounds by what might have been called in the previous century the Puritan interests. It has been suggested by P. J. Crean that these attacks may have been at least as responsible as Fielding's anti-Walpole farces for the passing of the Licensing Act of 1737.

In the *Weekly Miscellany*, No. 52, William Webster provides a good illustration of the savageness of these attacks, in this case launched against the theater. Such invective—the essay concluded with a call to the "City Magistracy" to remove the "pernicious Influence" from the City of London—illuminates the climate of opinion which existed prior to the passing of the Act. Webster returned to his attack, though somewhat more moderately, in No. 94. Here he admitted that it would be possible to put literature to good and moral use, though he felt that it had seldom been done, largely because of the natural antipathy between wit and judgment; if a poet manifested much wit in his productions, then it was very unlikely that he should also show judgment. Of eighteenth-century poets, Webster approved only three. Edward Young he admitted merely negatively, as having no immoral sentiments, and—pointedly or not—did not praise Young for supporting the cause of virtue. Addison was mentioned with a warmer endorsement; but Webster's accolade was really reserved for a Mr. Norris, whose total eclipse is perhaps the best comment on Webster's restrictive standards. The only Norris listed in the *Cambridge Bibliography* who lived at all near this time was John Norris of Bemerton (d. 1711), whose principal works appeared in 1684 and 1687; but Webster spoke of his Norris as though he were a contemporary of Addison and Young, as Norris of Bemerton was not. Presumably Webster's Norris was

such a minor figure that his existence escaped even the vigilance of the compilers of *CBEL*.

Literary men could not take such attacks as Webster's without a response, and their reaction at this time, as in the previous quarter century, was to jettison aspects of wit and literature which they found untenable. For example, the attacks on literature—together doubtless with his own sincere convictions—explain why Henry Baker argued so eloquently in his *Universal Spectator*, No. 218, for the good moral effects of the proper use of the stage and spurned so impatiently its abuse, and in No. 344 called for a definition of poetry that would find its origin in "a Contemplation of . . . the *moral* or *natural* System of Things." Baker, like other literary men of this period, must have felt his back was to the wall, that he must fight for freedom of the press and stage against those who would destroy it utterly, that he must throw overboard anything that he could not defend against charges of immorality, and that those literary men who persisted in furnishing the Puritans with ammunition in the form of questionable plays were damaging the cause he was trying to make common with them. This last explains Baker's irritation with some of his contemporaries; the fools couldn't read the handwriting on the wall, and by their bland refusal to change the set of their sails in the face of adverse winds they were making the situation more dangerous for everybody.

In his preface to *Winter* James Thomson openly acknowledged that there were those who "seriously, declare against [the] DIVINE ART" of poetry and proceeded to take the offensive against them vigorously. In attacking poetry, he maintained, they were attacking "the very Soul of all Learning, and Politeness," "the universal Taste of Mankind," and even, since much of the Bible is poetry, "the sublimest Passages of the inspired Writings themselves"—this last an exceptionally clever stroke against the Puritans. Moreover, their position revealed them as defective in the ability to appreciate the excellencies of poetry. And finally, Thomson said, as Sir Philip Sidney had said before him, the abuse of a thing was no argument against its proper use. What was the proper use for poetry? To treat subjects "such as are fair, useful, and magnificent . . . so as, at once, to please, instruct, surprize, and astonish." Useful subjects and instructive treatment were here an integral part of the conception of poetry's function; and thus Thomson, too, for all that he began his defense of poetry with an attack on her attackers, was willing to accept their assumptions and to reject any type of poetry that he feared they would not accept.



The same note was also struck in No. 79 of Aaron Hill's *Prompter*. Hill was himself a literary man of some distinction, though far from the first rank; yet his attack on the immorality and profaneness of the English stage, especially of contemporary English comedies, was at least as vigorous and forceful as anything Webster ever wrote. He seems, indeed, to be more on Webster's side than on his own. Undoubtedly Hill, like Baker, believed what he wrote; but undoubtedly also Hill felt that he could never gain a hearing among the Puritans for his argument that comedy "can never be *naturally*, criminal" unless he first condemned as vigorously as they themselves what he wanted to make them accept as merely an abuse of comedy.

The attacks we have been discussing, together undoubtedly with the disapproval of obscenity in Pope's *Essay on Criticism*, probably explain the ridicule of smut in comedy and satire that is found in Section 34 of Miller's *Harlequin-Horace*.

Henry Pemberton's response to the attack on literature was original and striking. He confessed that it was possible to abuse the forms of literature, thus leaving the way open for an appeal from abuse to proper use. But he placed the mechanism of instruction through poetry upon a new ground: instead of the traditional notion that poetry instructs by telling a story with a moral, he offered the ideas that poetry instructs merely by showing what people are really like; that the realistic presentation of character will itself teach us prudence; and also that poetry instructs by arousing in us the emotions of compassion for others that lead to the benevolent exercise of virtue. It can readily be seen that it is much easier to defend the morality of literature when its method is viewed in this new light than when the more usual arguments are used. But, not content with this, Pemberton went on to carry the fight directly to the enemy. The purpose of poetry, he declared, may according to Horace be *either* to teach or to entertain, and there is nothing wrong with entertainment: "Those poetic amusements . . . which promise no more than relief from the fatigues of business, are far from being unprofitable, nor the least unworthy of diligent cultivation."

In view of the fact that Fielding is often given the blame for being the immediate cause of the passage of the Licensing Act of 1737, it is interesting to find him of Henry Baker's and Aaron Hill's party in the *Champion* for 3 January 1739/40. When wit is used to attack religion, virtue, honor, modesty, or innocence, he said in a memorable phrase, it becomes "a Sword in a Madman's Hand."

Part of the implication here, of course, was that Fielding's use of wit in his attacks on the Walpole administration did not come under this heading, and thus the essay was in part an apologia for his own practice. But in its wider implications the essays said in effect to Webster and his allies: "I agree with you that wit wrongly used is as bad as you say it is; where you go astray is in not realizing that wit can also be used in support of virtue and morality or to castigate vice and folly."

The same concern to defend wit colored the comments of Fielding's erstwhile partner, James Ralph, in the *Champion*, No. 441, that the sword of wit—the metaphor was common at the time—should be drawn only "against Folly and Affectation," not against "humble Ignorance" or "modest Weakness."

William Whitehead's *Essay on Ridicule* is an especially interesting commentary on wit. He disapproved of ridicule on several grounds. To ridicule someone else was presumptive pride; it showed that you considered yourself superior to the object of your ridicule. Ridicule was particularly reprehensible when applied, as Shaftesbury would have had it, as a test of truth; not only was it ineffectual as a test of truth, but it might also, as it had done in the hands of Mandeville, introduce error. Often ridicule was applied to something only because the ridiculer didn't understand it thoroughly. Certainly ridicule should never be used to attack "Faults by Nature's Hand imprest," but only failings which the individual might correct; here, however, we should be careful that we were motivated by a desire to help and not simply by a desire to gratify our own ill-nature. But even when we aimed to help, we rarely succeeded; people hid their faults from themselves, or became hypocritical and hid them from others, or might lose accompanying virtues in trying to extirpate vices. Affectation, the source of ridicule which Fielding had approved in the preface to *Joseph Andrews*, came as near an acceptable object as possible, but even here there were problems; affectations were individual and did not yield properly to general satire, and besides it was cruel to rob people of their delusions.

From this catalogue of objections it would seem that Whitehead was simply opposed to the use of wit and ridicule, but this is not true. Let wit be used with "Goodnature," he concluded, and all would be well; and he praised a number of wits: Cervantes; Lucian; Addison, whom he called "Clio," after the four letters which Addison used to sign his essays in the *Spectator* and which form the name of the muse of history; Scarron; Butler; Garth; Rabelais, whom Whitehead censured, however, for his ribaldry; John Phil-

lips, author of "The Splendid Shilling"; Gay; Arbuthnot; Swift; and evidently Pope, who presumably was the person intended by the handsome compliment on p. 20. This shows very clearly the contradiction into which those who would defend wit were forced. How could a man who opposed ridicule on so many grounds as Whitehead praise the writers whom Whitehead praised? How could a man who claimed to enjoy Swift and Pope find so many grounds on which to condemn wit? The positions are irreconcilable and can be explained only if we conclude that what Whitehead was really doing was saying to the antagonists of wit something like this: "Yes, wit is often a very bad thing, and here are some arguments against it that you have forgotten, but it is possible (as I continually remind you rather subtly) to use wit for good purposes, and the writers I mention are very enjoyable. I will grant all your arguments but will still maintain that when wit is used with good nature it is valuable." The only trouble with Whitehead's position is that he marked off so many areas in which wit might not be used that there was nothing left.

Another way of handling the problem of wit is seen in Fielding and Foote. Fielding, in the preface to *Joseph Andrews*, simply ignored wit as an element of comedy, and Foote relegated it to an unimportant, almost insignificant, position in *The Roman and English Comedy Consider'd and Compar'd*; both placed their emphasis on humour instead. Fielding pushed this tendency a little farther in the introductory chapter to Bk. IX of *Tom Jones*, where he discussed "Genius." Most writers of his period would have thought in terms of wit and judgment. Fielding by-passed "wit" entirely in favor of "invention"; this, in turn, he defined as "a quick and sagacious Penetration into the true Essence of all the Objects of our Contemplation." Certainly not even Jeremy Collier, whose *Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage* (1698) had set the tone for the Puritan attack, could have objected to such insight as being immoral or profane. But, to clinch his argument, Fielding insisted that judgment, or the capacity for distinguishing the "essential Differences" between things, was the inseparable concomitant of invention; "For how we can be said to have discovered the true Essence of two Things, without discovering their Difference, seems to me hard to conceive." Thus Fielding concluded with a triumphant Q. E. D.; but it is difficult not to feel that instead of really answering the arguments against wit, Fielding merely juggled the terms with such dazzling rapidity that if he actually convinced any of his opponents it was just because they were confused.

It is interesting to notice that while Fielding was quite correct that etymologically "invention" has the meaning he ascribed to it, this usage was archaic in Fielding's own day, and the commonly accepted meaning of the word, as he himself confessed, was the same as it is today: "a creative Faculty." Thomas A. Edison objected to making the two terms interchangeable, as Fielding had done, though he had in mind a common misapprehension of the meaning of "discovery" rather than Fielding's usage; he complained that people did not properly discriminate between an invention, which was deliberate and purposeful, and a discovery, which was accidental and fortuitous. Edison himself maintained that he did not discover the electric light, he invented it; Bell, however, merely discovered the telephone. Edison would certainly have disapproved of Fielding's muddling of the two terms in the unlikely event that he ever read *Tom Jones*; and even those of us without Edison's special interest in the word "invention" may decide that Fielding was jumping from word to word because he wanted to shift the grounds of the attack against wit and to find the term with the most favorable connotation.

The final illustration of the defense of wit to be found reproduced here occurs in Isaac Hawkins Browne's poem on *Design and Beauty*, where he insisted not only that beauty could be found in virtue alone, but also that "True Poets are themselves a Poem," that only virtuous men could write good poetry. The first point, as Browne phrased it, seems to foreshadow Keats's statement that beauty is truth; truth, beauty. Thus a consideration of the development of the defense of wit and literature on moral grounds may lead a historian of criticism to the conclusion that this defense may underlie one of the basic positions of the Romantic movement. The second had previously been introduced into English criticism for the first time, so far as I am aware, by Milton; during the second quarter of the eighteenth century one may find it not only in Browne but also in Upton, in a lengthy passage (not reproduced here) on pp. 91-98 of his *Critical Observations upon Shakespeare*. Eventually one finds it in full flower, so to speak, in Ruskin; and it has been productive of controversy well into our own day.

Definitions of wit, humour, etc., were especially common at this time, perhaps because of their relationship to the attacks on wit that we have already noticed. Several have been included here so that their similarities and occasional differences may be noted. One quality they have in common is amusing: while all are essentially identical, all complain that the term is wrongly defined by everyone except the present writer.

The best definition of wit to appear during this period was that given by Corbyn Morris. He recognized clearly both the psychological effect of wit, so important in characterizing it, and the formal requirement that wit depends on a comparison of two objects. His concept of wit was not novel; but for that very reason it is especially important in gaining a clear notion of what that frequently used term meant to the eighteenth century. Particularly useful in his essay is his careful establishment of the boundaries of wit by showing how it differs from humour, judgment, invention, raillery, satire, and ridicule.

It is probably significant that Morris's discussion of wit, and especially his comparison of wit with humour, showed little admiration for it; he gave seven reasons why humour was superior. This may reflect the growing distaste for wit occasioned by the necessity of defending it against Puritan attacks.

Dodsley's view of wit in the *Publick Register*, 17 January 1741, was conventional and undistinguished; his definition of humour, on the contrary, was not only unusual but difficult to follow. Certainly his conclusion that humour got its principal effects when it was not permitted to "dwell long upon the Imagination" was sharply different from Morris's notion that wit's effects were much shorter in their duration than those of humour. Dodsley also brought out, as did Theobald, Morris, and Foote, the old idea, first promulgated, I believe, by Sir William Temple, that the prevalence of humorous characters in England was owing to the individual liberty ensured by the nation's political organization.

E. N. Hooker has shown, in "Humour in the Age of Pope," how humour became gradually more and more sympathetically regarded as the eighteenth century wore on. This movement can be traced from Swift's distrust of humour as a quality which, because it made a man nonconformist, should be expunged, through such sympathetic humourists as Sir Roger de Coverley and Parson Adams, to the farthest extreme the movement reached in the century, Toby Shandy. Dodsley's approval of Sir Roger de Coverley because we "love the Character, while we smile at [his] Foibles" shows that with Dodsley we are pretty far along in that development.

Fielding and Whitehead, and to a lesser extent Morris, show traces of the new attitude, which in them was related, though at one remove, to sentimentality. While neither Fielding nor Whitehead showed signs of wanting to revel in pity for pity's sake, both felt that there were situations more deserving of sympathy than of ridicule. The distinction was not clearly drawn by either writer. Fielding, in the preface to *Joseph Andrews*, seems to feel that unless

a humour was acquired—for affectation, which he found the source of the ridiculous, is an acquisition—it should not be ridiculed; but it is hard to tell, for his examples were all drawn from physical deformities rather than psychological peculiarities. Whitehead, who used the words “acquir’d” and “delib’rate” to describe what he felt was suitable, or at least relatively suitable, for ridicule, made the distinction perhaps more clearly. To interpret somewhat more confidently than the evidence will bear, both Fielding and Whitehead apparently felt that there were two types of humours, inherent and acquired; that those peculiarities or deviations over which the individual had no control, which he could not help having, should be regarded sympathetically; but that those which were affected were fair game. It is difficult not to feel that this distinction, if indeed it existed, was a very reasonable one and was creditable to the humanitarian impulses of both authors.

Not all writers who dealt with humour, however, showed signs of recognizing that there were elements of it which should be treated sympathetically. Foote, for instance, adhered to a definition of humour and an attitude toward it which Dryden and Swift would have recognized and shared.

## Chapter IV

# Textual Criticism

One of the problems that concerned English literary critics during this quarter century was that presented by textual criticism. Textual criticism of classical authors was a well established procedure by this time, and even earlier, but the difficulties faced by the textual critic when he approached a work in his own language had not been thoroughly apprehended, let alone solved.

Three of the best known works in the history of English textual criticism appeared during the period under scrutiny: Lewis Theobald's *Shakespeare Restor'd* (1726), his edition of Shakespeare, and Richard Bentley's edition of Milton's *Paradise Lost*. The opposite reputation which Theobald's and Bentley's works now have well exemplifies the extent to which no agreed-upon procedure for textual criticism had been established, especially when one considers that Theobald's and Bentley's contemporaries, such as Pope and Fielding, thought both performances equally ludicrous, and that while Theobald had an academic background inferior to Bentley's, he produced the better work by far.

Theobald's method, as he described it in the preface to his edition of Shakespeare, was conservative. He refused to change anything unless he found some good reason to do so. Previous editors had sometimes altered the text for reasons of taste; this Theobald restrained himself from doing, for he knew that taste changes, and what was in good taste in 1700 might have been in bad or indifferent taste a century previously. Whenever he found a line he did not understand, he considered the defect to lie in himself and his own knowledge rather than in Shakespeare and set about to find, in Shakespeare's contemporaries and predecessors, examples of linguistic usage which would make the passage clear. The magnitude of this task for one man to perform in days before there were any scholarly studies of the area or even good collections of Elizabethan plays can hardly be appreciated by us. But it was

only when Theobald had exhausted the linguistic evidence at his disposal that he began to attack the line as corrupt. Then his procedure was to ask himself what the line meant and to establish its meaning by linguistic analogues, altering it as little as he could in the process.

Theobald's emphasis on the meaning of the line, rather than its alliteration or the consistency of its metaphors, is a striking feature of his performance and derives from the unusual nature of his purposes. For *Shakespeare Restor'd*, his first venture into the editing of Shakespeare, was dedicated to John Rich, the famous pantomimist and theatrical manager; and, if the dedication of such a work to a pantomimist seems strange to us, that is because we fail to recognize the problem that the growing stage popularity of undoctored Shakespearean plays presented for actors. As long as the actors could use Shakespearean plays as revised and rewritten by Nahum Tate and Colley Cibber, among others, there was no problem in understanding the meaning of the lines. But when, during the eighteenth century, it began to become popular once more to play Shakespeare in the original versions, the actors had trouble. For they were unable to skip over an obscure passage, as could the scholar, cloistered in his study; they had to project it out to an audience with inflection. And the purpose of Theobald's researches was to produce an edition of Shakespeare which would allow the actors to speak each line with some confidence that it had a meaning which they could communicate to their auditors.

Although I have given high praise to Theobald here, I would not allow him to go altogether blameless. For one thing, the limitations of his knowledge were more confining than he knew, and scholars are still finding readings of which he and such other eminent editors of Shakespeare as Johnson were unaware. This is only to be expected; and yet Theobald had a certain truculence of tone, a certain air of having made the final statement, that makes us notice his failures more than if he had been more humble. But more important is the bardolatry evident on every page of Theobald's work, perhaps owing to his concentration on meaning to the exclusion of considerations of taste; perhaps owing to his animosity toward Pope, who had been at pains to show where Shakespeare went astray; but more likely arising from the spirit of his age. In Theobald's view, as in the views of many of his contemporaries, Shakespeare could do no wrong, and if any line contained a mixed metaphor, a contradiction, or any other fault, Theobald went out of his way to show that the fault was no fault at all. How much more refreshing is Johnson's acceptance of Shakespeare as a human being, capable of making



errors, but with a power of genius which made these errors of little significance.

Another work of textual criticism which was as controversial as Theobald's during this period was Richard Bentley's edition of Milton's *Paradise Lost*; and it is, indeed, a sign of the rudimentary state of the science that the two editors were lumped together. Bentley was a classical scholar who had produced a respectable edition of Horace and a brilliant exposure of the spurious "epistles of Phalaris," but when he approached Milton he threw all sound judgment overboard. Depending with far too much confidence on the infallibility of his taste, Bentley discerned, or believed he discerned, certain weaknesses and defects in *Paradise Lost* which he thought he could easily set right. Whether he actually believed the tale he told in his preface, of an "editor" who botched the initial publication of Milton's epic, cannot now be determined, but it is unlikely that he did. In either event, the best judgment on Bentley's theory was that of Johnson, in his *Life of Milton*: "A supposition rash and groundless, if he thought it true; and vile and pernicious if, as is said, he in private allowed it to be false."

Sound though Theobald's principles may have been, they did not save him from being made the hero of the *Dunciad*, and he was one of the most common symbols of pedantry in his age. Pedantry—or what they considered pedantry—was a common target of Pope and Swift and their followers. One might almost conclude that a young man desirous of making his reputation as a poet and of coming favorably to Pope's attention would begin by writing an attack on pedantry, and this probably explains the epistle *Of Verbal Criticism* which young David Malloch, later to change his name to Mallet, offered to Pope in 1733. Malloch's targets were the customary ones—Theobald and Bentley. He also mentioned, in passing, Pieter Burman, a Dutch scholar of some eminence, noted chiefly for his edition of Petronius.

Fielding, coincidentally, had studied under Burman at the University of Leyden, but, as is shown by a glancing reference to his professor (not reprinted here) in the preface to *The Tragedy of Tragedies*, he was not impressed. A chapter from *A Journey from This World to the Next* exemplifies the ridicule of Theobald and of textual scholarship generally that one finds in Fielding's work—and also shows its inconsistencies. William Warburton was praised. Why was he not condemned along with Theobald? Presumably because he had married the daughter of Ralph Allen, Fielding's friend and patron. Thus a personal obligation overruled considerations of intellectual consistency, as such often did with Fielding.



## Chapter V

# The Literary Milieu

Two interesting pictures of the literary world of the 1730's are given in the pieces reprinted here, one by Swift in his verse essay (or, as he called it, "rhapsody") *On Poetry* and the other by Fielding in a dream vision in the *Champion* for 13 December 1739.

Swift's concern was to satirize what he viewed as the typical progress of a literary man of the time: first the writing of a piece of which the greatest merit lay in the wit of its punctuation and italicization; then the failure of the piece, which its author himself condemned so as to keep his identity secret; then the failure of his second and third attempts; then the hiring of his pen to the Walpole administration, or the turning critic so as to exercise the power of success or failure over others which had formerly been exercised over his own work. It will be noted how much of Swift's satire here was paralleled by Johnson's essays on Dick Minim in the *Idler*, nearly thirty years later. Swift's picture of the successful writer was equally discouraging; he became the target for attacks by all the poets who found themselves beneath him. It is not unlikely that Swift here was thinking of his friend Pope.

Fielding's portrayal of his literary milieu dealt more in personalities, although Swift's also mentioned names (among them Fielding's), in passages not reprinted here. The mountain in Fielding's vision was, of course, Parnassus, the abode of the nine Muses, Calliope (muse of epic poetry), Clio (of history), Erato (of erotic poetry), Thalia (of comedy), Melpomene (of tragedy), Terpsichore (of dance), Euterpe (of music), Polyhymnia (of sacred poetry), and Urania (of astronomy). The little man on the summit of Parnassus was Alexander Pope, whose achievements in several branches of poetry qualified him to receive Fielding's praise. The tall man who tumbled down the hill was Colley Cibber, whose pronunciation suggested that of Sir Novelty Fashion, a character he himself acted,

in his play *Love's Last Shift* and Vanbrugh's sequel, *The Relapse*. Cibber's song referred to the odes which, as poet laureate, he wrote to celebrate the king's birthday.

The short, heavy-set man who joined Pope at the peak of Parnassus was Richard Glover, author of the now unread epic poem *Leonidas*, the popularity of which was owing to its political implications; despite the blandness of its poetry, it was taken up by the Opposition to Sir Robert Walpole because it presented an example of the principles which Bolingbroke was later to develop in his *Patriot King*. Glover's tall, thin companion is less capable of positive identification, but the description fits George Lyttelton, later Baron Lyttelton, one of Fielding's schoolfellows at Eton and a leader of the group of young members of the Opposition to Walpole who were known as the Patriots. The man who entered with a club in his hand was Fielding himself, who was conducting the *Champion* under the pen-name of Capt. Hercules Vinegar.

The "huge over grown Fellow, with a large Rabble at his Heels," who shook people by the hand was the Prime Minister, Sir Robert Walpole. Walpole's invisible follower was John "Orator" Henley, an eccentric Nonconformist preacher who supported Walpole in a periodical called the *Hyp-Doctor*, that is, doctor for hypochondriacs; the implication was that the ills which the Opposition found in the Walpole administration were only the imaginings of hypochondriacs, which Henley undertook to cure. Walpole's habit of shaking people by the hand alludes to the charges of bribery which were leveled against him by the Opposition.

It is interesting to note Fielding's criticism of Pope for not standing firmer against the Walpole administration; he repeated the charge in another essay a few months later but then excused Pope on the basis that Walpole's power to crush his opponents was so great that no one should be blamed for not having the courage to stand against him. In the piece reprinted here, however, he suggested that Pope himself had been bribed.

## Chapter VI

# Pre-Romantic Tendencies

Since one of the phenomena of the eighteenth century was the growth of what has been called, for the lack of a better term, the pre-Romantic movement, it may be instructive to examine the critical essays of this time to see whether any of the tendencies of that movement can be discerned. The most important characteristics which revealed themselves during the quarter century now under scrutiny were a rejection of the authority of Aristotle, an interest in the description of nature for its own sake, a questioning of the authority of the neo-Aristotelian rules, and a feeling that genius without learning was sufficient for literary greatness; there were, as well, a number of minor issues.

Of these tendencies, perhaps the most significant was the rejection of Aristotle as the supreme arbiter to whom all literary disputes might be referred; this was, in fact, basic to several other attitudes associated with pre-Romanticism. During the period 1726-1750 no one met Aristotle in a more head-on fashion than Henry Pemberton. One of the most fundamental assumptions of Aristotle's *Poetics* was its emphasis on the importance of action and plot. But this Pemberton rejected on the grounds that history tells a story as well as a poem can and that a story can attract us only when we read it for the first time and wonder how it will come out; some deeper element in a poem must explain why we return to it again. Pemberton found this element in the characters, for it is these which instruct us "in the passions and characters of men."

Pemberton also disagreed with Aristotle in the area of poetic diction. In the *Poetics*, and also in the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle had been concerned with the devices which elevate language above the level of ordinary discourse. Pemberton felt that the poet should be rather concerned with language which moved the emotions by presenting "sensible images" to the imagination. Whether such lan-

guage was figurative or not was of no consequence to Pemberton; here, however, he undervalued the effect of figurative language upon the imagination. The direction in which Pemberton was moving here was one which Wordsworth was to explore sixty years later with his interest in "the real language of men," and actually it is difficult to see that Wordsworth went very much farther beyond Pemberton's position. Coleridge's criticism of Wordsworth's theory, at least, is equally relevant to Pemberton's.

A sign of Aristotle's waning influence can be seen in the cavalier attitude taken toward him by Henry Fielding, whose positions on most literary questions were essentially conservative. He could write in Bk. VIII, Ch. i, "It is, I think, the Opinion of *Aristotle*; or if not, it is the Opinion of some wise Man, whose Authority will be as weighty, when it is as old . . . ." Fielding certainly was not rejecting Aristotle as an authority; but his tongue was in his cheek. Perhaps more interesting, though even less conclusive, is his footnote to a remark attributed to André Dacier earlier in the same chapter. He paraphrased Dacier as having said "that the same Thing which is impossible may be yet probable," and commented drily, "It is happy for M. *Dacier* that he was not an *Irishman*." (The reference, of course, was to Irish "bulls.") Yet Dacier's statement occurred in his commentary on Aristotle's *Poetics* and, indeed, was merely an accurate statement of a famous Aristotelian principle, that a probable impossibility is more credible than a possible improbability. If Fielding knew that the sentiment was Aristotle's, we may conclude that, while he was not prepared to do so openly and by name and preferred to laugh at him through his French commentator, his instinct was to ridicule the Greek critic; if he did not, we may conclude not only that some of Fielding's formidable classical learning was faked, but also that he did not consider it as essential as for example Pope to acquaint himself thoroughly with the *Poetics*.

Corollary with the rejection of Aristotle in the pre-Romantic complex of ideas was a turning to Longinus, with his emphasis on emotional effect; and Pemberton also showed this tendency, devoting much space to the problems of the sublime. Here, although he had comparatively little to offer, giving only a restatement of Longinus' ideas much as many earlier critics had done since the time of John Dennis, he did give, however, the best affirmative statement of Longinian principles in the quarter century.

Another characteristic of the pre-Romantic movement was an interest in descriptive or nature poetry for its own sake. The Neoclassicist tended to regard description of nature as embellishments

to more important elements rather than as ends in themselves; moreover, he was uncomfortable with nature in its wilder aspects. It was precisely these wilder aspects—storms, forests, mountains, and rivers—which fascinated the pre-Romantics.

This tendency is perhaps by no one better exemplified than by James Thomson, an uneven poet who at his best shows great power. Too often Thomson has been judged only by his failures and his successes ignored. Plains, valleys, even abysses and chasms, may be found in plenty throughout his work; but Thomson also has his heights and peaks. What is lacking in his topography is plateaus on which excellence is sustained at a high altitude.

Although Bonnamy Dobrée says of Thomson's *Winter*, ". . . there was nothing startlingly new about the kind of poetry he had given the reading world" (*English Literature in the Early Eighteenth Century*, p. 485), Thomson did assemble and draw together a number of tendencies which were to be found only scattered before him, heightened them by the force of his considerable talent, and gave them new impetus. He himself was conscious that he was an innovator. Even though the plan of his preface to *Winter* was borrowed from John Norris of Bemerton, "it is," as Dobrée has pointed out, "the differences rather than the likenesses that are significant" (p. 484); Thomson was as militantly aware of the novelty of his ideas as Wordsworth was to be in the preface to *Lyrical Ballads* seventy-five years later. One gathers that he regarded himself as a kind of literary John the Baptist, proclaiming the advent of some "illustrious Man" to arise in the future; and one cannot help feeling that in many ways Wordsworth was the Messiah who fulfilled Thomson's prophecy. Thomson was hard on his predecessors and contemporaries and called for a new poetry, scorning and despising trivial subjects and mere surface productions of the fancy in favor of "a calm, wide, Survey" of "*the Works of Nature.*"

In this connection it is interesting to notice that Thomson was received with more sympathy by his contemporary critics than Wordsworth was by his; it is likely that this fact signifies that Thomson was, for all his innovations, less truly revolutionary. Within the first few years after the publication of *Winter*, several very complimentary notices had appeared. One of these was the handsome and gracious reference to his ability as a descriptive poet in Blackwell's *Life and Genius of Homer*. Another, not reproduced here, was a poem, "To Mr. Thomson on his Seasons," affixed to James Dalacourt's *Prospect of Poetry*: "Thomson is another name for nature now," he wrote.

Although he did not mention Thomson, Henry Baker, in No. 328 of his *Universal Spectator*, emphasized the importance of descriptions and nature poetry. In a way, he came close to Matthew Arnold's theory of touchstones by which poetry might be judged. He did not, perhaps, really go beyond what any good Neoclassicist would have been willing to say about the value of description, and he did not elevate description to the importance of an aim in itself; it remained subsidiary to other elements of writing. But it would be difficult to take a step beyond Baker's position without becoming interested in the description of nature for its own sake and thus passing into the realm of pre-Romanticism.

Another attitude which can be identified as pre-Romantic is a chafing at the "rules." These were a body of doctrines which had been derived from Aristotle, from the commentators upon Aristotle, and from the commentators upon the commentators, until their number had, by the eighteenth century, become truly formidable. It was during this century that the importance of the rules collapsed and crumbled.

The unknown author of the pamphlet entitled *Some Remarks on the Tragedy of Hamlet*, which for long was erroneously attributed to Sir Thomas Hanmer, makes some trenchant observations on the rules which show that by the 1730's these elements of the neo-Aristotelian structure were losing their force. It is often remarked that what destroyed the rules was that Shakespeare could not be explained by them; possibly nowhere except in Johnson's preface to Shakespeare do the rules and the bard collide in a more head-on fashion than in this anonymous essay—and Johnson's preface followed this by thirty years.

The author of the *Remarks*, however, was incapable of handling the problem of how the audience reacted to a dramatic representation. His idea that this depended on a delusion, that to an extent the audience was actually for a time out of its senses, is far from satisfactory. Johnson's solution—that one attended a play only to see a set of fine words justly declaimed—is hardly better; in fact, it really is farther from the mark. Not until Coleridge was there an adequate explanation of the phenomenon.

Much as the author of the *Remarks* decided that if he could not reconcile Shakespeare and the rules, the rules had to go, Corbyn Morris displayed in his comparison of Shakespeare and Ben Jonson, though less consciously, the change in attitude that came when Shakespearean comedy confronted Neoclassical doctrine. In Neoclassical criticism, the purpose of comedy, like that of tragedy, was moral instruction. Morris recognized Jonson as more morally in-



structive, and therefore closer to the purpose of comedy, than Shakespeare; but he also recognized that he enjoyed Shakespeare's comedies more. From here it is only a step, though one Morris did not take, to a conclusion that if Shakespeare's comedies, though farther from the accepted ideal, were better, then there was something wrong with the accepted ideal.

The problems which a Neoclassical critic faced in dealing with Shakespeare are shown also in Upton's *Critical Observations on Shakespeare*. His solution is interesting, perhaps influenced by Dryden's apology for his own dramatic practice in the preface to *The Conquest of Granada*: that these plays were not tragedies at all but "dramatic heroic poems." This definition Upton applied not specifically to *Antony and Cleopatra*, where the sweep of action does approach the epic, but (in passages not reprinted here) to *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, and *Othello*. Because Shakespeare's plays—tragedies, histories, and comedies alike—were all "dramatic heroic poems," Upton argued, they did not need to follow any of the rules of any of the *genres*, except certain basic principles which Upton, unable to break with Neoclassicism entirely, derived from Aristotle.

Upton's not very successful attempt to reconcile Shakespeare with Aristotle led him into some peculiar positions. On p. 73, for instance, in the space of one paragraph, there are two noteworthy passages. We find him citing Aristotle to the effect that the difference between a heroic poem and a tragedy, and therefore the reason why the former did not need to observe the unities while the latter did, was that "the former is to be *red* [*sic*], the latter to be *seen*." If that was true, then it would seem to follow inexorably that a "dramatic heroic poem" would need to follow the unities, because it too, by virtue of being "dramatic," would be *seen*.

Moving on from that contradiction, Upton argued that the unities of place and time were unnecessary because "dramatic art is the art of imposing; and he is the best poet, who can best impose on his audience." Shakespeare's very habit, therefore, of jamming years of action into the space of a few hours was not a weakness; it was his greatest strength. By not going quite so far as the author of the *Remarks* in insisting that an audience was deluded while it watched a play, by going no farther than to say the audience was imposed on by the poet, Upton reached a point a little closer to an understanding of dramatic illusion in the Coleridgean sense. Thus, although Upton here made too much of the simple mechanics of construction, he did mark an advance, however slight, in the development of dramatic theory.

While Fielding showed no awareness of these gropings toward a theory which would replace the rules of the three unities by an understanding of the means by which a play moved an audience, to put the problem in the terms Johnson used in the preface to his edition of Shakespeare, he also questioned the unities. "What Critick," Fielding inquired, "hath been ever asked why a Play may not contain two Days as well as one, or why the Audience (provided they travel like Electors, without any Expence) may not be wafted Fifty Miles as well as five!" These questions were to be asked resoundingly fifteen years later by Johnson. But that Fielding, usually so conservative and even so uninterested in theoretical matters, could raise them in Bk. V, Ch. i, of *Tom Jones* suggests that by this time they had really become commonplaces of coffee-house criticism.

Another issue that separated the pre-Romantic from the Neoclassic was whether genius alone could make a writer successful, or whether he needed a classical education as well. The traditional Neoclassic view is rather well exemplified in this collection by Fielding, with his insistence upon the importance of learning and his heavy sarcasm on this subject in Bk. XIV, Ch. i, of *Tom Jones*—sarcasm somewhat reminiscent of Swift. The classic statement of the pre-Romantic view, that genius did not need the support of learning, is Edward Young's *Conjectures on Original Composition* (1759). Yet, although Young's essay is often treated in histories of literary criticism as a revolutionary document, Fielding spoke of Young's idea as something which modern critics were beginning to broadcast freely, and E. N. Hooker has shown in an article on "The Reviewers and the New Criticism" that Young's essay was not met with surprise by contemporary reviewers. Hooker's conclusion is that by 1759 the idea that original genius alone was all a writer needed, an idea which had received its first forceful statement by Addison, was by 1759 so much in the air that Young was merely expressing a commonplace.

Between Addison and Young perhaps nothing gives a better sampling of the growth of a climate of opinion ready to accept Young's ideas than an anonymous essay in the *Daily Gazetteer*, 25 September 1741. Here it was argued that imitation of the ancients was sterile and that a knowledge of Greek and Latin did not necessarily qualify a man for vigorous and effective use of his own language. It is especially interesting to see Swift listed as one of the examples of original genius; Swift, who was contemptuous of writers who had no learning, and Young, who used Swift as his prime example of a writer of "infantine" genius, would have been equally surprised.

In a number of ways the Richardsons' *Explanatory Notes and Re-*

marks on Milton's *Paradise Lost* look forward to the Romanticism of the century to come. They reject end-stopped lines, preferring to pause only "as the Sense requires." Whereas the ideals of the Neoclassical writers had included lucidity, the Richardsons did not merely apologize for Milton's obscurity, they positively praised him for it, while carefully (and rightly) distinguishing between the kind of obscurity which was the writer's fault and that which was the reader's. Although the Richardsons were not pugnacious and did not entirely reject the rules, they felt that the sublimity of *Paradise Lost* raised it above the necessity to follow them; in them, therefore, the Longinian won out almost completely over the Aristotelian. Even in defining poetry as such the Richardsons were forerunners of the Romantics; Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, Poe, and several others gave definitions of poetry, whereas Neoclassical critics were usually concerned with other problems. Elements in their definition, too, looked ahead to the future. First, in divorcing poetry from the idea of verse, they were moving in a direction that Shelley was to take. This concept dates back to the time of Sir Philip Sidney but was not significant during the Neoclassical period; besides the Richardsons, Henry Baker, in the *Universal Spectator*, No. 344, and Aaron Hill, in the *Prompter*, No. 79, both voiced the idea during the second quarter of the century. The second element in the Richardson's definition that forecasted later developments is that in emphasizing the aspect of poetry as "a Sort of New Creation," rather than as an imitation of reality, they were taking a step along the road Coleridge was later to travel. One can, indeed, see some germs of Coleridge's theory of imagination, and his distinction between that quality and fancy, in the Richardsons' discussion.

Interesting as the Richardsons may be, however, of no critic of the quarter century is the discrepancy between his merit and his fame greater than that between the brilliance of Samuel Say as an analyst of metrical technique and his almost total obscurity. He understood the importance of variety in meter better than any other critic of the period, and indeed better than some living authors of college poetry textbooks; though it should also be noted that the variety he praised in Milton was also to be found in Pope, for that consideration suggests that Pope quietly practised some of the principles which Say preached. Say scoffed at Pemberton's praise of Milton's smoothness, pointing out that often "rough" meters are necessary to communicate depth of emotion; Pope had been similarly scornful of "tuneful fools," for whom "smooth or rough . . . is right or wrong," in the *Essay on Criticism*. And when Say illustrated the importance of the selection of consonants in achieving

poetic effects, was he really saying more than Pope in the celebrated passage where the sound was shown to be an echo to the sense?

These similarities between Say's arguments and the practice and theory of Pope, together with the critic's evident familiarity with and use of Aristotle and Horace, when contrasted with his fondness for Milton, as well as his association with the Jonathan Richardsons, John Hughes, and other figures associated with pre-Romanticism, point up the fact that in some ways Neoclassicism contained the seeds of its own destruction—or, to put it in another way, that Romanticism itself was a logical development of Neoclassical tendencies. After all, Say's notion that the rhythm of a poem, as one aspect of its form, should be organically related to its emotional content, which we have noticed was implicit in Pope, is really, as has been forcefully stated by Paul Fussell, Jr., in his introduction to the edition of Say's essay published by the Augustan Reprint Society, only one facet of Coleridge's theory of organic unity.

# JAMES THOMSON

## From the Preface to *Winter* (1726)

[9] I AM neither ignorant, nor concern'd, how much One may suffer in the Opinion of several Persons of great Gravity, and Character, by the Study, and Pursuit, of POETRY.

Altho' there may seem to be some Appearance of Reason for the present Contempt of it, as managed by the most part of our modern Writers, [10] yet that any Man should, seriously, declare against that DIVINE ART is, really, amazing. It is declaring against the most charming Power of Imagination, the most exalting Force of Thought, the most affecting Touch of Sentiment; in a Word, against the very Soul of all Learning, and Politeness. It is affronting the universal Taste of Mankind, and declaring against what has charmed the listening World from *Moses* down to *Milton*. In fine, it is, even, declaring against the sublimest Passages of the inspired Writings themselves, and what seems to be the peculiar Language of Heaven.

The Truth of the Case is this: These weak-sighted Gentlemen cannot bear the strong Light of POETRY, and the finer, and more amusing, Scene of Things it displays; but must Those, therefore, whom Heaven has blessed [11] with the discerning Eye shut it, to keep them Company. . . .

That there are frequent, and notorious, Abuses of POETRY is as true as that the best Things are most liable to that Misfortune; but is there no End of that clamorous Argument against the Use of Things from the Abuse of them? . . .

[12] To insist no further on this Head, let POETRY, once more, be restored to her antient Truth, and Purity; let Her be inspired from Heaven, and, in Return, her Incense ascend thither; Let Her exchange Her low, venal, trifling, Subjects for such as are fair, useful, and magnificent; and, let Her execute these so as, at once, to please, instruct, surprize, and astonish: and then, of Necessity, the most

inveterate Ignorance, and Prejudice, shall be struck Dumb; and Poets, yet, become the Delight and Wonder, of Mankind.

But this happy Period is not to be expected, till some long-wished, illustrious Man, of equal Power, and Beneficence, rise on the wintry World of Let[13]ters: One of a genuine, and unbounded, Greatness, and Generosity, of Mind; who, far, above all the Pomp, and Pride, of Fortune, scorns the little addressful, Flatterer; peirces thro' the disguised, designing, Villain; discountenances all the reigning Fopperies of a tasteless Age: and who, stretching his Views into late Futurity, has the true Interest of Virtue, Learning, and Mankind, intirely, at Heart—A Character so nobly desirable! that to an honest Heart, it is, almost, incredible so few should have the Ambition to deserve it.

Nothing can have a better Influence towards the Revival of POETRY than the chusing of great, and serious, Subjects; such as, at once, amuse the Fancy, enlighten the Head, and warm the Heart. These give a Weight, and Dignity, to the Poem: Nor is the Pleasure, I should say Rapture, both the Writer, and the Reader, feels, unwarranted by Reason, or followed by [14] repentant Disgust. To be able to write on a dry, barren, Theme, is looked upon, by some, as the Sign of a happy, fruitful, Genius—fruitful indeed[!]—like one of the pendant Gardens in *Cheapside*, water'd, every Morning, by the Hand of the *Alderman*, Himself. And what are we commonly entertain'd with, on these Occasions, save forced, unaffected, Fancies; little, glittering Prettinesses; mixed Turns of Wit, and Expression; which are as widely different from Native POETRY, as Buffoonery is from the Perfection of human Thinking? A Genius fired with the Charms of Truth, and Nature, is tuned to a sublimer Pitch, and scorns to associate with such subjects. . . .

[15] I know no Subject more elevating, more amusing; more ready to awake the poetical Enthusiasm, the philosophical Reflection, and the moral Sentiment, than the *Works of Nature*. Where can we meet with such Variety, such Beauty, such Magnificence? All that enlarges, and transports, the Soul? What more inspiring than a calm, wide, Survey of Them? In every Dress *Nature* is greatly charming! whether she puts on the Crimson Robes of the *Morning!* the strong Effulgence of *Noon!* the sober Suit of the *Evening!* or the deep Sables of *Blackness*, and *Tempest!* how gay looks the *Spring!* how glorious the *Summer!* how pleasing the *Autumn!* and how venerable the *Winter!*—But there is no thinking of these Things without breaking out into POE[16]TRY; which is, by the bye, a plain, and undeniable, Argument of their superior Excellence.

For this reason the best, both Antient, and Modern, POETS have been passionately fond of Retirement, and Solitude. The wild romantic Country was their Delight. And they seem never to have been more happy, than when lost in unfrequented Fields, far from the little, busy, World, they were at Leisure, to meditate, and sing the *Works of Nature*.





# ALEXANDER POPE

## From *Martinus Scriblerus His Treatise of the Art of Sinking in Poetry* (1727)

CHAP. VII. *Of the Profund, when it consists in the Thought.*

[29] THE Physician, by the Study and Inspection of Urine and Ordure, approves himself in the Science; and in like sort should our Author accustom and exercise his Imagination upon the Dregs of Nature.

THIS will render his Thoughts truly and fundamentally Low, and carry him many fathoms beyond Mediocrity. For, certain it is, (tho' some lukewarm Heads imagine they may be safe by temporizing between the Extreams) that where there is a Triticalness or Mediocrity in the *Thought*, it can never be sunk into the genuine and perfect *Bathos*, by the most elaborate low *Expression*: It can, at most, be only carefully obscured, or metaphorically debased. But 'tis the *Thought* alone that strikes, and gives the whole that Spirit, which we admire and stare at. For instance, in that in-[30]genious Piece on a Lady's drinking the *Bath-Waters*.

*She drinks! She drinks! Behold the matchless Dame!  
To her 'tis Water, but to us 'tis Flame:  
Thus Fire is Water, Water Fire, by turns,  
And the same Stream at once both cools and burns.*

[Anon.]

WHAT can be more easy and unaffected than the *Diction* of these Verses? 'Tis the Turn of *Thought* alone, and the Variety of Imagination, that charm and surprize us. And when the same Lady goes into the Bath, the *Thought* (as in justness it ought) goes still deeper.

*Venus beheld her, 'midst her Crowd of Slaves,  
And thought Herself just risen from the Waves.*

[Idem.]

How much out of the way of common Sense is this Reflection of *Venus*, not knowing herself from the Lady?

OF the same nature is that noble Mistake of a frightened Stag in full Chace, of which the Poet,

*Hears his own Feet, and thinks they sound like more;  
And fears the hind Feet will o'ertake the fore.*

[31] So astonishing as these are, they yield to the following, which is *Profundity* itself,

*None but Himself can be his Parallel.*

[Theobald,  
Double  
Distress.]

unless it may seem borrow'd from the Thought of that *Master of a Show* in *Smithfield*, who writ in large Letters, over the Picture of his Elephant,

*This is the greatest Elephant in the World, except Himself.* . . .

[32] ANOTHER Author, describing a Poet that shines forth amidst a Circle of Criticks,

*Thus Phœbus thro' the Zodiac takes his way,  
And amid Monsters rises into Day.*

WHAT a Peculiarity is here of Invention? The Author's Pencil, like the Wand of *Circe*, turns all into *Monsters* at a Stroke. A great Genius takes things in the Lump, without stopping at minute Considerations: In vain might the Ram, the Bull, the Goat, the Lion, the Crab, the Scorpion, the Fishes, all stand in his way, as mere natural Animals: much more might it be pleaded that a pair of Scales, an old Man, and two innocent Children, were no Monsters: There were only the Centaur and the Maid that could be esteem'd out of Nature. But what of that? with a Boldness peculiar to these daring Genius's, what he found not Monsters, he made so.

CHAP. VIII. *Of the Profund consisting in the Circumstances, and of Amplification and Periphrase in general.*

[33] WHAT in a great measure distinguishes other Writers from ours, is their chusing and separating such Circumstances in a Description as illustrate or elevate the Subject.

THE Circumstances which are most natural are obvious, therefore not astonishing or peculiar. But those that are far-fetch'd, or unexpected, or hardly compatible, will surprize prodigiously. These therefore we must principally hunt out; but above all, preserve a laudable *Prolixity*; presenting the Whole and every Side at once of the Image to view. For Choice and Distinction are not only a Curb to the Spirit, and limit the Descriptive Faculty, but also lessen the Book, which is frequently of the worst consequence of all to our Author.

[34] WHEN *Job* says in short, *He wash'd his Feet in Butter*, (a Circumstance some Poets would have soften'd, or past over) hear how it is spread out by the Great Genius.

*With Teats distended with their milky Store,  
Such num'rous lowing Herds, before my Door,  
Their painful Burden to unload did meet,  
That we with Butter might have wash'd our Feet.*

[Blackm.  
Job p. 133.]

How cautious! and particular! He had (says our Author) so many Herds, which Herds thriv'd so well, and thriving so well, gave so much Milk, and that Milk produc'd so much Butter, that if he *did not*, he *might* have wash'd his Feet in it. . . .

[35] *Periphrase* is another great Aid to *Prolixity*; being a diffus'd circumlocutory Manner of expressing a known Idea, which should be so misteriously couch'd, as to give the Reader the Pleasure of guessing what it is that the Author can possibly mean; and a Surprise when he finds it.

THE Poet I last mention'd is incomparable in this Figure.

*A waving Sea of Heads was round me spread,  
And still fresh Streams the gazing Deluge fed.* [Job p. 78.]

[36] HERE is a waving Sea of Heads, which by a fresh Stream of Heads, grows to be a gazing Deluge of Heads. You come at last to find it means a *great Crowd*.

How pretty and how genteel is the following.

*Natures Confectioner, —  
Whose Suckets are moist Alchimy  
The Still of his refining Mold,  
Minting the Garden into Gold.* [Cleveland.]

What is this, but a *Bee* gathering Honey?

WE may define *Amplification* to be making the most of a *Thought*; it is the spinning Wheel of the *Bathos*, which draws out and spreads it in the finest Thread. There are Amplifiers who can extend half a dozen thin Thoughts over a whole Folio; but for which, the Tale of many a vast Romance, and the Substance of many a fair Volume [37] might be reduced into the size of a *Primmer*.

IN the Book of *Job*, are these Words, *Hast thou commanded the Morning, and caused the Day Spring to know his Place?* How is this extended by the most celebrated Amplifier of our Age?

*Canst thou set forth th' ethereal Mines on high,  
Which the refulgent Ore of Light supply?  
Is the Celestial Furnace to thee known,  
In which I melt the golden Metal down?  
Treasures, from whence I deal out Light as fast,  
As all my Stars and lavish Suns can waste.* [Job p. 180]

THE same Author hath amplified a Passage in the 104th Psalm; *He looks on the Earth, and it trembles. He touches the Hills, and they smoke.*

*The Hills forget they're fix'd, and in their Fright,  
Cast off their Weight, and ease themselves for flight:  
The Woods, with Terror wing'd, out-fly the Wind,  
And leave the heavy, panting Hills behind.* [p. 167]

You here see the Hills not only trembling, but shaking off their Woods [38] from their Backs, to run the faster: After this you are presented with a Foot Race of Mountains and Woods, where the Woods distance the Mountains, that like corpulent pursy Fellows, come puffing and panting a vast way behind them.

CHAP. IX. *Of Imitation, and the manner of Imitating.*

THAT the true Authors of the *Profund* are to imitate diligently the Examples in their own Way, is not to be question'd, and that divers have by this Means attain'd to a Depth whereunto their own Weight could not have carried them, is evident by sundry Instances. Who sees not that *DeF[oe]* was the Poetical Son of *Withers*, *T[a]te* of *Ogilby*, *E. W[ar]d* of *John Taylor*, and *E[usde]n* of *Bl[ac]k-mo[re]*? Therefore when we sit down to write, let us bring some great Author to our Mind, and ask our selves this Question; How would Sir *Rich[39]ard* have said this? Do I express myself as simply as *A. Ph[ilips]*? or flow my Numbers with the quiet thoughtlessness of Mr. *W[el]st[e]d*?

BUT it may seem somewhat strange to assert, that our Proficient should also read the Works of those famous Poets who have excell'd in the Sublime: Yet is not this a Paradox. As *Virgil* is said to have read *Ennius*, out of his Dunghil to draw Gold; so may our Author read *Shakespear*, *Milton*, and *Dryden*, for the contrary End, to bury their Gold in his own Dunghil. A true Genius, when he finds any thing lofty or shining in them, will have the Skill to bring it down, take off the Gloss, or quite discharge the Colour, by some ingenious Circumstance, or Periphrase, some Addition, or Diminution, or by some of those Figures the use of which we shall shew in our next Chapter.

THE Book of *Job* is acknowledg'd to be infinitely sublime, and yet has not our Father of the *Bathos* reduc'd it in every Page? Is there a Passage in all *Virgil* more painted up and labour'd [40] than the Description of *Ætna* in the Third *Æneid*. . . . But lo! how this is taken down by our *British* Poet, by the singly happy Thought of throwing the Mountain into a Fit of the *Cholic*.

*Ætna, and all the burning Mountains, find  
Their kindled Stores with inbred Storms of Wind  
Blown up to Rage, and roaring out, complain,  
As torn with inward Gripes, and torturing Pain;  
Lab'ring, they cast their dreadful Vomit round,  
And with their melted Bowels, spread the Ground. . . .*

[*Pr. Arth.*  
Pag. 75.

[41] IMITATION is of two Sorts; the First is when we force to our own Purposes the Thoughts of others; The Second consists in copy-

ing the Imperfections, or Blemishes of celebrated Authors. I have seen a Play professedly writ in the Stile of *Shakespear*, wherein the greatest Resemblance lay in one single Line,

*And so good Morrow t'ye, good Master Lieutenant.*

And sundry Poems in Imitation of *Milton*, where with the utmost Exactness, and not so much as one Exception, nevertheless was constantly *nathless*, embroider'd was *broider'd*, Hermits were *Eremites*, disdain'd was *'sdeign'd*, shady *umbrageous*, Enterprize *Emprize*, Pagan *Paynim*, Pinions *Pennons*, sweet *dulcet*, Orchards *Orchats*, Bridge-work *Pontifical*; nay, her was *hir*, and their was *thir thro'* the whole Poem. And in very Deed, there is no other Way by [42] which the true modern Poet could read to any purpose the Works of such Men as *Milton* and *Shakespear*.

It may be expected, that like other Criticks, I should next speak of the PASSIONS: But as the main End and principal Effect of the *Bathos* is to produce *Tranquillity of Mind*, (and sure it is a better Design to promote Sleep than Madness) we have little to say on this Subject. Nor will the short Bounds of this Discourse allow us to treat at large of the *Emollients* and *Optiats* of *Poesy*, of the *Cool*, and the Manner of producing it, or of the *Methods* us'd by our Authors in *managing* the *Passions*. I shall but transiently remark, that nothing contributes so much to the *Cool*, as the Use of *Wit* in expressing Passion: The true Genius rarely fails of *Points*, *Conceits*, and proper *Similies* on such Occasions: This we may term the *Pathetic epigrammatical*, in which even Puns are made use of with good Success. Hereby our best Authors have avoided throwing themselves or their Readers into any indecent Transports.

[43] But forasmuch as it is sometimes needful to excite the Passions of our Antagonist in the Polemic way, the true Students in the *Low* have constantly taken their Methods from *Low-Life*, where they observ'd, that to move *Anger*, use is made of *scolding* and *railing*; to move *Love*, of *Bawdry*; to beget *Favour* and Friendship, of gross *Flattery*; and to produce *Fear*, by calumniating an Adversary with *Crimes* obnoxious to the *State*. As for *Shame*, it is a silly Passion, of which as our Authors are incapable themselves, so they would not produce it in others. . . .

CHAP. XII. *Of Expression, and the several Sorts of Style of the present Age.*

[59] THE *Expression* is adequate, when it is proportionably low to the Profundity of the Thought. It must not be always *Grammatical*,

lest it appear pedantic and ungentlemanly; nor too *clear*, for fear it become vulgar; for Obscurity bestows a Cast of the Wonderful, and throws an oracular Dignity upon a Piece which hath no meaning.

[60] For example, sometimes use the wrong Number; *The Sword and Pestilence at once* devours, instead of *devour*. Sometimes the wrong Case; *And who more fit to sooth the God than thee*, instead of *thou*: And rather than say, [Ti. Hom. II. 1. *Thetis saw Achilles weep, she heard him weep.*

WE must be exceeding careful in two things; first, in the Choice of *low Words*; secondly, in the *sober and orderly* way of *ranging* them. Many of our Poets are naturally bless'd with this Talent, insomuch that they are in the Circumstance of that honest Citizen, who had made *Prose* all his Life without knowing it. Let Verses run in this manner, just to be a Vehicle to the Words. (I take them from my last cited Author, who tho' otherwise by no means of our Rank, seem'd once in his Life to have a mind to be simple.)

*If not, a Prize I will my self decree,*  
*From him, or him, or else perhaps from thee.* [Ti. Hom. II. 1. p. 11.

————— *full of Days was he;*  
*Two Ages past, he liv'd the thir'd to see.* . . . [Idem. p. 17.

[61] *Then let my Mother once be rul'd by me,*  
*Tho' much more wise than I pretend to be.* [p. 38

Or these of the same hand.

*I leave the Arts of Poetry and Verse*  
*To them that practice them with more success:*  
*Of greater Truths I now prepare to tell,*  
*And so at once, dear Friend and Muse, farewell.* [Tons. Misc. 12ves. vol. 4. p. 292. fourth Edition.

Sometimes a single *Word* will familiarize a poetical Idea; as where a Ship set on fire owes all the Spirit of the *Bathos* to one choice *Word* that ends the *Line*.

*And his scorch'd Ribs the hot Contagion fry'd.* [Pr. Arthur. p. 151.

. . . So also in these:

*Beasts tame and savage to the River's Brink*  
*Come from the Fields and wild Abodes—to drink.* . . . [Job. p. 263

[62] *STYLE* is divided by the Rhetoricians into the *Proper* and the *Figured*. Of the *Figur'd* we have already treated, and the *Proper* is what our Authors have nothing to do with. Of *Stiles* we shall mention only the *Principal*, which owe to the *Moderns* either their *chief Improvement*, or entire *Invention*.

[63] 1. The FLORID,

Than which none is more proper to the *Bathos*, as Flowers which are the *Lowest* of Vegetables are the most *Gaudy*, and do many times grow in great Plenty at the bottom of *Ponds* and *Ditches*.

A fine Writer in this kind presents you with the following Posie:

*The Groves appear all drest with Wreaths of Flowers,*  
*And from their Leaves drop aromatic Showers,*  
*Whose fragrant Heads in mystic Twines above,*  
*Exchang'd their Sweets, and mix'd with thousand Kisses,*  
*As if the willing Branches strove*  
*To beautify and shade the Grove.—*

[Behn's  
Poems, p. 2.

(Which indeed most Branches do). . . .

[64] 2. The PERT Stile.

This does in as peculiar a manner become the low in Wit, as a Pert Air does the low in Stature. Mr. *Thomas Brown*, the Author of the *London Spy*, and all the *Spies* and *Trips* in general, are herein to be diligently study'd: In Verse, Mr. *Cibber's Prologues*.

But the Beauty and Energy of it is never so conspicuous, as when it is employ'd in *Modernizing* and *Adapting* to the *Taste of the Times* the Works of the Antients. This we rightly phrase *Doing them into English*, [65] and *making them English*; two Expressions of great Propriety, the one denoting our *Neglect* of the *Manner how*, the other the *Force* and *Compulsion* with which, it is brought about. It is by Virtue of this Stile that *Tacitus* talks like a *Coffee-House Politician*, *Josephus* like the *British Gazeteer*, *Tully* is as short and smart as *Seneca* or Mr. *Asgill*, *Marcus Aurelius* is excellent at *Snip-snap*, and honest *Thomas a Kempis* as *Prim* and *Polite* as any Preacher at Court.

3. THE ALAMODE Stile,

Which is fine by being *new*, and has this Happiness attending it, that it is as durable and extensive as the Poem itself. Take some Examples of it, in the Description of the Sun in a Mourning Coach upon the Death of *Q. Mary*.

*See Phæbus now, as once for Phaeton,*  
*Has mask'd his Face; and put deep Mourning on;*  
*Dark Clouds his sable Chariot do surround,*  
*And the dull Steeds stalk o'er the melancholy Round.*

[A. Phil.

[66] Of Prince *Arthur's* Soldiers drinking.

*While rich Burgundian Wine, and bright Champaign,*  
*Chase from their Minds the Terrors of the Matn.*

[Pr. Ar.  
p. 16.

(Whence we also learn, that *Burgundy* and *Champaign* make a Man on Shore despise a Storm at Sea.)

Of the Almighty encamping his Regiments.

— He sunk a vast capacious deep,  
Where he his liquid Regiments does keep;  
Thither the Waves file off, and make their way,  
To form the mighty Body of the Sea;  
Where they incamp, and in their Station stand,  
Entrench'd in Works of Rock, and Lines of Sand.

[Blackm.  
Ps. 104. p.  
261.

Of two Armies on the Point of engaging.

Yon' Armies are the Cards which both must play;  
At least come off a Saver if you may:  
Throw boldly at the Sum the Gods have set;  
These on your Side will all their Fortunes bet.

[Lee Sophon.

[67] All perfectly agreeable to the present Customs and best Fashions of this our Metropolis.

BUT the principal Branch of the *Alamode* is the PRURIENT, a Stile greatly advanc'd and honour'd of late by the practise of Persons of the *first Quality*, and by the encouragement of the *Ladies* not unsuccessfully introduc'd even into the *Drawing-Room*. Indeed its *incredible Progress* and *Conquests* may be compar'd to those of the great *Sesostris*, and are every where known by the *same Marks*, the Images of the Genital Parts of Men or Women. It consists wholly of Metaphors drawn from two most fruitful Sources or Springs, the very *Bathos* of the human Body, that is to say \* \* \* and

\* \* \* \* \*

*Hiatus Magnus lachrymabilis.* \* \* \* \* \*

\* \* \* \* \*

\* \* \* \* \*. And

*selling of Bargains*, and *double Entendre*, and [Cibberism], and [Oldfieldism], all derived from the said Sources.

4. THE FINICAL, which consists of the most curious, affected, mincing Metaphors, and partakes of the last mentioned.

[68] As this, of a Brook dry'd by the Sun.

Won by the Summer's importuning Ray[,] }  
Th' eloping Stream did from her Channel stray,  
And with enticing Sun-beams stole away.

[Bl. Job.  
p. 26.

Of an easy Death.

When watchful Death shall on his Harvest look,  
And see thee ripe with Age, invite the Hook;  
He'll gently cut thy bending Stalk, and thee  
Lay kindly in the Grave, his Granary. . . .

[Ibid. p. 23.

5. LASTLY, I shall place the CUMBROUS, which moves heavily under a Load of Metaphors, and draws after it a long Train of Words.



[69] AND the BUSKIN, or *Stately*, frequently and with great Felicity mix'd with the Former. For as the first is the proper engine to depress what is High, so is the second to raise what is Base and Low to a ridiculous Visibility: When both these can be done at once, then is the *Bathos* in Perfection; as when a Man is set with his Head downward, and his Breech upright, his Degradation is compleat: One End of him is as high as ever, only that End is the wrong one. Will not every true Lover of the *Profund* be delighted to behold the most vulgar and low Actions of Life exalted in this Manner?

Who knocks at the Door?

*For whom thus rudely pleads my loud-tongu'd Gate,  
That he may enter? —————*

See who is there?

*Advance the fringed Curtains of thy Eyes,  
And tell me who comes yonder. —————*

[Temp.]

Shut the Door.

*The wooden Guardian of our Privacy  
Quick on its Axle turn. —————*

[70] Bring my Cloaths.

*Bring me what Nature, Taylor to the Bear,  
To Man himself deny'd: She gave me Cold,  
But would not give me Cloaths. —————*

Light the Fire.

*Bring forth some Remnant of Promethean Theft,  
Quick to expand th' inclement Air congeal'd  
By Boreas's rude Breath. —————*

Snuff the Candle.

*Yon Luminary Amputation needs,  
Thus shall you save its half-extinguish'd Life. . . .*

Uncork the Bottle, and chip the Bread.

*Apply thine Engine to the spongy Door,  
Set Bacchus from his glassy Prison free,  
And strip white Ceres of her nut-brown Coat.*

CHAP. XV. *A Receipt to make an Epic Poem.*

[80] AN Epic Poem, the Criticks agree, is the greatest Work Human Nature is capable of. They have already laid down many mechanical Rules for Compositions of this Sort, but at the same time they cut off almost all Undertakers from the Possibility of ever performing them; for the first Qualification they unanimously require in a Poet, is a *Genius*. I shall here endeavour (for the Benefit of my Countrymen) to make it manifest, that Epick Poems may be made

*without a Genius*, nay without Learning or much Reading. This must necessarily be of great Use to all those who confess they never *Read*, and of whom the World is convinc'd they never *Learn*. What *Moliere* observes of making a Dinner, that any Man can do it *with Money*, and if a profess'd Cook cannot do it *without* he has his Art [81] for nothing; the same may be said of making a Poem, 'tis easily brought about by him that *has* a Genius, but the Skill lies in doing it without one. In pursuance of this End, I shall present the Reader with a plain and certain *Recipe*, by which any Author in the *Bathos* may be qualified for this grand Performance.

For the *Fable*.

TAKE out of any old Poem, History-book, Romance, or Legend, (for Instance *Geffry of Monmouth* or *Don Belianus of Greece*) those Parts of Story which afford most Scope for *long Descriptions*: Put these Pieces together, and throw all the Adventures you fancy into *one Tale*. Then take a Hero, whom you may chuse for the Sound of his Name, and put him into the midst of these Adventures: There let him *work*, for twelve Books; at the end of which you may take him out, ready prepared to *conquer* or to *marry*; it being necessary that the Conclusion of an Epick Poem be *fortunate*.

[82] *To make an Episode*.

TAKE any remaining Adventure of your former Collection, in which you could no way involve your Hero; or any unfortunate Accident that was too good to be thrown away; and it will be of Use, apply'd to any other Person; who may be lost and *evaporate* in the Course of the Work, without the least Damage to the Composition.

*For the Moral and Allegory*.

THESE you may extract out of the *Fable* afterwards, at your leisure: Be sure you *strain* them sufficiently.

*For the Manners*.

FOR those of the *Hero*, take all the best Qualities you can find in the most celebrated Heroes of Antiquity; if they will not be reduced to a *Consistency*, lay 'em *all on a Heap* upon him. But be sure they are Qualities which your *Patron* would be thought to have; and to prevent any Mistake which the World may be subject to, select from the Alphabet those Capital Letters that compose his Name, and set [83] them at the Head of a Dedication before your Poem. However, do not absolutely observe the exact Quantity of these Virtues, it not being determin'd whether or no it be necessary for

the Hero of a Poem to be an *honest Man*. For the *Under-Characters*, gather them from *Homer* and *Virgil*, and change the Names as occasion serves.

*For the Machines.*

TAKE of *Deities*, Male and Female, as many as you can use. Separate them into two equal Parts, and keep *Jupiter* in the middle. Let *Juno* put him in a Ferment, and *Venus* mollify him. Remember on all occasions to make use of Volatile *Mercury*. If you have need of Devils, draw them out of *Milton's Paradise*, and extract your *Spirits* from *Tasso*. The Use of these Machines is evident; for since no Epick Poem can possibly subsist without them, the wisest way is to reserve them for your greatest Necessities. When you cannot extricate your Hero by any human means, or your self by your own Wit, seek Relief from Heaven, and the Gods will do your business very [84] readily. This is according to the direct Prescription of *Horace* in his Art of Poetry.

*Nec Deus interit, nisi dignus vindice Nodus  
Inciderit.*—————

That is to say, A Poet should never call upon the Gods for their Assistance, but when he is in great Perplexity.

*For the Descriptions.*

FOR a *Tempest*. Take *Eurus*, *Zephyr*, *Auster* and *Boreas*, and cast them together in one Verse: Add to these of Rain, Lightning and of Thunder (the loudest you can) *quantum sufficit*. Mix your Clouds and Billows well together 'till they foam, and thicken your Description here and there with a Quicksand. Brew your Tempest well in your Head, before you set it a blowing.

FOR a *Battle*. Pick a large Quantity of Images and Descriptions from *Homer's Iliads*, with a Spice or two of *Virgil*, and if there remain any Overplus, you may lay them by for a *Skirmish*. Season it well with *Similes*, and it will make an *Excellent Battle*.

[85] FOR a *Burning Town*. If such a Description be necessary, (because it is certain there is one in *Virgil*,) Old *Troy* is ready burnt to your Hands. But if you fear that would be thought borrow'd, A Chapter or two of the Theory of the *Conflagration*, well circumstanced, and done into Verse, will be a good *Succedaneum*.

As for *Similes* and *Metaphors*, they may be found all over the Creation; the most ignorant may gather them, but the Danger is in applying them. For this advise with your Bookseller.



# WALTER HARTE

## From *An Essay on Satire* (1730)

- [5] T<sup>e</sup> Exalt the Soul, or make the Heart sincere,  
To arm our Lives with honesty severe,  
To shake the wretch beyond the reach of Law,  
Deter the young, and touch the bold with awe,  
To raise the fal'n, to hear the sufferer's cries,  
And sanctify the virtues of the wise,
- [6] Old Satire rose from Probity of mind,  
The noblest Ethicks to reform mankind.  
    As *Cynthia's* Orb excels the gems of night:  
So *Epic Satire* shines distinctly bright.  
Here Genius lives, and strength in every part,  
And lights and shades, and fancy fix'd by art.  
A second beauty in its nature lies,  
It gives not *Things*, but *Beings* to our eyes,  
*Life, Substance, Spirit* animate the whole;  
*Fiction* and *Fable* are the Sense and Soul. . . .
- [7] A *Dunciad* or a *Lutrin* is compleat,  
And *one* in action; ludicrously great.  
Each wheel rolls round in due degrees of force;  
E'en *Episodes* are *needful*, or *of course*:  
*Of course*, when things are virtually begun  
E'er the first ends, the Father and the Son:  
Or else so *needful*, and exactly grac'd,  
That nothing is *ill-suited*, or *ill-plac'd*.  
    True Epic's a vast World, and this a small;  
One has its *proper* beauties, and one *all*.
- [8] Like *Cynthia*, one in *thirty days* appears,  
Like *Saturn* one, rolls round in *thirty years*.  
*There* opens a wide Tract, a length of Floods.  
A height of Mountains, and a waste of Woods:  
*Here* but one Spot; nor Leaf, nor Green depart

From Rules, e'en Nature seems the Child of Art.  
As *Unities* in Epick works appear,  
So must they shine in full distinction here.  
Ev'n the warm *Iliad* moves with slower pow'rs:  
That forty days demands, This forty hours.

Each other Satire humbler arts has known,  
Content with meaner Beauties, tho' its own:  
Enough for that, if rugged in its course  
The Verse but rolls with Vehemence and Force;  
Or nicely pointed in th' *Horatian* way  
Wounds keen, like *Syrens* mischievously gay.

[9] Here, All has *Wit*, yet must that *Wit* be *strong*,  
Beyond the Turns of *Epigram*, or *Song*.  
The *Thought* must rise exactly from the vice,  
*Sudden*, yet *finished*, *clear*, and yet *concise*.  
*One Harmony* must *first* with *last* unite;  
As all true Paintings have their *Place* and *Light*.  
*Transitions* must be *quick*, and yet *design'd*,  
Not made to fill, but just retain the mind:  
And *Similies*, like meteors of the night,  
Just give one flash of momentary Light.

As thinking makes the Soul, low things exprest  
In high-rai'd terms, defined a *Dunciad* best.  
*Books and the Man* demands as much, or more,  
Than *He* who *wander'd to the Latian shore*:  
For here (eternal Grief to *Duns's* soul,  
And *B——'s* thin Ghost!) the *Part* contains the *Whole*:

[10] Since in Mock-Epic none succeeds, but he  
Who tastes the Whole of Epic Poesy.

The *Moral* must be clear and understood;  
But finer still, if negatively good. . . .  
A *Fool's* the *Heroe*; but the *Poet's* end  
Is, to be *candid*, *modest*, and a *Friend*.

Let *Classic Learning* sanctify each Part,  
Not only show your Reading, but your Art.

The charms of *Parody*, like those of *Wit*,  
If well *contrasted*, never fail to hit;  
One half in light, and one in darkness drest,  
(For contraries oppos'd still shine the best.)

[11] When a cold Page half breaks the Writer's heart,  
By this it warms, and brightens into Art.  
When Rhet'ric glitters with too pompous pride,  
By this, like *Circe*, 'tis un-deify'd. . . .

The *Language* next: from hence new pleasure springs;  
For *Styles* are dignify'd, as well as *Things*.  
Tho' Sense subsists, distinct from phrase or sound,  
Yet *Gravity* conveys a surer wound.

- [12] The chymic secret which your pains wou'd find,  
Breaks out, unsought for, in *Cervantes'* mind;  
And *Quixot's* wildness, like that King's of old,  
Turns all he touches, into *Pomp* and *Gold*.  
Yet in this *Pomp* discretion must be had;  
Tho' *grave*, not *stiff*; tho' *whimsical*, not *mad*:  
In Works like these if *Fustian* might appear,  
Mock-Epics, *Blackmore*, would not cost thee dear.

We grant, that *Butler* ravishes the Heart,  
As *Shakespear* soar'd beyond the reach of Art;  
(For Nature form'd those Poets without Rules,  
To fill the world with *imitating Fools*.)  
What *Burlesque* could, was by that Genius done;  
Yet faults it has, impossible to shun:

- Th' unchanging strain for want of grandeur cloy,  
And gives too oft the horse-laugh mirth of Boys:  
[13] The short-legged verse, and double-gingling Sound,  
So quick surprize us, that our heads run round:  
Yet in this Work peculiar Life presides,  
And *Wit*, for all the world to glean besides.





# JAMES MILLER

## From *Harlequin-Horace: or, The Art of Modern Poetry* (1731)

- [1] (1) IF some great Artist in whose Works conspire  
The Grace of *Raphael*, and a *Titian's* Fire,  
Should toil to draw the *Portrait* of a Fair  
With *Shaftsb'ry's* Mien, and *Harvey's* pleasing Air;  
[2] A *Shape* that might with lovely *Queenb'rough's* Vie,  
The *Smile* of *Vanbrugh*, and a *Hartford's* Eye,  
'Till the whole Piece shou'd like a *Richmond* shine,  
One finish'd Form, in ev'ry *Part* divine.  
Tho' thus with all that's *Justly* pleasing fraught,  
Our *modern Connoisseurs* would scorn the Draught.  
(2) Such Treatment Friend you must expect to find,  
Whilst Art, and Nature in your works are join'd.  
'Tis not to Think with Strength, and Write with Ease,  
No—'tis the *Ægri Somnia* now must please;  
Things without Head, or Tail, or Form, or Grace,  
A wild, forc'd, glaring, unconnected Mass.  
[3] Well! Bards (*you say*) like Painters, Licence claim,  
To dare do any thing for Bread, or—Fame.  
'Tis granted—therefore use your utmost Might,  
To gratify the Town in all you write;  
A Thousand jarring Things together yoke,  
The *Dog*, the *Dome*, the *Temple*, and the *Joke*,  
Consult no Order, but for ever steer  
From grave to gay, from florid to severe.  
(3) To grand Beginnings full of Pomp and Show,  
Big Things profest, and Brags of what you'll do,  
Still some gay, glitt'ring, foreign *Gewgaws* join,  
Which, like *gilt Points*, on *Peter's Coat*,<sup>1</sup> may shine;

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1. Vide *Tale of a Tub*. [—Miller.]

- [4] Descriptions which may make your Readers stare,  
And marvel how such pretty Things came There. . . .  
    Suppose you're skill'd in the *Parnassian* Art,  
    To purge the Passions, and correct the Heart,
- [5] To paint Mankind in ev'ry Light, and Stage,  
Their various Humours, Characters, and Age,  
To fix each Portion in its proper Place,  
And give the Whole one Method, Form, and Grace;  
What's that to us? who pay our Pence to see  
The great Productions of *Profundity*,  
*Shipwrecks*, and *Monsters*, *Conjurers*, and *Gods*,  
Where every Part is with the Whole at odds.  
    (4) With Truth and Likelihood we all are griev'd,  
    And take most Pleasure, when we're most deceived.  
    Now write obscure, and let your Words move slow,  
    Then with full Light, and rapid Ardor glow;
- [6] In one scene make your *Hero* cant, and whine,  
Then, roar out *Liberty* in every Line;  
Vary one Thing a thousand pleasant Ways,  
Shew *Whales* in *Woods*, and *Dragons* in the *Seas*.  
    (5) To shun a Fault's the ready Way to fall,  
    Correctness is the greatest Fault of all. . . .
- [7] (7) N'ere wait for Subjects equal to your Might,  
For then, 'tis ten to one you never write;  
When Hunger prompts you, take the first you meet,  
For who'd stand chusing when he wants to eat?  
Besides, Necessity's the keenest Whet;  
He writes most natural, who's the most in Debt. . . .
- [20] (21) Let lofty Language your Beginning grace,  
And still set out with a gigantick Pace;  
In thund'ring Lines your *no Design* rehearse[,]  
And rant, and rumble in a Storm of Verse.
- [21] It ne'er can fail to charm a crowded House,  
To see the lab'ring Mountain yield a Mouse.  
We're pleas'd to find the *great*, th'*important*, *Day*,  
Produce a Jig, a Wedding, or a Fray;  
*As if the old World modestly withdrew*,  
*And in Creation had brought forth a New*;  
Profoundly judging with the antient Sire,  
That *where there is much Smoke, must be some Fire*.  
    (22) 'Tis therefore your's to keep the Mind in Doubt,  
And never let your Meaning quite come out;

- To shun the least approach of Light with Care,  
 And turn, and double like a hunted Hare.
- [22] To hide your whole Design make some Pretence,  
 And spare no Pains to keep us in suspense;  
 Leave out no Nonsense, and you cannot fail  
 To make your Work have neither Head nor Tail. . . .
- [33] (34) Who'ere would *Comedy* or *Satire* write,  
 Must never spare *Obscenity*, and *Spite*:  
 A *Quantum sufficit* of Smut, will raise  
 Crowds of Applauders to the dullest Plays;  
 Whilst Scandal, Rallery, and pure ill Nature,  
 Are found the best *Ingredients* for a *Satire*.  
 But he that would in *Buskins* tread the Stage,  
 With *Rant*, and *Fustian*, must divert the Age,  
 And *Boschi* like, be always in a Rage. }  
 In *Blood* and *Wounds* the *Galleries* most delight,  
 Who think all Vertue is to storm, and fight;  
 Whilst *Plumes*, gilt *Truncheons*, *bloody Ghosts* and *Thunder*,  
 Engage the *Boxes* to behold and—wonder. . . .
- [35] (36) But hold, wise Sir, for that *your Leave* we crave,  
 What shan't we shew the little Wit we have?  
 Shall *we* (*you cry*) learn writing ill by *Rule*,  
 And have *we* need to *Study* to be *Dull*?  
 Yes—when the greatest Merit's want of Sense,  
 The least faint glimpse of Reason gives offence:
- [36] Besides, who'd read the *Antients* Night and Day,  
 And toil to follow where they lead the Way?  
 Who'd write, and cancel with alternate Pain,  
 First sweat to build, then to pull down again?  
 To turn the weigh'd Materials o'er and o'er,  
 And every Part, in ev'ry Light explore,  
 From Sense, and Nature never to depart,  
 And labour *artfully*, to cover *Art*:  
 Who'd seek to run such *rugged* Roads as these?  
 When *smooth Stupidity's* the Way to please;  
 When gentle *H*——'s *Singsongs* more delight,  
 Than all a *Dryden* or a *Pope* can write. . . .
- [38] (40) . . . Some Fools indeed amongst us yet remain,  
 Who think to mend their Works by Time, and Pain;  
 Much Care, and Reading their Productions cost,  
*Much Care* and *Reading* now, is *so much* lost:
- [39] Take then no Time to Think, but work in haste,  
 The brightest Talent's that of writing fast. . . .

- [43] (43) The *Greeks*, dull Souls! so greedy were of Fame,  
 They starv'd their *Body*, to preserve their *Name*:
- [44] They scorn'd forsooth to suit the vulgar Taste,  
 Their Labours to Posterity must last,  
 And, for the present, they must—what? why fast. }  
 Thank Heav'n we're bless'd with more *substantial Sense*,  
 And take most Pleasure, when we count the *Pence*;  
 Let wicked *Heathens* be so proud, and vain,  
 A Christian Poet's Godliness is *gain*.  
 Take then due Care to lengthen out the Piece,  
 By which you'll *profit* more, as well as *please*[.]  
 Of Bulk alone your Printer is a Judge,  
 Nor a large Price, for many Sheets can grudge;
- [45] Your Readers too you better can impose on,  
 Whilst the long, tedious, puz'ling *Tome* they doze on. . . .
- [54] (52) Some question whither this diverting Vein,  
 Be Nature's Gift, or is acquir'd by Pain.  
 In my Opinion neither is requir'd,  
 Nor taught by *Study*, nor by *Genius* fir'd, }  
 By *Whim* alone, or *Penury* inspir'd.
- [55] He then that would the wish'd-for Prize obtain,  
 Need never dim his Eyes, or rack his Brain,  
 Nor toil by Day, nor meditate by Night,  
 But take for *Power*, the *Willingness* to write . . . .

# HENRY FIELDING

## From the Preface to *The Tragedy of Tragedies* (1731)

[A3'] . . . I shall adventure to affirm this of the Sentiments of our Author; That they are generally the most familiar which I have ever met with, and at the same time delivered with the highest Dignity of Phrase; which brings me to speak of his *Diction*.—Here I shall only beg one Postulatum, *viz.* That the greatest Perfection of the Language of a Tragedy is, that it is not to be understood; which granted (as I think it must be) it will necessarily follow, that the only ways to avoid this, is by being too high or too low for the Understanding, which will comprehend every thing within its Reach. Those two Extremities of Stile Mr. *Dryden* illustrates by the familiar Image of two Inns, which I shall term the Aerial and the Subterrestrial.

*Horace* goeth farther, and sheweth when it is proper to call at one of these Inns, and when at the other;

*Telephus & Peleus, cum pauper & exul uterque,  
Projicit Ampullas & Sesquipedalia Verba.*

That he approveth of the *Sesquipedalia Verba*, is plain; for had not *Telephus & Peleus* used this sort of Diction in Prosperity, they could not have dropt it in Adversity. The Aerial Inn, therefore (says *Horace*) is proper only to be frequented by Princes and other great Men, in the highest Affluence of Fortune; the Subterrestrial is appointed for the Entertainment of the poorer sort of People only, whom *Horace* advises,

———— *dolere Sermone pedestri.*

The true Meaning of both which Citations is, That Bombast is the proper Language for Joy, and Doggrel for Grief, the latter of which is literally imply'd in the *Sermo pedestris*, as the former is in the *Sesquipedalia Verba*.

*Cicero* recommendeth the former of these. *Quid est tam furiosum vel tragicum quàm verborum sonitus inanis, nullâ subjectâ Sententiâ neque Scientiâ.* What can be so proper for Tragedy as a Set of big sounding Words, so contrived together, as to convey no Meaning; which I shall one Day or other prove to [A4] be the Sublime of *Longinus*. *Ovid* declareth absolutely for the latter Inn:

*Omne genus scripti Gravitate Tragœdia vincit.*

Tragedy hath of all Writings the greatest Share in the *Bathos*, which is the Profound of *Scriblerus*.

I shall not presume to determine which of these two Stiles be properer for Tragedy.—It sufficeth, that our Author excelleth in both. He is very rarely within sight through the whole Play, either rising higher than the Eye of your Understanding can soar, or sinking lower than it careth to stoop. But here it may perhaps be observed, that I have given more frequent Instances of Authors who have imitated him in the Sublime, than in the contrary. To which I answer, First, Bombast being properly a Redundancy of Genius, Instances of this Nature occur in Poets whose Names do more Honour to our Author, than the Writers in the *Dogrel*, which proceeds from a cool, calm, weighty Way of Thinking. Instances whereof are most frequently to be found in Authors of a lower Class. Secondly, That the Works of such Authors are difficultly found at all. Thirdly, That it is a very hard Task to read them, in order to extract these Flowers from them. And Lastly, It is very often difficult to transplant them at all; they being like some Flowers of a very nice Nature, which will flourish in no Soil but their own: For it is easy to transcribe a Thought, but not the Want of one. The *Earl of Essex*, for Instance, is a little Garden of choice Rarities, whence you can scarce transplant one Line so as to preserve its original Beauty. . . .

# RICHARD BENTLEY

## From his Preface to Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1732)<sup>1</sup>

[a] Our celebrated Author, when he compos'd this Poem, being obnoxious to the Government, poor, friendless, and what is worst of all, blind with a *Gutta Serena*, could only dictate his Verses to be writ by another. Whence it necessarily follows, That any Errors in Spelling, Pointing, nay even in whole Words of a like or near Sound in Pronunciation, are not to be charg'd upon the Poet, but on the Amanuensis.

The Faults therefore in Orthography, Distinction by Points, and Capital Letters, all which swarm in the prior Editions, are here very carefully, and it's hop'd, judiciously corrected: though no mention is made in the Notes of that little but useful Improvement. . . .

[a'] But more Calamities, than are yet mention'd, have happen'd to our Poem: for the Friend or Acquaintance, whoever he was, to whom *Milton* committed his Copy and the Overseeing of the Press, did so vilely execute that Trust, that *Paradise* under his Ignorance and Audaciousness may be said to be *twice lost*. A poor Bookseller, then [a2] living near *Aldersgate*, purchas'd our Author's Copy for ten Pounds, and (if a Second Edition follow'd) for five Pounds more: as appears by the original bond, yet in being. This Bookseller, and that Acquaintance who seems to have been the sole Corrector of the Press, brought forth their First Edition, polluted with such monstrous Faults, as are beyond Example in any other printed Book. . . .

But these Typographical Faults, occasion'd by the Negligence of this Acquaintance, (if all may be imputed to That, and not several wilfully made) were not the worst Blemishes brought upon our Poem. For, this suppos'd Friend, (call'd in these Notes *the Editor*) knowing *Milton's* bad Circumstances; *who*, VII. 26,

*Was faln on evil days and evil tongues,  
With Darkness and with Dangers compass'd round  
And Solitude;*

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1. In the original what is here printed in Roman type is in Italic, and vice versa.

[a2'] thought he had a fit Opportunity to foist into the Book several of his own Verses, without the blind Poet's Discovery. This Trick has been too frequently plaid; but especially in Works publish'd after an Author's Death. And poor *Milton* in that Condition, with Three-score Years Weight upon his Shoulders, might be reckoned more than half Dead. . . .

And yet a farther Misfortune befell this noble Poem, which must be laid to the Author's Charge, though he may fairly plead *Not Guilty*; and had he had his Eye-sight, he would have prevented all Complaints. There are some Inconsistenc[i]es in the System and Plan of his Poem, for want of his Revisal of the Whole before its Publication. These are all first discover'd in this Edition . . . . But though the Printer's Faults are corrigible by retrieving the Poet's own Words, not from a Manuscript, (for none exists) but by Sagacity, and happy Conjecture: and though the Editor's Interpolations are detected by their own Silliness and Unfitness; and easily cured by printing them in the *Italic* Letter, and inclosing them between two Hooks; yet *Milton's* own Slips and Inadvertencies cannot be redress'd without a Change both of the Words and Sense. Such Changes are here suggested, but not obtruded, to the Reader: they are generally in this Stile; *It MAY be adjusted thus; Among several ways of Change this MAY be one.* And if any Person will substitute better, he will deserve every Reader's Thanks: though, it's hoped, even These will not be found absurd, or disagreeing from the *Miltonian* Character . . . .

[a3] Upon the View of what has here been said, such Reflexions, as these following, must necessarily arise in an attentive Reader.

First, he'll be throughly convinc'd, That the Proof-sheets of the First Edition were never read to *Milton*: who, unless he was as deaf as blind, could not possibly let pass such gross and palpable Faults. Nay, the Edition, when publish'd, was never read to him in seven Years time. The First came out in 1667, and a Second in 1674; in which all the Faults of the Former are continued, with the Addition of some New ones.

If any one fancy this *Persona* of an Editor to be a mere Fantom, a Fiction, an Artifice to skreen *Milton* himself; let him consider these four and sole Changes made in the second Edition, *I.* 505. *V.* 638. *XI.* 485, 551. These are prov'd here in the Notes, every one of them to be manifestly for the worse. And whoever allows them to be worse, and yet will contend they are the Poet's own, betrays his Ill Judgment, as well as Ill Nature. But now if the Editor durst insert his Forgeries, even in the second Edition, when the Poem and its Author had slowly grown to a vast Reputation; what durst he



not do in the First, under the Poet's Poverty, Infamy, and an universal Odium from the Royal and triumphant Party? Add to this a farther Confirmation; That when *Milton* afterwards publish'd his *Paradise Regain'd* and *Samson Agonistes*; that Edition is without Faults; because He was then in high Credit, and had chang'd his old Printer and Supervisor.

There's another Reflexion, which the Reader must needs make. What a wonderful Performance, will he say, was this *Paradise Lost*? that under all these Disadvantages could gradually arise and soar to a national Applause and Admiration? How many Thousands would depress and vilify the Poem, out of Hatred and Detestation of the Poet; who they thought deserv'd Hanging on a Gibbet? What native, unextinguishable Beauty must be impress'd and instincted through the Whole, which the Defoedation of so many Parts by a bad Printer and a worse Editor could not hinder from shining forth? It seems to have been in [a3] the Condition of *Terence's* beautiful Virgin, who in spite of Neglect, Sorrow, and beggarly Habit, did yet appear so very Amiable . . . .

Nor can the Reader miss another Reflexion; How it could happen, that for above 60 Years time this Poem with such miserable Deformity by the Press, and not seldom flat Nonsense, could pass upon the whole Nation for a perfect, absolute, faultless Composition: The best Pens in the Kingdom contending in its Praises, as eclipsing all modern Essays whatever; and rivaling, if not excelling, both *Homer* and *Virgil*. And it's likely, he'll resolve it into This Cause; That its Readers first accede to it, possess'd with Awe and Veneration from its universal Esteem; and have been deterr'd by That from trusting to their Judgments; and even in Places displeasing rather suspecting their own Capacity, than that any thing in the Book could possibly be amiss. Who durst oppose the universal Vogue? and risque his own Character, while he labour'd to exalt *Milton's*? I wonder rather, that it's done even now. Had these very Notes, been written forty Years ago; it would then [a4] have been Prudence to have suppress'd them, for fear of injuring one's rising Fortune. But now when Seventy Years *jam dudum memorem monuerunt*, and spoke loudly in my Ears,

*Mitte leves spes & certamina divitiarum;*

I made the Notes *extempore*, and put them to the Press as soon as made; without any Apprehension of growing leaner by Censures, or plumper by Commendations.



# HENRY BAKER

From *The Universal Spectator* (1732)

No. 184<sup>1</sup>

[745] A Correspondent from *Derby*, who signs K. P. writes thus—  
We are a Couple of young Girls who live at a Grandmother's, whose Kindness is equal to us. We are delighted with Reading, and the old Lady furnishes us with Books. My Cousin *Maria* is fond of the Sublime, and I of plain Sense; she is best pleas'd when most pusled [puzzled], I never better entertain'd than with an easy and intelligible Style, which gives the full Sense of an Author's Thoughts. I am delighted with the noble Sentiments and Simpleness of Diction remarkable in the *Married Philosopher*; my Cousin is so charm'd with the Sublimity of Thought and Loftiness of Expression in the *Blazing Comet*, that her common Discourse is almost unintelligible. Walking with her in the Garden on a fine Day, she took occasion to break out in the following Lines,

See, groveling Mortal, see th' Eternal Blaze,  
View her[e] the INKY Sun' unbyass'd Ways,  
Let loose thy Soul t'Ætherial Paths Divine,  
And teach thy Earth-born Thoughts the Road of mine,  
Amazing, dazzling be, th' Eternal Shine. }

I express'd my Dislike of the Epithet *Inky* given to the Sun. She told me that, to comprehend the Sublime, we ought to be all Æther, Pure and Celestial Air, Spirits divested of corporeal and gross Ideas. What wretched, paltry, groveling, trite Thoughts, in a vulgar Style, is the *Married Philosopher* stuff'd with; but with what a Vivacity and Strength of Thought and Expression is the *Blazing Comet* compos'd! *Virgil* himself would renounce all his Works to be the Author of the last 3 Lines which conclude (Oh! that it never wou'd conclude) the *Blazing Comet*.

Jove again full blaze the strong Seas forsook,  
From Realm to Realm three ample Strides he took  
Thundring up the high Profound, the Worlds above all shook[.] }

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1. Text from the *Gentleman's Magazine*, II (1732), 745-746.

Here is a Fire, Propriety of Diction, and strong Ideas convey'd. I acknowledged this extremely fine, but my self too weak to be taken with it. —No Wonder, says *Maria*, the Eagle only gazes on the Sun. In like manner you object to the Word *Inky*; but I borrowed it from the Dedication of this incomparable Poem, which she pull'd out and read as follows. *And now with the Quill of an Eagle in my Hand, wrap me with divine Thoughts, and make me ready to leap up in Ecstasy, and dip my Pen in the Sun.*—Shew me any Thing like Thought or Sublimity in your new Comedy, and I'll shew you an hundred Improperities. Don't you perceive your Author's Blunder in making a Philosopher continually uneasy and in dread of Sarcasms; in making him give way to his Passions, and lose all his Philosophy at the Sight of a fine Woman?—I answer'd, that the wisest [746] Men have their Weakness, and that 'twas a genteel Compliment made to our Sex in shewing Philosophy too weak for the Charms of Beauty.

The old Lady having heard our Arguments, said the Cause was too weighty for her Decision, and advis'd to state our Case to Mr. *Spectator*.

Mr. *Stonecastle's* Answer is, that *Maria's* Objections shew a penetrating Judgment; and the Lady's Answer, good Sense, and strong Reasoning.

No. 218<sup>2</sup>

[1104] 'Tis not doubted that the *Stage*, well regulated, is of considerable Service to the Publick: A good *Play*, finely acted, leaves upon the Mind a strong Bias toward whatever appears worthy our Imitation, as well as a lasting Aversion for whatever is shown to be ridiculous or detestable.

The Follies of Mankind are best corrected by *Comedy*; but Ambition, Anger, Revenge, Treachery, Cruelty, and other outrageous Passions, properly belong to *Tragedy*, whose Business it is to set before us the dreadful Consequences of them.

I would fain persuade some noble Genius . . . to undertake the delivering us from the wretched Slavery of *Harlequins*, *Morris-Dancers*, and *Ballad Singers*, which of late have been preferred to the noblest, and most instructive Entertainment; and for the Assistance of such who will endeavour it, [subjoin] the following Advice sent to a young Gentleman preparing to write a *Tragedy*.

Our Writers who have of late attempted *Tragedy*, want both *Art* and *Genius*, since either of these would make a tolerable Play,

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2. Text from the *Gentleman's Magazine*, II (1732), 1104.

as for Example, the *Earl of Essex* without *Poetry*, and most of *Shakespear's* without a *Plot*. I mean by *Art* in a Play, all that Disposition of the Parts in respect of *Plotting*, which makes the whole clear, natural, and uniform, which must be the Result of close Studying the Criticks antient and modern. Under the word *Genius* I comprehend every Thing relating to the Passions, Sentiments and Versification: These proceed from the Harmony of the Ear, Clearness of the Head, and Warmth of the Heart; and are refin'd by an universal Reading. The 4th Book of *Virgil's Æneids*, or part of the 6th *Iliad* of *Homer* will be of as much Service as a Scene in *Hamlet*.

Our Writers have been too sparing in their Labour, as well as deficient in their Judgment. The present Method may be drawn into the following general *Receipt*.—Take a *Love Story*, add thereto an immensurable Length of Time, Characters undistinguish'd by any Thing but the Names; *Scenes* here, there, and every where, *Entrances* and *Exits* without Occasion, *Descriptions* for the Sake of the Verses, *Soliloquies* to shew how well we can argue, and *Asides* because it is the Fashion; *Murders* without Reason, and *Punishments* without *Justice*, not forgetting a *Simile* in Rhyme at the End of every Act.



# DAVID MALLOCH

## From *Of Verbal Criticism: An Epistle to Mr. Pope* (1733)

- [3] AMONG the numerous Fools, by fate design'd  
Oft to disturb, and oft divert mankind,  
The *Reading Coxcomb* is of special note,  
By rule a Poet, and a Judge by rote;  
Grave Son of idle Industry and Pride,  
Whom learning but perverts, and books misguide. . . .
- [4] See, in the darkness of dull Authors bred,  
With all their refuse lumber'd in his head,  
Long years consum'd, large volumes daily turn'd,  
And *Servius* read perhaps, while *Maro* burn'd,  
In error obstinate, in wrangling loud,  
Unbred, unsocial, positive, and proud;  
Forth steps at last the self-applauding *Wight*,  
Of points and letters, chaff and straws, to write:  
Sagely resolv'd to swell each bulky piece  
With venerable toys, from *Rome* and *Greece*;  
How oft, in *Homer*, *Paris* curl'd his hair;  
If *Aristotle's* Cap were round or square;  
If in the Cave where *Dido* first was sped,  
To *Tyre* she turn'd her heels, to *Troy* her head.
- [5] Such the choice Anecdotes, profound and vain,  
That store a *Bentley's* and a *Burman's* brain:  
Hence *Plato* quoted, or the *Stagyrite*,  
To prove that flame ascends, and snow is white:  
Hence much hard study without sense or breeding,  
And all the grave impertinence of reading.  
If *Shakespear* says, the noon-day sun is bright,  
His *Scholiast* will *remark*, it then was light;  
Turn *Caxton*, *Winkin*, each old *Goth* and *Hun*,

- To rectify the reading of a *pun*.  
 Thus, nicely trifling, accurately dull,  
 How one may toil, and toil—to be a fool! . . .
- [6] Condemn'd to dig and dung a barren soil,  
 Where hardly tares will grow with care and toil,  
 He, with low industry, goes gleaning on  
 From good, from bad, from mean, neglecting none:  
 His brother book-worm so, in shelf or stall,  
 Will feed alike on *Woolston* and on *Paul*.  
 See him on *Shakespear* pore, intent to steal  
 Poor farce, by fragments, for a third-day meal.  
 Such that grave *Bird* in northern seas is found,  
 Whose name a *Dutchman* only knows to sound:<sup>1</sup>  
 Where-e'er the King of fish moves on before,  
 This humble friend attends from shore to shore;  
 His eyes still earnest, and his bill declin'd,  
 He picks up what his patron drops behind,
- [7] With those choice cates his palate to regale,  
 And is the careful *Tibbald* of a whale. . . .
- [9] While *Bentley*, long to wrangling schools confin'd,  
 And but by books acquainted with mankind,
- [10] Dares, in the fulness of the Pedant's pride,  
 Rhime tho' no genius, tho' no judge decide.  
 Yet he, prime pattern of the captious art,  
 Out-tibbalding poor *Tibbald*, tops his part;  
 Holds high the scourge o'er each fam'd Author's head,  
 Nor are their graves a refuge for the Dead.  
 To *Milton* lending sense, to *Horace* wit,  
 He makes 'em write what never Poet writ:  
 The *Roman Muse* arraigns his mangling pen,  
 And *Paradise*, by him, is *lost agen*. . . .
- [14] How little Knowledge reaps from toils like these!  
 Too doubtful to direct, too poor to please.  
 Yet, Critics, would your tribe deserve a name,  
 And nobly useful, rise to honest fame:  
 First, from the head, a load of lumber move,  
 And from the Volume, all yourselves approve;  
 For patch'd and pilfer'd Fragments, give us Sense,  
 Or Learning, clear from learn'd Impertinence,  
 Where moral meaning, or where taste presides,

1. This remarkable bird is called the *Strundt-Jager*. . . . See a *Collection of Voyages to the North*. [—Malloch.]



And Wit enlivens but what Reason guides:  
Great without swelling, without meanness plain,  
Serious, not simple, sportive but not vain;  
On trifles slight, on things of use profound,  
In quoting sober, and in judging sound.



# JONATHAN SWIFT

## From *On Poetry* (1733)

[7] How shall a new Attempter learn  
Of diff'rent Spirits to discern,  
And how distinguish, which is which,  
The Poet's Vein, or scribbling Itch?  
Then hear an old experienc'd Sinner  
Instructing thus a young Beginner.

Consult yourself, and if you find  
A powerful Impulse urge your Mind,  
Impartial judge within your Breast  
What Subject you can manage best;  
Whether your Genius most inclines  
To Satire, Praise, or hum'rous Lines;  
To Elegies in mournful Tone,  
Or Prologue sent from Hand unknown.  
Then rising with *Aurora's* Light,  
The Muse invoc'd, sit down to write;

[8] Blot out, correct, insert, refine,  
Enlarge, diminish, interline;  
Be mindful, when Invention fails,  
To scratch your Head, and bite your Nails.

Your Poem finish'd, next your Care  
Is needful, to transcribe it fair.  
In modern Wit all printed Trash, is  
Set off with num'rous *Breaks*—and *Dashes*—

To Statesmen wou'd you give a Wipe,  
You print it in *Italick Type*.  
When Letters are in vulgar Shapes,  
'Tis ten to one the Wit escapes;  
But when in *Capitals* exprest,  
The dullest Reader smoaks the Jest:  
Or else perhaps he may invent

A better than the Poet meant,  
As learn'd Commentators view  
In *Homer* more than *Homer* knew.

[9] Your Poem in its modish Dress  
Correctly fitted for the Press,  
Convey by Penny-Post to *Lintot*,  
But let no Friend alive look into't.  
If *Lintot* thinks 'twill quit the Cost,  
You need not fear your Labour lost:  
And, how agreeably surpriz'd  
Are you to see it advertiz'd!  
The Hawker shews you one in Print,  
As fresh as Farthings from the Mint:  
The Product of your Toil and Sweating;  
A Bastard of your own begetting.

Be sure at *Will's* the following Day,  
Lie Snug, and hear what Criticks say.  
And if you find the general Vogue  
Pronounces you a stupid Rogue;  
Damns all your Thoughts as low and little,  
Sit still, and swallow down your Spittle.  
Be silent as a Politician,  
For talking may beget Suspicion:

[10] Or praise the Judgment of the Town,  
And help yourself to run it down.  
Give up your fond paternal Pride,  
Nor argue on the weaker Side;  
For Poems read without a Name  
We justly praise, or justly blame:  
And Criticks have no partial Views,  
Except they know whom they abuse.  
And since you ne'er provok'd their Spight,  
Depend upon't their Judgment 's right:  
But if you blab, you are undone;  
Consider what a Risk you run.  
You lose your Credit all at once;  
The Town will mark you for a Dunce:  
The vilest Doggrel *Grubstreet* sends,  
Will pass for yours with Foes and Friends.  
And you must bear the whole Disgrace,  
'Till some fresh Blockhead takes your Place.

Your Secret kept, your Poem sunk,  
And sent in Quires to line a Trunk;

- [11] If still you be dispos'd to rhyme,  
 Go try your Hand a second Time.  
 Again you fail, yet Safe's the Word,  
 Take Courage, and attempt a Third.  
 But first with Care imploy your Thoughts,  
 Where Criticks mark'd your former Faults.  
 The trivial Turns, the borrow'd Wit,  
 The *Similes* that nothing fit;  
 The *Cant* which ev'ry Fool repeats,  
 Town-Jests, and Coffee-house Conceits;  
 Descriptions tedious, flat and dry,  
 And introduc'd the Lord knows why;  
 Or where we find your Fury set  
 Against the harmless Alphabet;  
 On A's and B's your Malice vent,  
 While Readers wonder whom you meant.  
 A publick, or a private *Robber*;  
 A *Statesman*, or a South-Sea *Jobber*.  
 A *Prelate* who no God believes;  
 A [Parliament], or Den of Thieves.  
 A Pick-purse at the Bar, or Bench;  
 A Duchess, or a Suburb-Wench.
- [12] Or oft when Epithets you link,  
 In gaping Lines to fill a Chink;  
 Like stepping Stones to save a Stride,  
 In Streets where Kennels are too wide:  
 Or like a Heel-piece to support  
 A Cripple with one Foot too short:  
 Or like a Bridge that joins a Marish  
 To Moorlands of a diff'rent Parish.  
 So have I seen ill-coupled Hounds,  
 Drag diff'rent Ways in miry Grounds.  
 So Geographers in *Afric*-Maps  
 With Savage-Pictures fill their Gaps;  
 And o'er unhabitable Downs  
 Place Elephants for want of Towns.  
 But tho' you miss your third Essay,  
 You need not throw your Pen away.  
 Lay now aside all Thoughts of Fame,  
 To spring more profitable Game.  
 From Party-Merit seek Support;  
 The vilest Verse thrives best at Court.

- [13] A Pamphlet in Sir *Rob's* Defence  
 Will never fail to bring in Pence;  
 Nor be concern'd about the Sale,  
 He pays his Workmen on the Nail. . . .
- [15] But if you think this Trade too base,  
 (Which seldom is the Dunce's Case)  
 Put on the Critick's Brow, and sit  
 At *Wills* the puny Judge of Wit.  
 A Nod, a Shrug, a scornful Smile,  
 With Caution us'd, may serve a-while.  
 Proceed no further in your Part,  
 Before you learn the Terms of Art:  
 (For you may easy be too far gone,  
 In all our modern Criticks Jargon.)  
 Then talk with more authentick Face,  
 Of *Unities, in Time and Place*.  
 Get Scraps of *Horace* from your Friends,  
 And have them at your Fingers Ends.
- [16] Learn *Aristotle's* Rules by Rote,  
 And at all Hazards boldly quote:  
 Judicious *Rymer* oft review:  
 Wise *Dennis*, and profound *Bossu*.  
 Read all the *Prefaces* of *Dryden*,  
 For these our Criticks much confide in,  
 (Tho' meerly writ at first for filling  
 To raise the Volume's Price, a Shilling.)  
 A forward Critick often dupes us  
 With sham Quotations *Peri [Hupsous]*:  
 And if we have not read *Longinus*,  
 Will magisterially out-shine us.  
 Then, lest with *Greek* he over-run ye,  
 Procure the Book for Love or Money,  
 Translated from *Boileau's* Translation,  
 And quote *Quotation* on *Quotation*.  
 At *Wills* you hear a Poem read,  
 Where *Battus* from the Table-head,  
 Reclining on his Elbow-chair,  
 Gives Judgment with decisive Air.
- [17] To whom the Tribe of circling Wits,  
 As to an Oracle submits.  
 He gives Directions to the Town,  
 To cry it up, or run it down.

(Like *Courtiers*, when they send a Note,  
Instructing *Members* how to Vote.)  
He sets the Stamp of Bad and Good,  
Tho' not a Word be understood.  
Your Lesson learnt, you'll be secure  
To get the Name of *Connoisseur*.  
And when your Merits once are known,  
Procure Disciples of your own.

- [20] . . . If, on *Parnassus'* Top you sit,  
You rarely bite, are always bit:  
Each Poet of inferior Size  
On you shall rail and criticize;  
And strive to tear you Limb from Limb,  
While others do as much for him.  
The Vermin only teaze and pinch  
Their Foes superior by an Inch.  
So, Nat'ralists observe, a Flea  
Hath smaller Fleas that on him prey,  
And these have smaller Fleas to bite 'em,  
And so proceed *ad infinitum*:  
Thus ev'ry Poet in his Kind,  
Is bit by him that comes behind;  
Who, tho' too little to be seen,  
Can teaze, and gall, and give the Spleen;  
Call Dunces, Fools, and Sons of Whores,  
Lay *Grubstreet* at each others Doors:  
[21] Extol the *Greek* and *Roman* Masters,  
And curse our modern Poetasters.  
Complain, as many an ancient Bard did,  
How Genius is no more rewarded;  
How wrong a Taste prevails among us;  
How much our Ancestors out-sung us;  
Can personate an awkward Scorn  
For those who are not Poets born:  
And all their Brother Dunces lash,  
Who crowd the Press with hourly Trash.





# WILLIAM WEBSTER

From *The Weekly Miscellany* (1733-34)

No. 52<sup>1</sup>

[639] . . . under proper Regulations the *Stage* might be made subservient to excellent Purposes, and be a useful Second to the *Pulpit* itself: Even as it is conducted, it's a tolerable Diversion to such as know not how to pass their Time, and who perhaps would spend it much worse in Drinking, Gaming, &c. [But it must have had a bad influence on] a young *Tradesman*, or much more an *Apprentice*, [for six reasons:] As, 1. All our modern Plays are calculated for Persons in *upper* Life, and the Moral and Instruction lies so deep and hidden, as seldom to fall within the Sphere of those in *low* Life. 2. The Loss of Time and Expence of Money. 3. The great Resort of lewd Women to these Places. 4. Most of our modern best Plays are so far from being *intended* for Instruction to a Man of Business, that such Persons are generally made the Dupes and Fools of the Hero of it. . . . 5. The great Depravity of Writers in general. . . . now the horrid Pantomime, and wicked Dumb Shew, the infamous Harlequin-Mimickry, introduced only to shew how to cozen, cheat, deceive, and cuckold; together with the wretched Group of Rogues formed from the Characters of *Shepherd*, *Jonathan Wild*, *Blueskin*, and others, remarkable for their superlative Wickedness, are exhibited, not for the sake of Poetical Justice in their Execution, but to divert the Audience by their *Tricks* and *Escapes*. 6. Frequent visiting a Playhouse too much detaches the Mind from Business, and fills it with light and airy Amusements. . . .

[640] There's but one Instance, where the Stage has condescended to make itself useful to the City Youth; and that is the Play of *George Barnwell*. . . .

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1. Text from the *Gentleman's Magazine*, III (1733), 639-640.

[499] The Influence of fine Poetry, and Estimation of good Poets have always been very great. The Harmony of Numbers, Beauty of Language, Variety of agreeable Images, conspire to captivate the Affections of the Reader. And an Art which gives such a quick Satisfaction, will give a proportionable Share of Credit to such as excel in it. These mighty Advantages make the Art and the Artists as dangerous as they are delightful. Whatever is read with so much Pleasure, should be read with as much Caution; and whoever has such a Command over the Attention and Affections, should be proportionately careful to confine his Art to its proper Uses. To adorn and recommend *Virtue* was its original Design, and Use: To taint the Mind with loose Images, to excite criminal Desires, to disguise or inforce Error, has been its Corruption, and its Disgrace. The most conversant in *Poetry*, are the *Young*, the *Gay*, and the *Polite*; and such are the most likely to have their Judgment imposed upon, and their Passions influenced. The Persons who *write* Poetry, like their Admirers, are, or should be, of a sprightly Constitution; yet the Briskness of the Spirits is apt to lead into Excesses in Conduct: and a corrupted Imagination will introduce loose Images, and loose Sentiments, into the Compositions; by which means, tho' the *Art of Poetry* be *Divine*, we have had but very few *Divine Poets*. And where the natural Temper does not corrupt the *Heart*, it often misleads the *Head*. When the Imagination and Invention are so busy, *Reason* and *Judgment* are seldom allowed Time enough to examine the Justness of a Sentiment, and the Conclusiveness of an Argument. Many of our own Poets, the most celebrated for their Ingenuity, have been very incorrect and injudicious, as well as irreligious and immoral, in their Sentiments. They seem to have studied rather to say *fine* things than *just* ones, and have often shewn their *Fancy* at the Expence of their *Understanding*, which is buying Reputation at a very extravagant Price. Many, however, deserve the highest Praises, for imploying their poetical Abilities, as they ought to be employed, in the Service of *Religion* and *Morality*. Dr *Young* has not (as I remember) in all his Works, a profane or immoral Sentiment or Expression, tho' his Enemies must allow him the Credit of a strong *Imagination* and a lively *Wit*. Mr. *Addison* was a most extraordinary Instance of *poetical*, *Religio[us]* and *moral* Excellence: He did not imagine that he should lessen his Character as a *Poet*, by appearing to be a *sound Divine*, and a *good Man*. Mr *Norris* has done still more Honour to *Poetry*, and to *himself*; for he has

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2. Text from the *Gentleman's Magazine*, IV (1734), 499.

shown that a *good Poet* may be a *close Logician*, and a nice distinguishing *Metaphysician*. If the Number of such Examples, as I have mentioned, were greater, the *Art of Poetry* would be more useful, and the *Character* of a *Poet* more reputable. But it cannot be denied, that the *Generality* of them are a Proof, that the *Poetical* and *Reasoning Faculties* seldom unite in the same Person; or, at least, that a *Poet* seldom reasons well in his *Poetry*.



# LEWIS THEOBALD

## From his Preface to *The Works of Shakespeare* (1734)

[xl] The Science of Criticism, as far as it affects an Editor, seems to be reduced to these three Classes; the Emendation of corrupt Passages; the Explanation of obscure and difficult ones; and an Inquiry into the Beauties and Defects of Composition. This work is [xli] principally confin'd to the two former Parts: tho' there are some Specimens interspers'd of the latter Kind, as several of the Emendations were best supported, and several of the Difficulties best explain'd, by taking notice of the Beauties and Defects of the composition peculiar to this Immortal Poet. But This was but occasional, and for the sake only of perfecting the two other Parts, which were the proper Objects of the Editor's Labour. The third lies open for every willing Undertaker: and I shall be pleas'd to see it the Employment of a masterly Pen.

It must necessarily happen, as I have formerly observ'd, that where the Assistance of Manuscripts is wanting to set an Author's Meaning right, and rescue him from those Errors which have been transmitted down thro' a Series of incorrect Editions, and a long Intervention of Time, many Passages must be desperate, and past a Cure; and their true Sense irretrievable either to Care or the Sagacity of Conjecture. But is there any Reason therefore to say, That because All cannot be retriev'd, All ought to be left desperate? We should shew very little Honesty, or Wisdom, to play the Tyrants with an Author's Text; to raze, alter, innovate, and overturn, at all Adventures, and to the utter Detriment of his Sense and Meaning: But to be so very reserved and cautious, as to interpose no Re-[xlii]lief or Conjecture, where it manifestly labours and cries out for Assistance, seems, on the other hand, an indolent Absurdity.

But because the Art of Criticism, both by Those who cannot form a true Judgment of its Effects, nor can Penetrate into its Causes, ([ ]which takes in a great Number besides the Ladies;) is esteem'd

only an arbitrary capricious Tyranny exercis'd on Books; I think proper to subjoin a Word or two about those Rules on which I have proceeded, and by which I have regulated myself in this Edition. By This, I flatter myself, it will appear, my Emendations are so far from being arbitrary or capricious, that They are establish'd with a very high Degree of moral Certainty.

As there are very few Pages in *Shakespeare*, upon which some Suspicions of Depravity do not reasonably arise; I have thought it my Duty, in the first place, by a diligent and laborious Collation to take in the Assistances of all the older Copies.

In his *Historical Plays*, whenever our *English* Chronicles, and in his Tragedies when *Greek* or *Roman* Story, could give any Light; no Pains have been omitted to set Passages right by comparing my Author with his Originals; for, as I have frequently observed, he was a close and accurate Copier where-ever his *Fable* was founded on *History*.

[xliii] Where-ever the Author's Sense is clear and discoverable, (tho', perchance, low and trivial;) I have not by any Innovation tamper'd with his Text; out of an Ostentation of endeavouring to make him speak better than the old Copies have done.

Where, thro' all the former Editions, a Passage has labour'd under flat Nonsense and invincible Darkness, if, by the Addition or Alteration of a Letter or two, I have restored to Him both Sense and Sentiment, such Corrections, I am persuaded, will need no Indulgence.

And whenever I have taken a greater Latitude and Liberty in amending, I have constantly endeavoured to support my Corrections and Conjectures by parallel Passages and Authorities from himself, the surest Means of expounding any Author whatever. *Cette voie d'interpreter un Auteur par lui-même est plus sure que tous les Commentaires*, says a very learned *French* Critick.

As to my *Notes*, (from which the common and learned Readers of our Author, I hope, will derive some Pleasure;) I have endeavour'd to give them a Variety in some Proportion to their Number. Where-ever I have ventur'd at an Emendation, a *Note* is constantly subjoin'd to justify and assert the Reason of it. Where I only offer a Conjecture, and do not disturb the Text, I fairly set forth my Grounds for such Conjecture, and submit it [xliv] to Judgment. Some Remarks are spent in explaining Passages, where the Wit or Satire depends on an obscure Point of History: Others, where Allusions are to Divinity, Philosophy, or other Branches of Science. Some are added to shew, where there is a Suspicion of our Author

having borrow'd from the Antients: Others, to shew where he is rallying his Contemporaries; or where He himself is rallied by them. And some are necessarily thrown in, to explain an obscure and obsolete *Term, Phrase, or Idea*. . . .

In reforming an infinite Number of Passages in the *Pointing*, where the Sense was before quite lost, I have frequently subjoin'd Notes to shew the *deprav'd*, and to prove the *reform'd*, Pointing: a Part of Labour in this Work which I could very willingly have spared myself. May it not be objected, why then have you burthen'd us with these Notes? The Answer is obvious, and, if I mistake not, very material. Without such Notes, these Passages in subsequent Editions would be liable, thro' the Ignorance of Printers and Correctors, to fall into the old Confusion: Where[xlv]as, a Note on every one hinders all possible Return to Depravity; and for ever secures them in a State of Purity and Integrity not to be lost or forfeited.

Again, as some Notes have been necessary to point out the Detection of the corrupted Text, and establish the Restoration of the genuine Readings; some others have been as necessary for the Explanation of Passages obscure and difficult. To understand the Necessity and Use of this Part of my Task, some Particulars of my Author's Character are previously to be explain'd. There are *Obscurities* in him, which are common to him with all Poets of the same Species; there are Others, the Issue of the Times he liv'd in; and there are Others, again, peculiar to himself. The Nature of Comic Poetry being entirely satyrical, it busies itself more in exposing what we call Caprice and Humour, than Vices cognizable to the Laws. The *English*, from the Happiness of a free Constitution, and a Turn of Mind peculiarly speculative and inquisitive, are observ'd to produce more *Humourists* and a greater Variety of Original *Characters*, than any other People whatsoever: And These owing their immediate Birth to the peculiar Genius of each Age, an infinite Number of Things alluded to, glanc'd at, and expos'd, must needs become obscure, as the *Characters* themselves are antiquated, and disused. An Editor therefore should be well vers'd in the [xlvi] History and Manners of his Author's Age, if he aims at doing him a Service in this Respect.

Besides, *Wit* lying mostly in the Assemblage of *Ideas*, and in the putting Those together with Quickness and Variety, wherein can be found any Resemblance, or Congruity, to make up pleasant Pictures, and agreeable Visions in the Fancy; the Writer, who aims at Wit, must of course range far and wide for Materials. Now, the

Age, in which *Shakespeare* liv'd, having, above all others, a wonderful Affectation to appear Learned, They declined vulgar Images, such as are immediately fetch'd from Nature, and rang'd thro' the Circle of the Sciences to fetch their Ideas from thence. But as the Resemblances of such Ideas to the Subject must necessarily lie very much out of the common Way, and every piece of Wit appear a Riddle to the Vulgar; This, that should have taught them the forced, quaint, unnatural Tract they were in, (and induce them to follow a more natural One,) was the very Thing that kept them attach'd to it. The ostentatious Affectation of abtruse Learning, peculiar to that Time, the Love that Men naturally have to every Thing that looks like Mystery, fixed them down to this Habit of Obscurity. Thus became the Poetry of *DONNE* (tho' the wittiest Man of that Age,) nothing but a continued Heap of Riddles. And our *Shakespeare*, with all his [xlvii] easy Nature about him, for want of the Knowledge of the true Rules of Art, falls frequently into this vicious Manner.

The third Species of *Obscurities*, which deform our Author, as the Effects of his own Genius and Character, are Those that proceed from his peculiar Manner of *Thinking*, and as peculiar a Manner of *cloathing* those *Thoughts*. With regard to his *Thinking*, it is certain, that he had a general Knowledge of all the Sciences: But his Acquaintance was rather That of a Traveller, than a Native. Nothing in Philosophy was unknown to him; but every Thing in it had the Grace and Force of Novelty. And as Novelty is one main Source of Admiration, we are not to wonder that He has perpetual Allusions to the most recondite Parts of the Sciences: and This was done not so much out of Affectation, as the Effect of Admiration begot by Novelty. Then, as to his *Style* and *Diction*, we may much more justly apply to *SHAKESPEARE*, what a celebrated Writer has said of *MILTON*; *Our Language sunk under him, and was unequal to that Greatness of Soul which furnish'd him with such glorious Conceptions*. He therefore frequently uses old Words, to give his Diction an Air of Solemnity; as he coins others, to express the Novelty and Variety of his Ideas.

Upon every distinct Species of these *Obscurities* I have thought it my Province to employ a Note, for the Service of my Author, [xlviii] and the Entertainment of my Readers. A few transient Remarks too I have not scrupled to intermix, upon the Poet's *Negligences* and *Omissions* in point of Art; but I have done it always in such a Manner, as will testify my Deference and Veneration for the Immortal Author.



# JAMES DALACOURT

## From *A Prospect of Poetry* (1734)

[16] In poetry this observation's true,  
Without some genius fame will ne'er ensue:  
Such for a while may climb against the hill,  
But then like Sysiphus, are falling still;  
I own by reading we may feed the flame,  
But first must have that heat from whence it came;  
Else like dry pumps whose springs their moisture mourn,  
We may pour in, but will have no return;  
To such, indeed, those rules are ill apply'd,  
For such were never on the muses side.

COME then, my friends, who like with me to rove  
The flow'ry mountain, and the laurel grove,  
[17] Where god Apollo guards the limpid fount,  
And the glad muses climb the vocal mount:  
You whom the voice invites to taste their charms,  
Whom verse transports, and tuneful fancy warms;  
Before you press the syrens to your heart,  
Attend a while the precepts I impart.

FIRST let your judgment for your fancy chuse,  
Of all the nine the most unblemish'd muse:  
Soft yet sublime, in love yet strictly coy,  
Prone to be grave, yet not averse to joy;  
Where taste and candour, wit and manners meet,  
Bold without bombast, daring but discreet;  
Correct with spirit, musical with sense,  
Not apt to give, nor slow to take offence:  
First to commend when others thoughts are shown,  
But always last delighted with her own.

WHEN this is done, let nature be your guide,  
Rise in the spring, or in the river glide;  
In ev'ry line consult her as you run,  
And let her Naiads rowl the river on:

[18] Unless to please our nice corrupted sense,  
Art be call'd in, and join'd with vast expence;  
Then rivers wander thro' the vale no more,  
But boil in pipes, or spout thro' figur'd ore;  
The neighb'ring brooks their empty channels mourn,  
That now enrich some artificial urn.

Thus ever suit your numbers to your theme,  
And tune their cadence to the falling stream;  
Or shou'd the falling stream incline to love,  
Let the words slide, and like its murmurs move:  
Poor were the praise to paint a purling rill,  
To make it music is the muse's skill;  
Without her voice the spring runs silent by,  
Dumb are the waters, and the verses dry;  
While chill'd with ice the cool waves creep along,  
And all the fountain freezes in the song.

But if a storm must rattle thro' the strain,  
Then let your lines grow black with gath'ring rain;  
Thro' Jove's aerial hall loud thunders sound,  
And the big bolt roar thro' the dark profound:

[19] But shou'd the welkin brighten to the view,  
The sun breaks out, and gilds the style anew;  
Colour your clouds with a vermilion dye,  
And let warm blushes streak the western sky;  
'Till evening shuts in sober suited gray,  
And draws her dappled curtains o'er the day. . . .

[43] In sculpture too proportion learns to please,  
When ev'ry Beauty swells by nice degrees;  
Where by the chissel's meant the poet's pen,  
That files, and polishes the works of men,  
Softens the rugged surface of the song,  
Yet turns the feature regular, and strong;  
Commands the limbs in attitudes to rise,  
And live, and walk before the reader's eyes. . . .

[44] By architecture last he lays the scheme,  
And by some model bids his genius flame:  
Works up the whole, and sees the building shine,  
In all its parts with conduct and design:

The poem rais'd upon so fine a plan,  
The test, the wonder, and delight of man,  
[45] Will stand the shocks, and injuries of time,  
Built upon nature, and the true sublime.

[47] . . . Nothing will take with this judicious age,  
 But lines well-labour'd, and a study'd page;  
 Where rich variety relieves the mind,  
 And beams of fancy strike the critic blind;  
 Exalted notions which great souls contain,  
 Thoughts big with life, and bursting from the brain;  
 Surprising novelties that never tire,  
 But lead the reader on from fire to fire.

Avow the harshness of discordant chime,  
 Sense ill atones for violated rhyme;  
 RR's jar untuneful o'er the quiv'ring tongue,  
 And Serpent S with hissings spoils the song:

[48] When Triplets like the furies join their hands[,] }  
 Unlock their folds, and break their lawless bands; }  
 Else Cerb'rus like the threefold monster stands. }  
 'Tis true a triplet might succeed by chance,  
 And ev'n twelve feet judiciously advance;  
 But those experiments are fatal found,  
 And seldom us'd but when we call for sound:  
 All Alexandrines from the page expunge,  
 That o'er the paper take a long unwieldy lunge. . . .

[50] To charge with gen'rous thoughts the clearest head,  
 Consult the living, and read o'er the dead;  
 Where ancient wisdom grows more wise with age,  
 And hoary seniors dignify the page;  
 Time's eldest born! sires gray to us in fame!  
 The antient's glory, but the modern's shame.



# JONATHAN RICHARDSON, FATHER AND SON

From *Explanatory Notes and Remarks on Milton's  
Paradise Lost* (1734)

[cxxxix] . . . All kinds of Verse have Sounds of their Own; Blank Verse comes nearest to Prose, and as the Prose of Some Writers Approaches Verse, *Milton's* Blank Verse, That of *Paradise Lost*, has the Beauty of Both; it has the Sweetness of Measure, without Stopping the Voice at the end of the Line, or Any where else but as the Sense requires; One Verse runs into Another, and the Period concludes in any part of a Line Indifferently, and as if 'twas his Choice 'tis very often Not at the End of One or of a Couplet, as is too Frequent with Those who write in Rime. He has frequently Eleven Syllables in a Verse, but 'tis rarely So unless [cxl] Those are no more in Quantity than the Ten of Another. . . . to read right requires Some Judgment, and some Experience in *Milton's* Manner who Abounds More with These Instances than most English Poets; but, well Read, the Musick of His Verse is Exceeding Delicate and Noble, though Somewhat Peculiar to Himself; for He, (as in his Language) has Profited Himself of the Greeks and Latins; His *Ictus*, or *Cadence*, or Musick bears towards Them, as he has form'd himself Upon Their Examples into Something of his Own, by his Own Ear, and which was a very Musical, Experienc'd and Judicious One. . . .

[cxlii] *Milton's* Language is English, but 'tis *M[i]lton's* English; 'tis Latin, 'tis Greek English; not only the Words, the Phraseology, the Transpositions, but the Ancient Idiom is seen in All he Writes, So that a Learned Foreigner will think *Milton* the Easiest to be Understood of All the English Writers. This Peculiar English is most Conspicuously seen in *Paradise Lost*, for This is the Work which he Long before Intended should Enrich and Adorn his Native Tongue. . . .

[cxliii] Poetry pretends to a Language of its Own. That of the Italian Poetry is so remarkably peculiar that a Man may Well

understand a Prose Writer, and not a Poet. Words, Tours of Expression, the Order of them, All has Somthing not Prosaic. This is Observable particularly in *Shakespear*. *Milton* has Apply'd it to that Sublimity of Subject in which he perpetually Engages his Readers, above what *Shakespear* ever Aim'd at and where This is Peculiarly Necessary.

Nor does he want Abundant Instances of what All Good Poets Have. the Sound of the Words, their Harshness, Smoothness, or Other Properties, and the Ranging, and Mixing them, all help to Express aswell as their Signification. . . .

[cxliv] a Reader of *Milton* must be Always upon Duty; he is Surrounded with Sense, it rises in every Line, every Word is to the Purpose; There are no Lazy Intervals, All has been Consider'd, and Demands, and Merits Observation. Even in the Best Writers you Somtimes find Words and Sentences which hang on so Loosely you may Blow 'em off; *Milton's* are all Substance and Weight; Fewer would not have Serv'd the Turn, and More would have been Superfluous.

His Silence has the Same Effect, not only that he leaves Work for the Imagination when he has Entertain'd it, and Furnish'd it with Noble Materials; but he Expresses himself So Concisely, Employs Words So Sparingly, that whoever will Possess His Ideas must Dig for them, and Oftentimes pretty far below the Surface. if This is call'd Obscurity let it be remembred 'tis Such a One as is Complaisant [cxlv] to the Reader, not Mistrusting his Ability, Care, Diligence, or the Candidness of his Temper; not That Vicious Obscurity which proceeds from a Muddled, Inaccurate Head, not Accustomed to Clear, Well Separated and Regularly Order'd Ideas, or from want of Words and Method and Skill to Convey them to Another, from whence Always Arises Uncertainty, Ambiguity, and a Sort of a Moon-Light Prospect over a Landscape at Best not Beautiful; whereas if a Good Writer is not Understood 'tis because his Reader is Unacquainted with, or Incapable of the Subject, or will not Submit to do the Duty of a Reader, which is to Attend Carefully to what he Reads. . . .

and Now 'tis of no great Importance whether this be call'd an Heroic or a Divine Poem, or only, as the Author himself has call'd it in his Title-page, a Poem. What if it were a Composition Intirely New, and not reducible under any Known Denomination? but 'tis Properly and Strictly Heroic, and Such *Milton* intended it, as he has Intimated [cxlvi] in his Short Discourse concerning the Kind of Verse, and which is prefix'd to it; as also in his Entrance on the Ninth Book; and 'tis not His Fault if there have been Those, who

have not found a Hero, or Who he is. 'tis *Adam, Adam*, the First, the Representative of Human Race; He is the Hero in This Poem, though as in Other Heroic Poems, Superior Beings are Introduc'd. the Business of it is to conduct Man through Variety of Conditions of Happiness and Distress, All Terminating in the Utmost Good. from a State of Precarious Innocence, through Temptation, Sin, Repentance, and finally a Secure Recumbency Upon, and Interest In the Supream Good by the Mediation of his Son. He is not Such a Hero as *Achilles, Ulysses, Æneas, Orlando, Godfrey, &c.* all Romantic Worthies, and Incredible Performers of Fortunate, Savage Cruelties: He is one of a nobler Kind. Such a *Milton* Chose to Write of, and found he had a Genius for the Purpose. he is not Such a Conqueror as Subdu'd Armies or Nations, or Enemies in Single Combat, but his Conquest was What Justly *gave Heroic Name to Person, and to Poem; His Hero was More than a Conqueror through Him that Loved us.* as Rom. viii. 37.

This was declar'd to be the Subject of the Poem at the Entrance on it, Man's First Disobedience and Misery 'till our Restoration to a More Happy State. the Design of it is also [cxlvii] Declar'd; 'twas to Justify Providence, All which is Done. the Moral we are also Directed to, and This the Poet has put into the Mouth of an Angel. Many Moral Reflections are excited throughout the Whole Work, but the Great One is Mark'd Strongly XII. 745, &c. PIETY AND VERTUE, ALL COMPRIZ'D IN ONE WORD CHARITY, IS THE ONLY WAY TO HAPPINESS.

if the Sublimity and Peculiarity of the Matter of this Poem, if its Superiority in That Respect has rais'd it above Some of the Rules given by *Aristotle*, or Whatever Other Criticks, and Gather'd From, or Founded on the *Iliad, Odyssey, or Æneid*, it has Distinguish'd it to its greater Glory; 'tis not only an Heroic Poem, but the Most So that Ever was Wrote. *Milton* did not despise Rules, Such as were Built upon Reason, So far as those Establish'd Reach'd; but as his Free and Exalted Genius Aspir'd Beyond what had Yet been Attempted in the Choice of his Subject, Himself was his Own Rule when in Heights where None had gone before, and Higher than Which None Can Ever go. . . .

[clv] Were I call'd upon to Define Poetry in General . . ., I would do it by saying 'tis ORNAMENT. This Implies Fiction, for Dress, Lace, Gold, Jewels, &c. is not the Body. Poetry therefore is not Truth, but Somthing More Agreeable, at least than Meer Truth.

and its Business is, Consequently, to Awaken, to Please, to Allure; 'tis Address'd to the Imagination, to the Passions, and This Supposes Energy as well as Beauty.

Verse and Prose are Opposites, but Verse may be Destitute of Poetry, as Prose may be Poetick, by having All the Beauties of Poetry Except the Numbers. Verse, With, or Without Rime, is but One of the Advantages Poetry makes Use of, 'tis not Alone Worthy of That Name. 'tis Prosaick Verse. . . .

[clvi] as We are Most Easily Led, or Intic'd by Pleasure, Poetry has Proportionable Influence on the Mind, Whether to carry it to Good or Evil; Whether 'tis made Subservient to One, or the Other, 'tis no Less, or More Poetry Still. if you Ask What is the Most Excellent, the most Amiable Poetry, the Answer is Easy; 'tis That Whose Elevation of Language, Arrangement of Words, its Sentiments and Images are Directed, and made Subservient to, not Only the Delight, but the Improvement of Mankind. and This after All Terminates in Pleasure, as True Wisdom and Goodness has the Greatest Tendency to our Happiness. in This Use of Poetry, and not its Power over Us, consists its Real, its most Important Dignity.

Poetry Pleases by a Peculiarity and Majesty of Stile and Language; its Numbers, its Rime (if us'd, and Skilfully) Pleases as Musick does, and as Painting, the Imagery of things, not only Real, but Fictitious: for Poetry is a Sort of New Creation, not only as it Produces to the Imagination What is Unknown to Nature, Such as Harpyes, Sphynxes, Gorgons, Hydraes, Centaurs, &c. or a Sort of Men as *Shakespear's Caliban*, or the People of Romances, Men [clvii] Better or Worse than ever were; but as it Raises and Embellishes (where 'tis possible) what is Seen in Nature, or Related in History, and by so doing shows Things Otherwise than they Really Are, or ever Were; and This not only agreeably Entertains the Mind, 'tis a Sort of New Acquisition; but it Helps Us ofttimes to See Real Beauties, and which would Else have pass'd Unregarded, and perhaps makes us Fancy we See What in Truth we do not.

there is Another Pleasure in Poetry, Oftener Felt perhaps than plac'd to its Account; 'tis This. Much of Art is Essential to This kind of Writing, and to Observe the Address and Capacity of the Poet is vastly Pleasing. 'tis So for Example when we meet with a True Poetical Word, Phrase or Expression, an Apt Simile, a Beautiful Allusion, a Noble Sentiment, a Sublime Image, &c. . . .

[clviii] Thought is the Life of the Mind, 'tis the *Intellectual Being* (II. 147.) and has the Universe, and Beyond what is Real, even



the Immense Regions of Fancy to range and *Wander* in, and as it cannot be Limited by Time, it Expatiates Eternity. the Soul's Natural Vigour produces a Constant Succession of Ideas; but These are Improveable by Art, by Frequent Reflection, Observation of what is offer'd to our Senses, or by Conversation; Reading is Con- versing only in Somwhat a Different Manner from Discourse *Viva Voce*. When we take a Book in hand 'tis to Supply our Selves with Thoughts which we could not Suggest from Within, or did not Expect would Arise Spontaneously; We Read for Amusement, De- light, Information, Instruction, Edification, to Awaken or to put our Passions into a more Vigorous Motion; in Short, to Rouze up the Intellectual Fire which Then gives Us a Kindly Warmth, a Wholesom Glow, a Lucid and Noble Flame; or it Pollutes the Mind with Black Exhalations, and Scorches, or Torments Us. Always the Mind is Fed, with its Proper Nourishment, Ideas. thus the Scrip- ture, the Best of Books, is said to be *Profitable for Doctrine, for Reproof, for Correction, for Instruction in Righteousness*. but None are Destitute of Some Juice, Somthing to Feed the Mind; though Those where 'tis Richest and in Greatest Abundance are to be Chosen. . . .

[clix] if Ever any Book was Truly Poetical, if Ever Any Abounded with Poetry, 'tis *Paradise Lost*. What an Expansion of Facts from a Small Seed of History! What Worlds are Invented, What Em- bellishments of Nature upon what Our Senses Present Us with? Divine things are More Nobly, more Divinely Represented to the Imagination than by Any Other Poem, a More Beautiful Idea is given of Nature than any Poet has Pretended to; Nature as just come out of the Hand of God, in its Virgin Loveliness, Glory, and Purity; and the Human Race is Shown, not as *Homer's*, More Gigantick, more Robust, more Valiant, but without Comparison more Truly Amiable, [clx] more So than by the Pictures and Statues of the Greatest Masters. and all These Sublime Ideas are Convey'd to Us in the most Effectual and Engaging Manner. the Mind of the Reader is Tempered, and Prepar'd, by Pleasure, 'tis Drawn, and Allured, 'tis Awaken'd and Invigorated to receive Such Impressions as the Poet intended to give it: it Opens the Fountains of Knowledge, Piety and Virtue, and pours Along Full Streams of Peace, Comfort and Joy to Such as can Penetrate the true Sense of the Writer, and Obediently Listen to his Song. . . .

to have the Mind Thus Stor'd, besides the Advantage of it in- tended by the Poet, is of no Small Importance to Us. the Works

of the Best Masters in Painting or Sculpture Deserve the Great Price they bear, upon Account of the Fine Ideas they give us whenever we please to have recourse to them, or as we happen to Remember them; a Well-Chosen Collection of Poetical Pictures, to Such as know How to Form them, Answers Much the Same [clxi] Purposes, but More may Possess Such, and at a Much Easier Price.

# HENRY BAKER

From *The Universal Spectator* (1735)

No. 328<sup>1</sup>

[23] In *Poetry*, nothing strikes the Generality of Readers with so much Pleasure as *Descriptions*, or occasions more Errors in Poets of little Judgment. A *judicious* Description is like a Face which is beautiful without Art; but an *injudicious* one is like a painted Complexion, discovering itself by affecting more Gaiety of Colour than is *natural*. The Reason why the *descriptive* Parts of *Poetry* make such lively Impressions on common Readers is, because they are drawn from *Nature*, and they, by what is called *Imaging*, are in a manner like *Pictures* made Objects of the *Sight*; whereas moral Thoughts and Discourses, consisting of Ideas abstracted from Sense, operate slower, and with less Vivacity.

As Descriptions are all drawn from *Objects* of the *Senses*, and the *Likeness* or *Unlikeness* is immediately perceiv'd, so there is a general *Similitude* in all true Descriptions of the *same* Object drawn by several Hands, like that in a Picture of the same Person done by several Artists; and yet the Degrees of *Likeness*, and the different Manner of expressing it by those several Artists, make a very *distinguishable* and entertaining *Variety*. The fine Description of a *Horse* in *Homer's Iliad*, B. 6 . . . is very different from one in the Book of *Job*; yet *both* extremely *natural* and *beautiful*.

Of all *Descriptions* in *Heroic Poetry*, none have Writers labour'd to vary so much as that of the *Morning*. . . . [Here Baker gives a kind of epitome of Homeric descriptions and shows, p. 24, that Virgil, Tasso, and "our *Spencer*, who excels in all Kind of *Imagery*," all derive from Homer.]

But of all the Descriptions of the *Morning* as a *Person*, it is impossible to find a more beautiful one than that of *Shakespear*.

*Look where the Morn, in russet mantle clad,  
Walks o'er the dew of yon high eastern hill.*

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1. Text from the *Gentleman's Magazine*, V (1735), 23-24.

The same Author, who never wants Variety of Thought, has in other Places embellish'd this Subject with a true *Spirit of Poetry*, thus,

—*Look what Streaks*

*Do lace the severing clouds in yonder east:  
Night's tapers are burnt out, and jocund day,  
Stands tiptoe on the misty mountain's top.  
The glow-worm shows the matin to be near,  
And 'gins to pale her ineffectual fire.*

Milton, in his *Paradise Lost*, has several Descriptions of the *Morning*, which are drawn with exquisite Beauty and Judgment, if a Mixture of the *Heathen Mythology* may be allow'd in a *Christian Poem*.

—*The Morn,*

*Wak'd by the circling Hours, with rosy hand  
Unbarr'd the gates of Light.  
Now morn her rosy steps in th' eastern clime  
Advancing, sow'd the earth with orient pearl.*

But in the following, where the *Heathen Mythology* is entirely laid aside, in my Opinion he far excels:

— *Now sacred Light began to dawn  
In Eden on the humid flowers that breath'd  
Their morning incense, when all things that breathe  
From th' earth's high altar send up silent praise  
To the creator, and his nostrils fill  
With grateful smell. . . .*

To conclude, of the several Descriptions of the *Morning* both in the *Antient* and *Modern Poets*, those of *England* have describ'd it with as much *Elegance of Fancy* as the others have done, and with far more *Variety*.

No. 339<sup>2</sup>

A RECIPE to make a MODERN CRITIC.

[186] A Good Quantity of *Stage Terms*, such as you may gather in the *Pit* any *first Night* of a *new Play*; a *Grain* and a *half of Judgment*, little or no *Reading*, and *Prejudice* and *Ill-nature Quantum sufficit*. . . .

N. B. The *Terms* chiefly recommended are *Fable*, *Manners*, and *Moral*, which in making up the *Recipe* you must manage thus:

As soon as you have nam'd the Word *Fable* you must proceed to

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2. Text from the *Gentleman's Magazine*, V (1735), 186-187.

*Definition*, and tell what *it is* and what *it is not*; obscure the Reader's Understanding as much as possible with what you don't understand a Word of yourself.

Then *write about it, Critic, and about it.*

As for *Manners*, shew how they *differ* and *don't differ*; what is *in Character* and *not in Character*, and affirm there is not an *Author in England* knows what they [187] are beside *yourself*; and take care to write in such a Style that not one of them shall know for you.

Then for the *Moral*, you must write *daringly*; for tho' the *Poet* you censure should have run it thro' his whole Play, you must confidently assert, that the Comedy is *ridiculous, unmeaning* and *un-instructive*: That all the rest of the Town is *blind*, and that you are the *only Man* that can see clear in it— You should also acquaint the World you are the most *learned Man of the Age*, lest they should not happen to find that *Secret* out.

This *Recipe* holds good against any *Theatrical Performance* whatever.

No. 344<sup>3</sup>

[252] It is not a Sett of Words, ranged in a certain Order that distinguishes *Poetry* from *History*, or other *Prose-Writings*, but such lively Representations as set the Things themselves before our Eyes, and make us imagine them acting before us rather than describ'd. Add to this a *Nobleness of Sentiments*, a *bold Metaphorical Turn* of Words, and a Choice of such Circumstances only as serve to enliven the *Description*, without regard to the Order of plain *Narration*. . . . Now what can inspire more exalted *Sentiments* or livelier *Descriptions* than a Contemplation of the *Works of Nature*, a View of the *moral* or *natural* System of Things? . . .

And tho' the common Forms of our *Language* may here be too scanty for our *Ideas*, yet since nothing adds more to the *Majesty* of *Poetry* than a Deviation from the common Modes of Speaking, that Defect may be abundantly supply'd by a *Revival* of *antiquated* Words, which are confess'd to give a *venerable* Air to *Poetical* Description.

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3. Text from the *Gentleman's Magazine*, V (1735), 252.



# AARON HILL

## From *The Prompter* (1735)

No. 71<sup>1</sup>

[356] Taste for *Epic Poetry* being one of the natural Consequences of a *martial Disposition*, and as there seems a Time approaching, when the *Trumpet* will be *fashionable* Musick, it can neither be a useless nor unseasonable Entertainment . . . if I borrow a *Discourse* upon this Subject from the Author of an unpublished Poem, of the *Epic Species*.

This cannot be improper, because the present Age, without much Regard to *Judgment*, in Poetry, has so profusely overflowed in the *Practice*, that it seems reduced to the Idea of a certain *Musical Cadence of Words*; or plain common *Sense*, raised to *Harmony*, by *Numbers*.

The Truth is, this Ductility of *Numbers*, is but a Part of the *Means*, mistaken for the *End*, and used as a *Vehicle* by the *first* divine Poets to convey the Bitterness of *Instruction*, with the Honey of *Delight*: But this Witchcraft of *Softness* exposed the Art by Degrees to the Prophanation of the *Ignorant*. Every body became able to imitate the *Dance* of the *Numbers*; few looked deep enough for the *Meaning*.

An *Epic Poem* is so called from a *Greek* word that signifies *SPEAKING*; because the Poet, here, speaks and relates Things, in his own Person, contrary to the *Dramatic*, or *Stage Poem*, which take their Name from a Word in the same Tongue, that signifies *ACTING*. —I shall *define* what it is; because our *CRITICKS* have represented it as an Undertaking so formidable, that one would be apt to imagine them engaged in a Confederacy to *scare* Men from writing at all, instead of furnishing Instructions *how to write, with Discernment*.

. . . I am inclined to endeavour a De[357]finition of the *Epic Poem*, and a short Explanation of the Parts of that Definition, in a manner, which disembarassing the *Art of Criticism*, from the *Jargon*

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1. Text from the *Gentleman's Magazine*, V (1735), 356-357.

of its *Terms*, may demonstrate that the Difficulty is by no means so *insuperable*, as these Gentlemen represent it. I am not altogether satisfied with what has been written on this Head, even by *Aristotle* himself, and much less by his *Commentators*, ancient, or modern.

A thousand *Dippers* into Poetry, and some of its *Professors* too, have been misled by our *Spencer's Fairy Queen*, the *English Translation of Orlando Furioso*, and other *Italian, French, and Spanish Writers*, of more Fancy than Judgment, to mistake for *Epic Poems*, any Tale told in Verse, containing a long Series of Romantic Adventures, related of some Hero, who gives Name to the Composition: But, there are scarce two Things in Nature, which differ more widely than an *Epic Poem*, from these *Historical Versifications*.

An *Epic Poem* is some noble and particular *Instruction in Morality*, conveyed to the Apprehension, under *Shadow* of some suitable, single Action, feigned or real; which Action must be illustrious and important in itself and its Personages; interest Heaven and Hell, in its Successes, and be probably, delightfully, and surprizingly *told in Verse*, with constituent Parts, or *Episodes*, ornamentally depending on, and arising naturally out of it. But, in the Management of this Story, and of all the Parts, which compose it, the Poet is never to have any other View before him but to strengthen, by the Persuasion and Authority of *EXAMPLE*, *That one moral Lesson*, which he is desirous to imprint on the Mind of his Readers.

No. 79<sup>2</sup>

[483] . . . what *Idea*, O ye Comic, and Tragic *Writers*, do you form to yourselves of *Theatrick Poesy*?—In what *View* do most of you write for the *Stage*?—In this:—You consider a Dramatic Piece, as a Work of *Genius*, but of little *Use*, when it does not redound to your *private Emolument*.—You think that 'tis enough for you to be ranked among the *CELEBRATED Dramatic Writers*; but, are little solicitous, whether your Performances entitle you to a Seat among the *VIRTUOUS*. That Maxim of *Horace*,—"The Aim of the Poet is to instruct, or delight," you so interpret, that, neglecting the *former*, which is of the greatest Importance; you have an Eye solely, or principally, to the *latter*; and chuse to *divert* Mankind, rather than *improve* them.—But, what is the *Consequence* of this?—By your erroneous Conduct, Dramatic Poetry, in General, is *turn'd* from its natural Channel; and that, which ought to be its only Aim, to *improve by pleasing*, is calculated *merely to please*, though to the

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2. Text from the *Gentleman's Magazine*, V (1735), 483-484.



*Prejudice* of the Audience. But, lest you should think these so many random Assertions, let us examine together, the *several* Kinds of Theatric Poesy.

Our TRAGEDY is as *sententious*, and *majestick*, as that of *Athens*, and boasts as great an Elegance of *Diction*. The Tragic Muse was never inspir'd with more exalted *Thoughts*, or cloth'd them, in more graceful *Expressions*. But, Alas! How much is she degenerated from her antient *candid Severity*! The *Athenian Tragedy* HEAL'd the Diseases of the Mind; but that of the Moderns CORRUPTS it. In *Athens*, it extinguish'd a *Thirst of Empire*, the greatest Crime in that Republick; but now it breathes into the Soul a double Passion, rash *Revenge*, and wanton [484] *Love*, the most deadly Pests to Religion and Society.

LET us now *examine*, what Advantages we reap from Comedy.—Tell us, thou happy Instructress, *what Immorality* thou *reformest* among us?

*I reprove* (answers she) *such modish young Sparks as are too finical in their Dress*:—A just reproof, were the[re] nothing in Youth, that *better deserv'd* Reprehension.

*I rebuke the Pedantick among the Fair; and such as are too affected in the Choice of their Words*:—A just Criticism, if there be nothing in the *Pride* or *Petulance* of the Female Sex, that *better deserves* Censure.

*I restore to their Health, and Senses, such, as are troubled with imaginary Diseases*:—A noble Cure, had you *first, heal'd* those, whose MINDS are *infected*, with VICE.

*I establish various Schools, for the Instruction and Improvement, of Husbands, Wives, and others*.—Excellent Institutions, certainly!—But what Apology will you make, should we prove, that you *prompt* Mankind to *Vice*, more than incline them to *Virtue*? What, if Youths, of both Sexes, are by *you* taught, to divest themselves of that Beauty of the Soul, *Simplicity*, merely to *foment stolen Fires*.

WHAT, if Wives are, by *you* instructed, to *violate* their Conjugal Fidelity? *Servants* to throw off all *Shame* and *Sincerity*, to assist the Light, and the Wanton?

What if *you* accustom your *Pupils*, to favour, and think tenderly of, *Vice*, and to discountenance, and sneer at, the Pretensions of *Virtue*? What if you, industriously, represent a contemptible Character, as *smart, witty, and facetious*; while, on the contrary, you miscolour a virtuous one, with all that is *stupid, and ridiculous*?

—Do you *laugh*?—Begone, O Thou wicked *Perverter* of our *Morals*,  
Thou *Hypocritical Corrupter* of the Mind, Thou *Bane* to the Peace  
of our Families!

But, *why* do I condemn *Comedy*?—She can never be *naturally*,  
criminal; she is *made so*, by others!—Let us rather accuse the  
*Poets*, who, when they ought to have presented us with *Examples*  
of *Virtue*, employed all their Wit to make *Vice appear amiable!*

# THOMAS BLACKWELL

## From *An Enquiry into the Life and Writings of Homer* (1735)

[33] To confess the Truth, *My Lord*, we are born but with narrow Capacities; We seem not able to master two Sets of Manners, or comprehend with facility different ways of Life. Our Company, Education and Circumstances make deep Impressions, and form us into a Character, of which we can hardly divest ourselves afterwards. The Manners not only of the Age in which we live, but of our City and Family, stick closely to us, and betray us at every turn, when we try to dissemble, and wou'd pass for Foreigners. These we understand, and can paint to Perfection; and there is no one so undiscerning, as not to see, that we have wonderfully succeeded in describing those Parts of *modern* Life we have undertaken. Was there ever a more natural Picture than the *Way of the World*? [34] Or can any thing in its kind surpass the *Rape of the Lock*? The Authors, doubtless, perfectly knew the Life and Manners they were painting, and have succeeded accordingly.

HERE THEN was *Homer's* first Happiness; He took his plain natural Images from *Life*: He saw *Warriors*, and *Shepherds*, and *Peasants*, such as he drew; and was daily conversant among such People as he intended to represent: The Manners used in the *Trojan* Times were not disused in his own: The same way of living in private, and the same Pursuits in publick were still prevalent, and gave him a Model for his Design, which wou'd not allow him to exceed the Truth in his Draught. By frequently and freely looking it over, he cou'd discern what Parts of it were fit to be represented, and what to be passed over.

FOR so unaffected and simple were the Manners of those Times, that the Folds and Windings of the human Breast lay open to the Eye; nor were People ashamed to avow Passions and Inclinations, which were entirely void of Art and Design. This was *Homer's* Happiness, with respect to Mankind, and the living Part of his

Poetry; as for the other Parts, and what a [35] Painter wou'd call *Still-life*, he cou'd have little Advantage: For we are not to imagine, that he cou'd discover the entertaining Prospects, or rare Productions of a Country better than we can. *That* is a Subject still remaining to us, if we will quit our Towns, and look upon it: We find it accordingly, nobly executed by many of the Moderns, and the most illustrious Instance of it, within these few Years, doing Honour to the *British* Poetry.<sup>1</sup>

IN SHORT, it may be said of *Homer*, and of every *Poet* who has wrote well, That *what* he felt and saw, *that* he described; and that *Homer* had the good Fortune to see and learn the *Grecian* Manners, at their true Pitch and happiest Temper for Verse: Had he been born much sooner, he would have seen nothing but Nakedness and Barbarity: Had he come much later, he had fallen in the Times either of wide Policy and Peace, or of General Wars, when private Passions are buried in the common Order, and established Discipline.

[57] BY TRACING the Causes that have the greatest Influence upon a Language, we are led to a Thought that must give Pleasure to the *truly Good*. We find that without *Virtue* there can be no *true Poetry*: It depends upon the *Manners* of a Nation, which form their Characters, and animate their Language: If their Manners are sound and entire, their Speech will accompany and do them Justice: And if we rise higher, and suppose them not only sound, but *Noble* and *Heroick* (as we must do, when speaking of Manners fit for Poetry) What [58] is this but *Virtue's* Self in all her Lustre and Dignity? . . . Is what we call *Heroism* indeed any thing else, than a disinterested Love of Mankind and our Country, unawed by *Dangers*, and unwearied by *Toils*? If it is not, the social Passions, and noblest Affections must prevail in an *Epic-Poem*. They may vary indeed, and shew themselves very differently in different Characters: They may likewise have their *own Shades*, and must be sometimes drawn upon dark Grounds, to raise and give them a *Relief*; but still they must be the *principal Figures* in the Piece, if it is meant to give real and lasting Pleasure.

BUT, *My Lord*, there is another Conclusion offers itself, and appears so *odd*, that one does not know what to make of it: For does it not sound something like Treason in *Apollo's* Court, to say that a *polished Language* is not fit for a great Poet? And yet, if the Maxim be true, "That no Man describes well but what he has seen, nor talks with Ease and Mastery, but in the Language and

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1. The SEASONS, by Mr. Thomson. [—Blackwell.]

Idiom he has been used to," I apprehend we must assent to it. Your Lordship is so well acquainted with what passes for Politeness of Stile, that I need be at no pains to make out the Consequence. Let me only observe, that what we call *Polishing* [59] diminishes a Language; it makes many Words obsolete; it coops a Man up in a Corner, allows him but one Set of Phrases, and deprives him of many significant Terms, and strong beautiful Expressions, which he must venture upon, like *Virgil*, at the hazard of appearing antiquated and homely.

A LANGUAGE thoroughly polished in the modern Sense, will not descend to the *Simplicity* of Manners absolutely necessary in *Epic-Poetry*: And if we feign the Manners, we must likewise endeavour to imitate the Stile. I have already shewn how little Success we can expect in the Attempt; and 'twere easy to give Proof in Fact, that no Learning or Genius is sufficient to secure us from a Miscarriage in this Particular.

[301] . . . Let us remember, *My Lord*, what it is that gives us such perpetual Pleasure in reading the *Iliad*? That makes us start at the Turns in the Speeches, and fills us with Anxiety and Wonder? It is not the beautiful Descriptions of *Places*, nor even the Rage and Ardour of the *Battles*. But those *High strokes of Character* that every where occur, and are constantly presenting us with new Sentiments of the human Heart, [302] such as we expect, and from our own Experience feel to be *true*. These can never miss their Aim: They at once charm the Fancy with Images, and fill the Understanding with Reflection: They interest every thing that is *human* about us, and go near to agitate us with the same Passions as we see represented in the moving Story.

THIS Reflection will bear to be turned on every side, and dreads no Search be it ever so severe. In the choice we make of any *Measure* in the conduct of our Business or Pleasures, we examine its Justness and Expediency, not only by considering what good end it serves? But likewise, what Inconveniences are avoided, what Pains or Trouble spared, or what Miscarriages prevented, to which *another Method* might be liable? Take *Homer's* Subject in the same Light, and it will appear with a Pre-eminency hardly to be expressed. *Such a Convention of Princes*, from different Countries and Soils, but all speaking the same Language, furnished him with *great Materials*, and hindered him from attempting an *Impossibility*; "I mean the feigning or forming new imaginary Characters, without Originals from which he might copy them." The flourishing Condition of *Greece* at that time; the great number of Principalities,

free Cities, and growing Republicks, sent forth an Assembly of Heroes, [303] the World could hardly match ever since. The *Grecians* themselves confessed, that their Country, when much more polished and improved, had never produced so many *free natural* Characters, not tainted with *Politicks*, not moulded by *Laws*, nor effeminated with *Pleasures*; and for that reason, half-deified those very Persons, whom they knew at the same time to be but the *Sons of Men*.

HIS SUBJECT therefore, saved him from a *desperate* Enterprize; and prevented him from falling into those Errors and Absurdities that deprive many a lively Poet of his Reputation. To it he owed the Stateliness and Dignity with which *Idomeneus* the *Cretan* King appears on all occasions. To it he owed the beautiful and unwarlike *Nireus*, the faithless *Pandarus*, and the amiable human *Patroclus*. And above all the rest, to this he was indebted for the noble CONTRAST of *Characters* that adorn his Poems. There we see the ancient *Nestor*, mild, and calm, and talkative, opposed to the young fiery *Thessalian*, the intractable *Achilles*: The too indulgent *Priam* stands by the prudent *Polydamas*, and the wise *Antenor*: The Hardiness of the noble *Hector*, and Debauchery of the luxurious *Paris*, serve but to illustrate one another, and come all originally from the same Fountain.

[304] THE *Detail* of this part of his Happiness would be endless: But there are two remarkable Circumstances in *Homer's* Writings, which have been generally look'd upon as *Strokes of Art*, where I am apt to think the Nature and Situation of his Subject bore a considerable Sway. It has been observ'd to his Honour, "That the *Characters* of his *Heroes*, tho' of the *same kind*, and excelling in one and the same thing, are yet all diversified, and mark'd with some Peculiarities that distinguish them, and make a Separation." Thus, for instance, both *Achilles* and *Ajax*, *Diomedes* and *Hector*, *Ulysses* and *Merion*, are all *brave*; but it is in a different manner. *Achilles* is fierce and impetuous, *Ajax* steady and firm, *Diomedes* gallant and open, *Ulysses* cautious and bold; and both *Agamemnon* and *Hector* are mark'd with that *princely Courage* which becomes the *GENERALS* of two great Nations. *This, My Lord*, I hardly think could ever have been feigned; it was Truth and Nature alone that could form those Differences, so real and yet so delicate, and afterwards offer them to a Representation. . . .

[306] THE *SECOND* thing which has been look'd upon as a noble Proof of his Judgment, is the *Period of Time* he has chosen for the Beginning of his Poem. He has not, they say, set out with the *first*

Campaign; nor attempted to deduce the *Trojan* Story from the miraculous Birth of *Helen*, or her Brothers: He has confined himself to the *last Year* of the War, and by that means filled his Poem with *History and Action*.

BUT here, too, he was happy in his Subject, which directed him of its own accord to make the Choice. There were *two* distinct *Periods* in the War. The first was long and tedious, while *Achilles* and his Myrmidons were fighting on the side of the *Greeks*, and ravaging the Country around *Troy*. During all that time, the *Trojans* kept within their Walls, and durst not meet this dreaded Warrior in the open Field: So that there was but little to be described, except these [307] Excursions to pillage, which are occasionally inserted in the Dialogues of the *Iliad*.

BUT the *second Period* was *short* and full of Action: For no sooner was the disobliged enraged Hero retired to his Ship, and had withdrawn his Troops, than the Face of the War was wholly changed: The remaining *Greeks* were now no longer supported by his tremendous *Arm*; and the *Trojans* ventured to quit their Town and face the Enemy. Battles, and Truces, and Perjuries, ensued: Fear, and Terror, and Despair, took their turns in the Camps, and filled every anxious Hour with Passion and Amazement. The WRATH of the Hero was the Spring of all this Misery; and therefore a *happy Theme* for an Epic or Narrative Poet. . . .





From *Some Remarks on the Tragedy of Hamlet*  
(1736)

[52] THERE is less Time employ'd in this Tragedy, as I observed else where, than in most of our Author's Pieces, and the Unity of Place is not much disturbed. But here give me leave to say, that the Critick's Rules, in respect to these two Things, if they prove any Thing, prove too much; for if our Imagination will not bear a strong Imposition, surely no Play ought to be supposed to take more Time than is really employ'd in the Acting; nor should there be any Change of Place in the least. This shews the Absurdity of such Arbitrary Rules. For how would such a Genius as *Shakespeare's* have been cramped had he thus fettered himself! But there is (in Truth) no Necessity for it. No Rules are of any Service in Poetry, of any kind, unless they add Beauties, which consist (in Tragedy) in an exact Conformity to Nature in the Conduct of the Characters, and in a sublimity of Sentiments and nobleness of Diction. If these [53] two Things be well observed, tho' often at the Expence of Unity of Time and Place, such Pieces will always please, and never suffer us to find out the little Defects in the Plot; nay it generally happens (at least Experience has shewn it frequently) that those Pieces wherein the fantastick Rules of Criticks have been kept strictly to, have been generally flat and low. We are to consider, that no Dramatick Piece can affect us but by the Delusion of our Imagination; which, to taste true and real Pleasures at such Representations, must undergo a very great Imposition, even such as in Speculation seem very gross, but which are nevertheless allowed of by the strictest Criticks. In the first Place, our Understandings are never shocked at hearing all Nations, on our Stage, speak *English*; an Absurdity one would think that should immediately revolt us; but which is, however, absolutely necessary in all Countries where Dramatick Performances are resorted to, unless the Characters be always supposed to be of each respective Nation; as for instance, in all *Shakespeare's* Historical Plays. I say, this never shocks us, nor do we find any Difficulty in believing the Stage to be *Rome*, (or *Denmark*, for instance, as in this Play;) or *Wilks* to be *Hamlet*, or *Booth* to be a Ghost, &c. These Things, I repeat it, appear difficult in Speculation; but we find, that in Reality they do go down; and must necessarily do so, or else farewell all Dramatick Performances; for un[54]less the Distress and Woes

appear to be real (which they never can, if we do not believe we actually see the Things that are represented) it is impossible our Passions should be moved. Let any one fairly judge, if these do not seem as great Impositions on our Reason, as the Change of Place, or the Length of Time, which are found fault with in our Poet. I confess there are Bounds set to this Delusion of our Imaginations, (as there are to every Thing else in this World) for this Delusion is never perform'd in direct Defiance of our Reason; on the contrary, our Reason helps on the Deceit; but she will concur no farther in this Delusion, than to a certain Point which she will never pass; and that is, the Essential Difference between Plays which deceive us by the Assistance of our Reason, and others which would impose upon our Imaginations in Despight of our Reason. It is evident by the Success our Author's Pieces have always met with for so long a Course of Time; it is, I say, certain by this general Approbation, that his Pieces are of the former, not of the latter Sort. But to go to the Bottom of this Matter, would lead me beyond what I propose.

SINCE therefore it is certain, that the strict Observance of the Critick's Rules might take away Beauties, but not always add any, why should our Poet be so much blamed for giving a Loose to his Fancy? The Sublimity of Sentiments in his Pieces, and that exalted Diction which is so peculiarly his own, and [55] in fine, all the Charms of his Poetry, far outweigh any little Absurdity in his Plots, which no ways disturb us in the Pleasures we reap from the above-mention'd Excellencies. And the more I read him, the more I am convinced, that as he knew his own particular Talent well, he study'd more to work up great and moving Circumstances to place his chief Characters in, so as to affect our Passions strongly, he apply'd himself more to This than he did to the Means or Methods whereby he brought his Characters into those Circumstances.

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# HENRY PEMBERTON

## From *Observations on Poetry* (1738)

[9] [Aristotle's contention that the fable is the most important element of epic or dramatic poetry is not true.] [10] To relate the events, which have passed in the world, is the subject of history; to feign strange and marvelous achievements with no farther design than to engage a reader's attention on the single principle of curiosity, should be confined to romance and novel; the poet ought to make it his chief endeavour to open the human mind, and bring forth the secret springs of action, the various passions and sentiments of men, upon which depends their good or ill conduct in every condition of life. . . . And however a well-contrived fable may for once by its novelty amuse us agreeably; where the sentiments, the manners, and characters of men are displayed, we must receive a much more lasting pleasure; here we shall always find fresh entertainment, be furnished with new reflections every time we read, and our minds be improved more and more in proportion, as we are delighted.

[11] I HAVE been thus particular upon Aristotle's doctrine in relation to the fable or plot . . . because I apprehend, the preheminance, he gives to the fable, is derogatory from the real dignity of these kinds of poetry; which certainly merit that high esteem, they have always obtained, from their instructing us in the passions and characters of men.

THE forming a right judgment upon the temper and behaviour of those, with whom we have intercourse, is the principal branch, of what is called knowledge of the world, and is a very essential part of prudence. This skill is acquired by men of business from long experience. But these kinds of writings, by shewing the natural effects of different tempers and passions under feigned actions, contribute greatly to the same purpose. In this view they may very justly be compared with the experimental part of natural philosophy. For as in that science artificial experiments are contrived, wherein

the powers of nature may discover them[12]selves by acting under less disguise, than in the ordinary course of things; so in such feigned actions and characters, as the poet frames, the inmost recesses of the soul may be laid open, and thereby the passions be shewn with more distinctness, than they are seen in history, or in the common affairs of life, where the sentiments and emotions of passion, which pass within the minds of men upon each occurrence, can be discerned only in proportion to the ability of the observer for making just deductions from the external appearances, that come under his cognizance. By this means that eminent tyrant, Alexander of Pheræa, who had passed his life in an uninterrupted series of the greatest cruelties without remorse, was melted into tears at a tragic representation, where the effects of the calamity on the mind of the sufferer were expressly set forth before his imagination.

THIS example points out a still greater use of these writings, no less than the advancement of virtue.

The powers of the human mind may in general be ranged under two heads, the understanding, and the temper. By the first we acquire the knowledge of things, and distinguish one from another; by the latter we are sensible of some kind of pleasure or dislike from almost every object, that [13] presents itself before us. From hence we are not only struck with the perception of beauty and deformity from sensible objects, but also from the subjects of our thoughts and reflections. Thus, of human actions, in which we have no personal concern, some command our esteem and admiration, others create disgust and abhorrence. Herein the best of the ancient moralists placed the foundation of goodness and virtue. This faculty, or disposition of the mind is strengthened and confirmed by frequent exercise; for which these poetic performances not only furnish occasions, but when such emotions of soul are excited by these writings or representations, they are usually indulged, and permitted to operate at full liberty without controul from more private or selfish passions, by which generous sentiments in affairs, where we are interested parties, are often too soon stifled. This effect of these compositions is so general and certain, that the philosophers appeal to it for proof, that such a principle of virtue is common to all men, and indubitably implanted in our nature. But under this cultivation will these seeds of virtuous inclinations successfully grow up, and be brought to maturity.

Moreover, for the completion of virtue not only a disposition to goodness is required, but also the knowledge of what is praiseworthy. And herein these writings will equally assist; for while such [14] feigned examples of good and evil conduct in men are the

subjects of our consideration, we shall insensibly learn to form just and impartial opinions of human actions and passions. This has made Horace say, that virtue and prudence are taught by Homer more fully, and to greater advantage, than in the writings of the most eminent philosophers.

Bossu is so much misled by the preference, Aristotle gives the fable, that . . . he supposes this moral instruction to be so included in the action, as to presume, that both Homer and Virgil proposed by their poems purely to inculcate some general moral sentiment, which they had first conceived in their thoughts; and that their poems were plan'd out with the single design [15] of exhibiting some fictitious transaction, which in the way of example might illustrate, and fix in the mind of the reader such preconceived maxim; the action or fable of these poems bearing an exact analogy to those short occurrences feigned by Esop between brutes suitable to the general qualities, we ordinarily ascribe to them. He goes so far as to suppose these latter fables capable of being extended into a great length, like the fables of the epic poets . . . ; not perceiving, that the elegance of the Esopic fables consists in their brevity, and a ready application to their intended moral. . . .

[16] But to consider this notion in the most favourable view, as we have no means of knowing the express intention of Homer or Virgil, but from their works; the only reason to imagine, they formed their poems on some one moral maxim, must be, that no other of equal importance is to be found in them. But Mons. le Clerc has very well observed, that the evils, with which an alliance may be attended from discord, and from any of the parties breaking measures with their chief, are not more fully represented by the calamities following the dissension between Agamemnon and Achilles; than the mischiefs that may accrue from the strictest union, when grounded on too implicit a submission to a single authority, is exemplified in the ruin, which comes upon the Trojans and their allies by their hasty compliance with the rash resolves of Hector, and the neglect of the advice given by Polydamas upon the reconciliation between the Grecian chiefs. [17] Nay, that we may equally learn from this poem, that too great power may be destructive to a monarch, as well as to the people whom he governs. If Priam and his family could have been controuled in their resolution to retain Helen, neither the city of Troy, nor himself had fallen a sacrifice to the just resentment of Greece.

The same author has canvassed in like manner the particular morals, Bossu assigns as the foundation of the *Odyssey* and *Æneid*.

But though we cannot fix upon one single moral lesson, as the sole intention of those poems, it ought not from thence to be concluded, their authors had no design at all farther than to compose an amusing story. If we consider the immense variety of useful observations, which may be drawn from a diligent examination of every part of the conduct of the several persons represented in the Iliad only, it is not to be conceived, how the writer by mere accident, and without any express design could possibly lay together so copious a fund for the most instructive moral reflections. The distinction, which ought here to be made, is between allowing in these poems no other intention than to exemplify some general maxim relating to men's conduct, and the more extensive design of exhibiting some finished picture of life, wherein may be exposed to view not only the natural consequences of human actions, but the tempers and the passions of men, with the internal motives both to good actions, and to those deviations from the general principles of vir[18]tue, which we daily see and lament in the world.

In supposing Homer to have composed his Iliad with a regard to the state of his country in his own time, and his Odyssey to give an important article of advice to princes, we ascribe to the poets a high point of ambition in taking upon them to be instructors in form to kings and states; yet upon a more perfect inspection into the nature of these writings we shall find this scheme to come very short of their real merit and dignity. For this makes them subservient only to particular purposes; whereas these poems, when they justly and fully represent the characters of men, are suited to instruct both public and private persons in all countreys, and in all ages. But it is by the representation of characters, that this is effected. For the actions of men are so various, that the fable of a poem, which shall bear an analogy to a transaction, which has past at one time, may not soon meet again with its parallel; but the natural tempers and dispositions of the human mind are always the same, and by the behaviour of men in one action in consequence of their respective characters their conduct may be judged of in other actions also, though of a different kind. The use therefore of this species of poetry being so universal, though occasions may offer, wherein the poet shall be directed in the choice of his subject by some present circumstance of his country, yet it is not necessary that he should always have in view any such particular point of instruction, before he chuses a fable. . . .

[20] But here a charge brought by Plato against the poets must be considered, who accuses them of chusing subjects more suited

to entertain than instruct: in particular, that the tragic representations of persons grieving under adverse fortune tend to corrupt our minds; for that by indulging the impressions, such representations make upon us, we are in danger of weakening our own tempers, and rendering our selves less able to support the evil [21] accidents of life. But this is confounding firmness of mind with hardness of heart. Compassion for the calamities, to which human nature by the vicissitude of fortune is continually exposed, arises from a temper of mind by no means inconsistent with fortitude; it being constantly seen, that those, who have the strongest compassion for the distresses of others, have supported their own with great magnanimity; and none are less apt to be moved at others ills, than such, as are the most subject to repine and sink under their own disappointments. Aristotle has much more justly observed, that this kind of poetry is conducive to refine the passions, it excites in us. Certainly such representations will give us occasion to distinguish the true objects of each passion.

It must indeed be confessed, that however useful these kinds of poetry built on the actions and passions of men may be towards directing us in the conduct of life, and forming the mind to virtue; yet they are capable of being perverted from this their high office.

The genuine design of comedy is to represent the true source of private enjoyment from family affections, and the judicious choice of our acquaintance and friends; to shew the inconveniences arising from imprudent conduct, and the irregular sallies of passion, together with the ridicule due to capriciousness of temper, and other particularities of humourists: tragedy on the other hand is adapted [22] to form the mind to compassion, to give just apprehensions of the uncertain state of human felicity, to set forth the excellence of fortitude, public benevolence, and the other great virtues, and to inspire a detestation of the contrary vices. But each of these may be perverted to serve evil purposes.

Comedy is thus abused, when it is employed to give favourable representations of vicious pursuits after pleasure, or treats with the levity of ridicule great immoralities; this is to allure men to the approbation of some vices, and to look on others without detestation; to persuade the corrupt, that they may purchase at the risk of a few jests only, the gratification of their inordinate desires, which they might possibly think too dearly bought at the expence of the general indignation and abhorrence of mankind.

The effects of tragic representations are equally mischievous, when instead of the calamities, to which mankind is subject from

the uncertain condition of human affairs, they present before us no other distresses, than what arise from the impetuosity of selfish desires. Though such weaknesses are not unnatural to particular ages and constitutions, and within proper bounds are just subjects of compassion; yet constant representations of this kind can only serve to continue that infirm temper beyond those tender years, wherein only it is pardonable, and prevent that steadiness of mind, which ought to take place in a more advanced age, and that moderation towards personal indulgencies, [23] which is required to the just performance of the necessary duties of life. . . .

Epic poetry may also be no less misapplied.

. . . the true office of pastoral is to express the cares and the amusements of the rustic condition. But instead of this a spurious kind has sprung up, wherein, however the thoughts may be confined to cattle and pastures, or other rural objects, we are plainly [24] presented with persons of superiour fortune acting in masquerade, and abandoning themselves to a languid indolence . . . . In short, these pieces, and their kindred-novels, exhibit as false a picture of human affairs, as the knight-errantry and enchantments of romances; but are so much the less innocent follies, as it is easier for men to give themselves up to languor of mind, or the unbounded sway of personal desires, than to propose to share in the glory of the imaginary heroes of those legends.

Most certainly all poetry is capable of the like abuse. Songs and the other lesser pieces of verse may be employed in instigating the passions toward unlawful pleasures. And satyre, whose office it is to cast the just contempt upon follies, and to draw the sword of a severer indignation against more serious enormities, loses its end, when it is turned into general invective; for then under the disguise of censure it in reality unites its forces with the most abandoned, whose constant endeavours are to represent the generality of men as corrupt as themselves, who very well know, that to treat mankind, as universally vicious, is to throw the greatest discouragement in the way of virtue by ren[25]dring suspected the most unexceptionable conduct, and to give the most effectual support to the cause of vice. . . .

[72] [The notion that poetry should only entertain] seems to have given a very disadvantageous idea of it to men of a serious turn of mind, who are apt to consider it merely as an amusement, or even more adapted to corrupt, than to improve the world. Plato under this pretence charges the art with being expresly appropriated to captivate and mislead the understanding; comparing both poetry



and oratory to the delicacies of cookery, where much less regard is had to the preservation of health, than to the luxurious gratification of the palate. But Horace has distinguished, that the design of poetry may either be to instruct, or to entertain. Some kinds indeed are chiefly intended to entertain, such as sonnets, festival odes, georgics, and other kinds of descriptive poetry. And these species ought certainly to be ranked amongst the principal of those arts, whereby the natural enjoyments of human life are improved. For if lofty woods, spacious gardens, and sumptuous [73] buildings are reasonable means of enjoyment, an art, that can raise in our minds pleasing images of these, and other objects of delight in the absence of these objects, must deserve a suitable place in our esteem. Human life is divided between what is usually called business and pleasure. The happiness of men depends chiefly on providing for the necessary demands of nature, and obeying the dictates of our serious affections towards our family, friends, and country; consequently such pursuits demand the gross of our time; and all other personal gratifications ought to give place to these. But as the first engage us in a course of laborious application; without intervals of relaxation and pleasing diversions it will be difficult to support that cheerfulness of mind, which is requisite towards success in our most important concerns. Those poetic amusements therefore, which promise no more than relief from the fatigues of business, are far from being unprofitable, or the least unworthy of diligent cultivation. But the part of poetry, which relates to human life, and the conduct of men, is however of a much more noble kind

[75] I think . . . we may thus distinguish the offices of poetry and prose, that prose primarily proposes to instruct the understanding, and poetry to affect the temper [i. e., sensibility of the mind; "to work upon the passions"].

I do not here mean that all prose writing must be simply didactic, or that the poet must never appear to instruct by design; but that the poet is always to remember, that his office is to exhibit continually sensible images of things, and the writer or speaker in prose, that he is addressing himself to the rational faculty. . . .

[83] The essence of poetry consists so much in making a due impression upon the imagination, that a single word productive of that effect . . . shall give a poetic turn to the plainest thought. Whatever artifice may be ascribed to such expressions from their being figurative, I think it manifest, that none of these phrases [cited from Homer, Virgil, and Milton] receive their poetic air from thence,

but from their raising in the mind a sensible image of the action referred to.

[98] . . . in comedy the language receives its poetic air not by departing from the ordinary forms of speech, but by keeping more close to them than in any other kind of writing.

[99] Tragedy, which imitates persons of high condition in their most serious affairs, requires a more solemn style; yet Aristotle observes, that though the first writers of tragedy took great freedom in adorning their language, as this species of poetry became more improved, it at length had rejected all forms of speech incongruous to discourse. Certainly nothing can well exceed the absurdity of those studied metaphors, formal sentences, and long similies, we often hear from the modern stage. This is to make the most offensive kind of affectation an ingredient in every character, by shewing them solicitous to be polished and refined in their discourse in the very midst of the dangers and distresses, with which they are supposed to be encompassed. . . .

[151] BEFORE we enquire farther into this particular [the sublime], it is necessary to premise, that the sublime in writing requires no less a right cast of temper in the reader to perceive, than it does warmth and greatness of imagination in the writer to execute.

[152] For by such elevated objects and conceptions all men are not equally moved. . . .

[153] LONGINUS, as necessary to constitute the sublime in writing, requires for the subject suitable conceptions and passions, and in the language, whether prose or verse, a happy choice of words, with an appropriate figurativeness of phrase, and to complete the rest such a harmony and cadence as may improve the dignity of the expression. . . .

[154] That pomp of sound has force to aid the sublime by giving additional energy to the expression, the powerful effects of music abundantly prove; and figurative forms of speech promote the same design, whenever they render the expression more close, or more comprehensive.

IN relation to the subjects most conducive to excite this admiration, wherein we have placed the sublime, besides vehement and enthusiastic passion, not only exalted sentiments, but also such images and actions, as are marvellous, conduce to this end. Hence we find, that writers have at all times made choice of such representations to warm, and fill the imaginations of their readers.

[155] . . . Milton had a subject, which permitted his fancy to expatiate beyond the bounds of the world, where the strength

of his invention has formed greater and more astonishing images than any former poet, or than can be allowed to any succeeding one, whose subject confines him within the limits of human actions and powers.

Indeed nothing supernatural can well be admitted into the plan of any such poem at present. For it is impossible, that men should be seriously affected by such representations, unless they bear some proportion to their real opinions. We find, that even the machinery of Homer gave disgust to succeeding generations, while the same religion remained . . . .

[161] The only use, which can now be made of the ancient system of theology, is in the way of similitude, which is not inventing new tales of those divinities, but merely alluding to the old. . . .

[163] Though ancient tragedians could introduce their deities, and later times, as well as ancient, have brought on the stage the ghosts of men departed; whenever we now attend to such representations with seriousness, it is out of regard to the writer, and the time, wherein he lived; but the revival of any such incredible incidents would be treated with the utmost contempt and disdain. Heroic poems bear so great a resemblance to tragedy, that what is not to be admitted in this, cannot have place in the other without the greatest absurdity. And if it be here asked, by what means then can a modern author attain the heights of epic poetry; I answer by the same, as render Homer still the first of poets; by just representations of life and manners; by sublime descriptions of natural objects; by filling his action with the most striking inci-  
[164]dents, the condition of human affairs will allow; and above all by sublimity of sentiment.



# HENRY FIELDING

## From *The Champion* (1739-40)

THURSDAY, Dec. 13, 1739.<sup>1</sup>

[I, 87] MEthought I found mself in the most beautiful Plain I ever beheld. The Soil was cover'd with a Verdure scarce to be equalled by Colours, or conceived by Imagination. A vast Quantity of Flowers of different Sorts variegated the Scene, and perfumed the Air with the most delicious Odours. In the [88] Midst of this Plain stood a Mountain, not much unlike a Mitre; which was of great Height, but withal so free from all Incumbrances of Trees or Briars, that I could, from the Bottom of the Hill, very plainly discern all such as ascended, or endeavoured to ascend. On one of the Summits of this Hill sat nine Girls, whose Names I learnt to be Miss *Cally*, Miss *Cly*, Miss *Raty*, Miss *Thally*, Miss *Pomy*, Miss *Psicky*, Miss *Terpy*, Miss *Polly*, Miss *Any*; they were very indifferently dressed, but so extremely beautiful, that the Rents in their Garments, which discover'd some Parts of their charming Limbs, would have been ill supply'd by the richest Brocade. A little Man who lay in the Lap of one, with his Head in the Bosom of another, playing with his Hands with the Neck of a third, gave me an Idea of a certain Colonel, who formerly used to lie in State in this Town. I could by no means learn the Name of this happy Man, though I asked several, who all returned me indirect Answers. One swore, if he could come at him, he would soon kick him down the Hill; another, that he had no Right to be there; a third (a very grave Man) shook his Head and said, he did not understand *Greek*. But what surprized me the most, was, that several Persons, instead of telling me his Name, ventured to contradict my senses, and to assure me I was mistaken, for that the little Gentleman was not, where I saw him: while I stood shocked with the Assurance of this Declaration, I observed a pretty tall Man tumbling down the Hill with

1. Text of both essays from the second edition of the reprint, London: H. Chapelle, 1743.

great Precipitation; upon applying my Glass, I thought I had seen him somewhere before; and was told, that he had ascended a good Part of the Mountain in Disguise, and had passed several of the Guards (which I now took Notice, watched carefully at equal Distances on the Ascent) under counterfeit Names. My Friend had scarce ended, when the aforesaid Person past by me, and with an Air of Indignation cryed out, 'Keep your *Helican*, [89] and be paxed! A Cup of Sack is a better Thing stap my Vitals! and since those young Ladies will not let me up the Hill, I will never introduce one of them to Court, split me.' He then began to hum a Song—I could hear some few Words only, as *Sing and Liberty*, and *Sing and War*, and *Sing and Peace*. I remarked, the faster he sung, the faster he walked, or rather ran from the Hill, so that he was soon out of Sight, which he scarce was, when I heard a vast Noise at the Bottom of the Hill; indeed it was so loud, and of so strange a Kind, that I despair of giv[ing] my Reader an adequate Idea of it. Nor do I believe he can form a juster, than by imagining a discordant Chorus of all the vociferous Animals in the World; for, besides the human Organs, which were here diversified into all the different Kinds of vocal Music, such as whistling, yawning, hallowing, hooting, groaning, &c. there were several Animals, (not chosen, as it seems, for the Sweetness of their Pipes) such as Asses, Owls, and Cats conjoined. While I was wondering at this hideous Outcry, one who stood near me, said, *O! they are hunting an Author*.

Nor can I help mentioning, that the little Gentleman on the Top of the Hill, put on a Kind of Smile, which I thought unbecoming at so brutal an Entertainment. I was diverted from enquiring farther into the Meaning of this Pastime, by a Number of Persons who brushed by me . . . . [90] We were no sooner rid of this Company, than a Couple approached, who, tho' their Persons did not much agree, (the one being of the taller Kind, and thin, the other shorter and fatter) yet their Minds seemed to be more of a Piece, they seemed to walk together with great Friendship and Affection: The Gates were instantly opened to them, and they walked on, without any Interruption, to the Top of the Hill; where the little Gentleman, and the nine young Ladies saluted them. They no sooner shewed themselves there, than a Parcel of Asses, who were grazing at the Bottom, set up the most execrable Bray I ever [91] heard: This I was informed, by one of the Guards, was the Nature of the Beasts whenever they beheld any Figure on the Top of the Mountain. Upon my asking who those two Gentlemen were, the same Person replied, "The shorter of them is the excellent Author

of *Leonidas*. He was introduced here many Years ago by *Milton* and *Homer*; nor is he dearer to those great Poets, than to several *Spartan* and *Roman* Heroes. He is thought, by long Intimacy with those two, to have learnt the Majestic Air of *Homer*, while he dresses himself like *Milton*, tho' others believe both to be natural to him. As for the other Gentleman, he was very fond of one or two of those Ladies you see yonder in his Youth, and they as warmly returned his Passion; but of late, there hath grown a Coldness of his Side; and graver Studies, in which he hath nobly distinguished himself, have made him less frequent in their Embraces.' He was proceeding, when several Persons came up, the first of which had, I observed, a great Club in his Hand. The Gate was immediately opened to them; and as soon as they had entered, the Guard whispered in my Ear, 'They are the Family of the *Vinegars*; he at the Head is the great Captain *Hercules*.' If you will give me Leave, Captain, your Club seemed to strike such a Terror, that I am in some Doubt, whether you did not owe your Admission to it: I no sooner turned about, than I observed a huge over grown Fellow, with a large Rabble at his Heels, who huzza'd him all along as he went. He had a Smile, or rather a Sneer in his Countenance, and shook most People by the Hand as he past; on each Side of him walked three Persons, with Cloths and Brushes in their Hands, who were continually employed in rubbing off Mire from him; and really he travelled through such a Quantity of Dirt, that it was as much as they could possibly do to keep him from being covered. I was informed, [92] that a certain Person, calling himself a *Hyp-Doctor*, walked after him, but he was invisible to me. As soon as he came to the Gate, he whispered to the Guard, and then shook him by the Hand; upon which the Gate was opened, but as the Guard was going to shut it on the rest, the huge Man turned about, and cried, *Sir, I pay for self and Company*; upon which it was flung wide open, and the whole Crew entered in, and marched on without the least Interruption through the several Passes; the huge Man shaking all those who *should have kept them* by the Hand. You will not wonder at my Curiosity in asking, who, or what this Man was; I was answered, 'That he was a great Magician, and with a gentle Squeeze by the Hand, could bring any Person whatever to think, and speak, and do what he himself desired, and that it was very difficult to avoid his Touch; for if you came but in his Reach, he infallibly had you by the Fist; that there was only one Way to be secure against him, and that was by keeping your Hand shut, for then his Touch had no Power;' but indeed, this Method of Security I did not per-

ceive any one to put in Practice. The Company, with their Leader, were now advanced a considerable Way up the Hill, when the Ladies applied to the little Gentleman to defend them; but he, to the great Surprize of every Body, crept under one of their Petticoats; upon which I heard one behind me cry out, *Ay, ay, he hath been touched before I warrant you.* The two Gentlemen, whom I mentioned to walk up the Hill together, advanced bravely to the Brow, and put themselves in a Posture of Defence, with a seeming Resolution to oppose the whole Posse. And now every one was in full Expectation of the Issue; when (eagerly pressing too forward) I came within the Reach of the huge Man, who gave me such a Squeeze by the Hand, that it put an End to my Dream, and instead of those flowry Landskips which I painted in the Be[93]ginning of my Letter, I found myself three Pair of Stairs in the *Inner-Temple.*

THURSDAY, *January 3, 1739-40.*

[I, 152] THERE are certain Qualities, which, notwithstanding the Admiration of the World hath been pleased to allow them, are, in themselves, quite indifferent, and may enable a Man to be either virtuous or vicious, according to the Manner in which they are exerted; or, to speak more philosophically, according to the other Qualities with which they are blended in the Mind. Valour and Wit in a good-natur'd Man are truly amiable, and justly entitle him to the Esteem of Mankind; but, when they meet with a different Disposition, only render the Possessor capable of doing greater Mischiefs, and make him a more dangerous Enemy to Society than he could otherwise have been.

Those who would rank Valour among the Cardinal Virtues, will often find themselves oblig'd to give the Title of Virtuous, to the vilest, and most deprav'd of Men. The greatest Tyrants, Murderers, and Robbers upon Earth, have been possessed [153] of this Quality, and some of them in an eminent Degree. The Devil, as he is described in *Milton*, appears to be the bravest Spirit in the Universe.

Nor, shall we do righter in giving too hasty Commendation to Wit, without having due Regard to the Manner in which it is exerted. When Religion, Virtue, Honour, Modesty, or Innocence, are attack'd by this Weapon, it becomes a Sword in a Madman's Hand, and, instead of deserving our Praise, is really an Object of utter Detestation and Horror.

[154] . . . Religion hath of late Years been the Subject of much Wit and Ridicule, and that in Writing as well as Discourse.



Virtue and true Honour have suffered the same Insults from this unruly Weapon. Nothing affords so frequent Triumph to Wit as Modesty. It is common to see a Man of Worth, by being possess'd of this Quality, made ridiculous and uneasy in Company, by the Jest and Sneers of an impudent witty Fellow. I have often heard it said; It is true, indeed, Mr. Such-a-one has a great deal of Ill-nature, but I easily forgive it him, for he has a vast deal of Wit.

For my Part, when I hear a Man call'd a witty or a brave Man, I entertain neither a good nor bad Opinion of him from such Appellation. *Catiline* and *Thersites* were possessed of these Qualities. But when the Defence of one's Country, or Friend, hath flow'd from Valour; or when Wit hath been used, like that of *Addison* or *Steel*, to propagate Virtue and Morality; when, like that of *Swift*, to expose Vice and Folly; it is then only, that these become commendable, and truly worthy of our Praise and Admiration.

I do not know a better general Definition of Virtue, than that it is a Delight in doing Good; how far, therefore, must they come short of deserving that Admiration which is due to Virtue alone, who are only possessed of [155] Qualities that enable them to prove hurtful and prejudicial to Mankind.



## From *The Daily Gazetteer* (1741)

25 September<sup>1</sup>

[487] [Ninety-nine out of a hundred people admire the works of a free and bold imagination, while only one has the degree of attention required to admire a finished work of judgment. Thus Homer is generally admired for his originality, although the discerning few also respect his craftsmanship. But Virgil, who is respected by the few for his accuracy, is not popular in the widest sense. Horace, on the other hand, charms all sorts of readers by virtue of his originality.

[Of modern writers, several have been popular because of their originality—Boccalini, Montaigne, Cervantes (the best of these), Rabelais, [488] Butler, Swift, and Bunyan.] I think his [Bunyan's] Example might incline Men unacquainted with any but their Mother-Tongue, to undertake somewhat therein, which might give them as just a Title to Reputation. *Sense* is *Sense* in *all Languages*, and let a Man *know* ever so much *Latin* and *Greek*, he thinks in the Tongue of his People, let it be what it will; so that in point of *Invention*, all Men are on a *Par*.

The Use I would make of all these Observations and Instances is this; I would be content to inculcate a Desire of excelling, rather by striking out new Paths, than by treading very circumspectly in the old ones. I have shewn, that it is natural for our Cotemporaries to be pleased with any thing that is tolerable if it be new, rather than a better Thing if it be evidently an Imitation. I have endeavoured to point out the reason for this, and to support my own Conjectures by several Examples. . . . if the Moderns would exercise the *Invention* more and their *Diligence* in *Imitating* less, they would succeed better than they do.

I would not be understood by this Manner of Speaking to lessen the *Antients* in any Degree. I have myself all the Veneration for them that a Man can have for other Men, and should have a very mean Opinion of any Author who should pretend to censure them: But after all, the esteeming great Men does not include any [489] Desire of aping them, nor do I think, that affecting a Man's Manner of Speaking or Writing does so much Honour to him, as it does discredit to ourselves. On the Whole, we may use the *Antients* without transcribing them, and keep them in View without treading on their Heels. By such a Method, a Writer may attain a just and proper Portion of Fame, which in the servile Track of Imitation he never can.

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1. Text from the *Gentlemen's Magazine*, XI (1741), 487-489.



# ROBERT DODSLEY

From *The Publick Register* (1741)

17 January

[27] EVERY one who has been conversant in the Writings of a *Cervantes*, a *Rabelais*, or a *Swift*, knows that Laughter, or at least a Tendency to it, is the natural Effect of Humour. It is a Maxim in Philosophy, that like Effects always arise from like Causes; we may therefore justly conclude, that there is a near Resemblance between the Objects of Humour, and those which in the former Paper [10 January] I defined to be the true Objects of Laughter.

. . . Humour consists in picturing Objects to the Imagination, under the Appearance of shifting off their own Nature or Character, to assume a direct contrary one; hanging, as it were, dubious between both. . . .

[28] Where the Mind itself is thus employ'd in compleating the Sentiment, the Humour is both delicate and pleasing, but often escapes a common, or indolent Reader, whose Imagination requires a strong Glare to rouze it. . . .

[36] It is frequent both in Conversation and Writing, to blend Wit and Humour together, which has led many to confound them in their Ideas, as if they were Partakers of the same Natures. Whereas Wit consists in finding out new and striking Resemblances or Congruities, and conveying them in such apt Terms, as to make a lively Impression upon the Fancy; and from hence arises the Observation that where Wit abounds, Judgment is often deficient: For a Mind which is pleased, and frequently employed in the Assemblage of Objects, that from a Likeness in some Particular bear an Affinity to each other, too often neglects the Work of Judgment, which is searching out the minutest Difference between Things, and carefully separating them from each other, so as not to be imposed upon by Similitude, and take one for another.

But to return; there is therefore between Wit and Humour this remarkable Difference. Humour combines and makes a Coalition

of Objects, where there is a Contrast and Jarring amongst their several Natures: Wit, on the contrary, assembles [37] only Resemblances, and where it makes an actual Coalition, as in Metaphor and Allegory, it is from some Degree of Congruity in the Nature of the Objects.

. . . the Objects of Humour and Laughter are the same. Whenever therefore they cease to be the one, they likewise cease to be the other. But from an Ambiguity in Appearance we are taken into a Laugh, by a kind of Surprize, which Ambiguity on Reflection soon vanishes; for Judgment steps in, unmasks the Object, and knows it for what it really is. This is the Reason that the same Object of Humour must not dwell long upon the Imagination, but, to preserve the Humour, must be quickly shifted for some other. Thus the solemn and grave Manner of treating trivial Subjects, which is a Species of Humour, requires great Dexterity to render it spirited. . . .

24 January

[51] IT is an Observation, and I believe a just one, That we nowhere so frequently meet with a Set of Mortals, call'd *Humourists*, as in our own Nation. The Security of our Properties is not the only Blessing we possess under a free Government; we likewise enjoy a full Power to exercise our Reason, and, what to many is yet more Flattering, to indulge our Opinions, and even Prejudices. Thus the Mind not being shackled by a slavish Submission to any Authority whatever, most Men think for themselves, and live according to the Bent of their own Humour. To this Freedom of thinking and acting, that Variety of Humourists, which so remarkably distinguishes this Country, is principally owing.

However barely to persue the natural Bent of Temper, is by no Means a sufficient Mark that the Person is a Humourist. For there is a certain Cast of Mind, as well as Turn of Feature, which distinguishes one Man from another, and forms his particular Character; according to which Cast every sensible Man will direct his Actions, still managing the Bias with a prudent Regard to the Ground he is to pass over. But should he, from any Prejudice in Opinions, willfully neglect the Circumstance of Place, or from too great an Indulgence so encrease the Biass, as to carry him out of the common Road, he then commences Humourist; and, however contrary to Reason, obstinately keeps his Way. . . .

As this Class of Characters is denoted by the Name of *Humourists*, from thence perhaps the Talent to draw and expose them in a strik-

ing Light has been call'd *Humour*. But whether this Conjecture be well or ill founded, they are certainly very proper Objects for the Exercise of this Talent. For as a wise Man considers the Circumstances of Time, Place, and Incidents, and accordingly shapes his Course, a Humourist, on the contrary, whatever Obstacle stands in his Way, perversly bears forward, and is a Virtuosi Ship, which sails against Wind and Tide.

[52] This Character, however, is not the only Sort proper for Humour; but to attempt to point out the several Kinds would be to enter upon a Calculation, *in how many different Ways Folly may be combined with the Human Mind* . . . . It is sufficient for my Purpose to observe, that when Humour takes off a Character, it is by marking the Ambiguities or Contrasts in it.

As nothing entertains more than a Character drawn with Humour, so, when mixed with a Strain of Humour of another Sort, it greatly relieves the Imagination, and, by introducing a Variety, prevents the Fatigue that arises from the constant Solicitation of one Sort of Object. . . .

Reason always makes one Part of the Composition in our complex Idea of Man. Whenever, therefore, it ceases to appear in its own native Dress of Truth, and, cloathed with false Opinions and Prejudices, puts on the Masque of Folly, it becomes ambiguous.

. . . .  
This Author, to whom I have so often refer'd [Addison], is remarkable for a natural and delicate Humour, which arises from a Choice of Characters, where the Foibles proved from a Bent of Disposition, not always directed by Reason, nay sometimes from such a Disposition, as makes us love the Character, while we smile at the Foibles. Of this Kind is Sir *Roger de Coverly's*, and surely that Humour is delicate that heals as it cuts?

The direct Opposite to this natural Humour are *Shakespear's* Fools, who are assum'd Characters of Poets, not of Nature's Formation. . . .

[53] An Author frequently diversifies his Humour by taking on a Character. This is done in the *Tale of a Tub*, and the Humour always encreases in proportion to the Number of different Kinds, that enter into the Composition. . . .

. . . when an Object makes a Break from its own Nature or Character, to run to another, a Laugh catches it, and it becomes the Subject of Humour.





# JAMES RALPH

## From *The Champion* (1742)

No. 441<sup>1</sup>

[479] *Wit*, as it appears to me, is a Start of Imagination in the Speaker, that strikes the Hearer with an Idea of Beauty common to both; and the immediate Result of the Comparison is the Flash of Joy that attends it. It stands, perhaps, in the same Regard to Wisdom as Lightning to the Sun; 'tis a Ray suddenly kindled, and as suddenly gone; for even where a Subject is begun, continued, and ended with *Wit*, the whole is but so many interrupted Flashes, that appear and disappear in Succession; while Reasoning and Philosophy shine with an equal and steady Light from Day-break till Evening.

*Wit*, is certainly in a good Degree dependent on the Constitution, and is seldom acquired by Study or Art, any more than Genius or Beauty: Volatile or mercurial Minds abound with it most, and, tho' 'tis always an Excellency in the Abstract, it sometimes arises from the Defect of the Mind, as well as from its Strength and Capacity. This is evident in those who are *Wits* only, without the Power of being grave or wise; the Imagination in them is purblind, it sees but Bits and Scraps of the Object before it, or else it squints and multiplies it into Confusion: Just, solid, and lasting *Wit* is the Result of fine Imagination, finish'd Study, and happy Temper of Body; a Man must have a Fancy quick to conceive, or he can never communicate with that Rapidity which hurries *Wit* into the World; if he has not Knowledge, his Vein will be poor, broken, and trifling; and without Good Humour he can never propagate that lively Complaisancy, that delightful Gaiety of Heart, which ought always to sweeten *Wit*: Such a Man must have many good Qualities, and will need as much Discretion as Sense, Knowledge, or Good-Humour, to direct it, so as to please always, and offend seldom.

There was a Time when *Wit* becomes as impertinent as Salt in Tea; and the Jest we are then vain of, we may, upon Reflection,

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1. Text from the *Gentleman's Magazine*, XII (1742), 479-480.

see Cause to blush for. Whoever [480] gives up the Reign to his *Wit*, will many Times be hurried by it into Misfortunes that his Prudence would have avoided: One Thing well said, and well received, has persuaded the Speaker to aim at many more, and the last has utterly destroy'd the Effect of the first; let me add, that any one Person's engrossing a Conversation, tho' he supports it ever so agreeably, is an Affront to the rest.

Again, he who affects to be always witty, renders himself cheap, and may be said to expose himself; tho' all Men have not a Talent at Satire, there are very few who don't see what is ridiculous in their Acquaintance, and no Creature in the World is more so than he who will be a Wit in all Company, and upon all Occasions.

The great Use and Advantage of *Wit*, is to render the Owner instrumental to the Happiness of others; and this great Privilege is certainly more at his Command than any one's beside. As soon as such a Person appears amongst his Friends, an Air of Pleasure and Satisfaction diffuses itself over every Face; and he becomes a Kind of Demi-God, in bestowing Pleasure around him.

*Wit*, on such Occasions, and so used, is an Instrument of sweetest Musick in the Hands of an Artist, commanding, soothing, and modulating all the Passions into Harmony and Peace.

Neither ought it only to be used for the Amusement of Mankind; 'tis a sharp Sword as well as a musical Instrument, and ought to be drawn against Folly and Affectation, when they become troublesome and offensive; many a Man is more afraid of being made ridiculous than run thro' the Body, and many have been stopp'd in a full Career of Absurdity by one seasonable and humourous Reproof.

Men, who are foolish and vain at the same Time, are the just and natural Objects of Wit and Satire, and 'tis but a friendly severity to expose them: In short, a prudent Man may make his Wit a Shield to defend himself, as well as a Weapon to punish others.

But there is an humble Ignorance, a modest Weakness that ought to be spar'd, because ignorant and weak by Nature, and yet tenderly sensible of Reproach; 'tis cruel to attack such as these; unhappy already in the Consciousness of their own Defects, and 'tis fighting with the Lamé and sick to be severe on them: A Cowardice that the Brave should be asham'd of, and the Humane oppose.

Among intimate Friends decent and sprightly Raillery may be of singular Advantage: The Wit that genteelly glances at a Foible, is then either smartly retorted, or generously forgiven, because the Affection of the Reprover is as well known as the Merit of the Per-

son reproved: In such delicate Conversations, Mirth, temper'd with Good-Manners, is the only Point in View; we grow gay and polite together; and perhaps no Moments of our Lives are so sincerely happy, and certainly none are so innocent.

Should *Wit* be introduced without this delicate Regard to Decorum, like Wine abused, 'tis the Parent of Discord and Confusion: The most piquant Jest, or liveliest Strain of Humour, can't atone for the Loss, or even Displeasure of a Friend.

*Wit* is a Quality that some possess, all covet; what many enjoy, and few manage with Discretion; it pleases and offends, gives Joy and Pain, is prais'd and hated; and, like Gold in its greatest Purity, stands in Need of Alloy: Youth affects it, Folly dreads it, Age despises it, and Dulness abhors it: In some 'tis a rich Odour, in others a deadly Poison; he that has the most of it, is not without Error, nor he that has the least, without something to deserve Praise.



# HENRY FIELDING

## From the Preface to *Joseph Andrews* (1742)<sup>1</sup>

[iii] The EPIC as well as the DRAMA is divided into Tragedy and Comedy. *Homer*, who was the Father of this Species of Poetry, gave us a Pattern of both these, tho' that of the latter kind is entirely lost; which *Aristotle* tells us, bore the same [iv] relation to Comedy which his *Iliad* bears to Tragedy. And perhaps, that we have no more Instances of it among the Writers of Antiquity, is owing to the Loss of this great Pattern, which, had it survived, would have found its Imitators equally with the other Poems of this great Original.

And farther, as this Poetry may be Tragic or Comic, I will not scruple to say it may be likewise either in Verse or Prose: for tho' it wants one particular, which the Critic enumerates in the constituent Parts of an Epic Poem, namely Metre; yet, when any kind of Writing contains all its other Parts, such as Fable, Action, Characters, Sentiments, and Diction, and is deficient in Metre only; it seems, I think, reasonable to refer it to the Epic; at least, as no Critic hath though proper to range it under any other Head, nor to assign it a particular Name to itself.

[v] Thus the *Telemachus* of the Arch-Bishop of *Cambray* appears to me of the Epic Kind, as well as the *Odyssey* of *Homer*; indeed, it is much fairer and more reasonable to give it a Name common with that Species from which it differs only in a single Instance, than to confound it with those which it resembles in no other. Such are those voluminous Works commonly called *Romances*, namely, *Clelia*, *Cleopatra*, *Astræa*, *Cassandra*, the *Grand Cyrus*, and innumerable others which contain, as I apprehend, very little Instruction or Entertainment.

Now a comic Romance is a comic Epic-Poem in Prose; differing from Comedy, as the serious Epic from Tragedy: its Action being more extended and comprehensive; containing a much larger Circle of Incidents, and introducing a greater Variety of Characters. It

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1. In the original what is here printed in Roman type is in Italic and vice versa.

differs from the serious Romance in its Fable and Action, in this; that as in the one these are grave and solemn, so in the other they are light and ri[vi]diculous: it differs in its Characters, by introducing Persons of inferiour Rank, and consequently of inferiour Manners, whereas the grave Romance, sets the highest before us; lastly in its Sentiments and Diction; by preserving the Ludicrous instead of the Sublime. In the Diction I think, Burlesque itself may be sometimes admitted; of which many Instances will occur in this Work, as in the Descriptions of the Battles, and some other Places, not necessary to be pointed out to the Classical Reader; for whose Entertainment those Parodies or Burlesque Imitations are chiefly calculated.

But tho' we have sometimes admitted this in our Diction, we have carefully excluded it from our Sentiments and Characters: for there it is never properly introduced, unless in Writings of the Burlesque kind, which this is not intended to be. Indeed, no two Species of Writing can differ more widely than the Comic and the Burlesque: for [vii] as the latter is ever the Exhibition of what is monstrous and unnatural, and where our Delight, if we examine it, arises from the surprizing Absurdity, as in appropriating the Manners of the highest to the lowest, or *è converso*; so in the former, we should ever confine ourselves strictly to Nature from the just imitation of which, will flow all the Pleasure we can this way convey to a sensible Reader. And perhaps, there is one Reason, why a Comic Writer should of all others be the least excused for deviating from Nature, since it may not be always so easy for a serious Poet to meet with the Great and the Admirable; but Life every where furnishes an accurate Observer with the Ridiculous.

I have hinted this little, concerning Burlesque; because, I have often heard that Name given to Performances, which have been truly of the Comic kind, from the Author's having sometimes admitted it in his [viii] Diction only; which as it is the Dress of Poetry, doth like the Dress of Men establish Characters, (the one of the whole Poem, and the other of the whole Man,) in vulgar Opinion, beyond any of their greater Excellencies: But surely, a certain Drollery in Style, where the Characters and Sentiments are perfectly natural, no more constitutes the Burlesque, than an empty Pomp and Dignity of Words, where every thing else is mean and low, can entitle any Performance to the Appellation of the true Sublime.

And I apprehend, my Lord *Shaftesbury's* Opinion of mere Burlesque agrees with mine, when he asserts, "There is no such Thing to be found in the Writings of the Antients." But perhaps, I have

less Abhorrence than he professes for it: and that not because I have had some little Success on the Stage this way; but rather, as it contributes more to exquisite Mirth and Laughter than any other; and these are probably more wholesome [ix] Physic for the Mind, and conduce better to purge away Spleen, Melancholy and ill Affections, than is generally imagined. Nay, I will appeal to common Observation, whether the same Companies are not found more full of Good-Humour and Benevolence, after they have been sweeten'd for two or three Hours with Entertainments of this kind, than when soured by a Tragedy or a grave Lecture.

[xi] . . . The Ridiculous only, as I have before said, falls within my Province in the present Work.—Nor will some Explanation of this Word be thought impertinent by the Reader, if he considers how wonderfully it hath been mistaken, even by Writers who have profess'd it: for to what but such a Mistake, can we attribute the many Attempts to ridicule the blackest Villanies; and what is yet worse, the most dreadful Calamities? What could exceed the Absurdity of an Author, who should write *the Comedy of Nero, with the merry Incident of ripping up his Mother's Belly*; or what would give a greater Shock to Huma[xii]nity, than an Attempt to expose the Miseries of Poverty and Distress to Ridicule? And yet, the Reader will not want much Learning to suggest such Instances to himself.

Besides, it may seem remarkable, that *Aristotle*, who is so fond and free of Definitions, hath not thought proper to define the Ridiculous. Indeed, where he tells us it is proper to Comedy, he hath remarked that Villany is not its Object: but he hath not, as I remember, positively asserted what is. Nor doth the *Abbé Bellegarde*, who hath writ a Treatise on this Subject, tho' he shews us many Species of it, once trace it to its Fountain.

The only Source of the true Ridiculous (as it appears to me) is Affectation. But tho' it arises from one Spring only, when we consider the infinite Streams into which this one branches, we shall presently cease to admire at the copious Field it affords to an Observer. Now Affectation proceeds from one of these two [xiii] Causes, Vanity, or Hypocrisy: for as Vanity puts us on affecting false Characters, in order to purchase Applause; so Hypocrisy sets us on an Endeavour to avoid Censure by concealing our Vices under an Appearance of their opposite Virtues. And tho' these two Causes are often confounded, (for they require some Difficulty in distinguishing;) yet, as they proceed from very different Motives, so they are as clearly distinct in their Operations: for indeed, the Affectation which arises from Vanity is nearer to Truth than the other; as it

hath not that violent Repugnancy of Nature to struggle with, which that of the Hypocrite hath. It may be likewise noted, that Affectation doth not imply an absolute Negation of those Qualities which are affected: and therefore, tho', when it proceeds from Hypocrisy, it be nearly allied to Deceit; yet when it comes from Vanity only, it partakes of the Nature of Ostentation: for instance, the Affectation of Liberality in a vain Man, differs visibly from the [xiv] same Affectation in the Avaricious; for tho' the vain Man is not what he would appear, or hath not the Virtue he affects, to the degree he would be thought to have it; yet it sits less awkwardly on him than on the avaricious Man, who *is* the very Reverse of what he would *seem* to be.

From the Discovery of this Affectation arises the Ridiculous—which always strikes the Reader with Surprize and Pleasure; and that in a higher and stronger Degree when the Affectation arises from Hypocrisy, than when from Vanity: for to discover any one to be the exact Reverse of what he affects, is more surprizing, and consequently more ridiculous, than to find him a little deficient in the Quality he desires the Reputation of. I might observe that our *Ben Johnson*, who of all Men understood the *Ridiculous* the best, hath chiefly used the hypocritical Affectation.

Now from Affectation only, the Misfortunes and Calamities of Life, [xv] or the Imperfections of Nature, may become the Objects of Ridicule. Surely he hath a very ill-framed Mind, who can look on Ugliness, Infirmary, or Poverty, as ridiculous in themselves: nor do I believe any Man living who meets a dirty Fellow riding through the Streets in a Cart, is struck with an Idea of the Ridiculous from it; but if he should see the same Figure descend from his Coach and Six, or bolt from his Chair with his Hat under his Arm, he would then begin to laugh, and with justice. In the same manner, were we to enter a poor House, and behold a wretched Family shivering with Cold and languishing with Hunger, it would not incline us to Laughter, (at least we must have very diabolical Natures, if it would:) but should we discover there a Grate, instead of Coals, adorned with Flowers, empty Plate or China Dishes on the Side-board, or any other Affectation of Riches and Finery either on their Persons or in their Furniture; we might then [xvi] indeed be excused, for ridiculing so fantastical an Appearance. Much less are natural Imperfections the Objects of Derision: but when Ugliness aims at the Applause of Beauty, or Lameness endeavours to display Agility; it is then that these unfortunate Circumstances, which at first moved our Compassion, tend only to raise our Mirth.



# HENRY FIELDING

## From *A Journey from This World to the Next* (1743)

### CHAP. VIII.

*The Adventures which the Author met on his first Entrance into Elysium.*

[63] OLD *Homer* was present at this Consort, (if I may so call it) and Madam *Dacier* sat [64] in his Lap. He asked much after Mr. *Pope*, and said he was very desirous of seeing him: for that he had read his *Iliad* in his Translation with almost as much delight, as he believed he had given others in the Original. I had the Curiosity to enquire whether he had really writ that Poem in detached Pieces, and sung it about as Ballads all over *Greece*, according to the Report which went of him? He smiled at my Question, and asked me whether there appeared any Connection in the Poem; for if there did, he thought I might answer myself. I then importuned him to acquaint me in which of the Cities, which contended for the Honour of his Birth, he was really born? To which he answered,—Upon my Soul I can't tell.

VIRGIL then came up to me, with Mr. *Addison* under his Arm. Well, Sir, said he, how many Translations have these few last Years produced of my *Æneid*? I told him, I believed several, but I could not possibly remember; for that I had never read any but Dr. *Trapp*'s.— Ay, said he, that is a curious Piece indeed! I then acquainted him with the Discovery made by Mr. *Warburton* of [65] the *Eleusinian* Mysteries couched in his 6th Book. What Mysteries? said Mr. *Addison*. The *Eleusinian*, answered *Virgil*, which I have disclosed in my 6th Book. How! replied *Addison*. You never mentioned a word of any such Mysteries to me in all our Acquaintance. I thought it was unnecessary, cried the other, to a Man of your infinite Learning: besides, you always told me, you perfectly understood my meaning. Upon this I thought the Critic looked a little out of countenance, and turned aside to a very merry Spirit, one *Dick Steele*, who embraced him, and told him, He had been the

greatest Man upon Earth; that he readily resigned up all the Merit of his own Works to him. Upon which, *Addison* gave him a gracious Smile, and clapping him on the Back with much Solemnity, cried out, *Well said, Dick.*

I THEN observed *Shakespeare* standing between *Betterton* and *Booth*, and deciding a Difference between those two great Actors, concerning the placing an Accent in one of his Lines: this was disputed on both sides with a Warmth, which surprized me in *Elysium*, till I discovered by Intuition, that every Soul [66] retained its principal Characteristic, being, indeed, its very Essence. The Line was that celebrated one in *Othello*;

*Put out the Light, and then put out the Light . . . .*

[67] At last it was agreed on all sides, to refer the matter to the Decision of *Shakespeare* himself, who delivered his Sentiments as follows: 'Faith, Gentlemen, it is so long since I wrote the Line, I have forgot my Meaning. This I know, could I have dreamt so much Nonsense would have been talked, and writ about it, I would have blotted it out of my Works: for I am sure, if any of these be my Meaning, it doth me very little Honour.'

HE was then interrogated concerning some other ambiguous Passages in his Works; but he declined any satisfactory Answer: Saying, if Mr. *Theobald* had not *writ about it* sufficiently, there were three or four more new Editions of his Plays coming out, which he hoped would satisfy every one: Concluding, 'I marvel nothing so much as that Men will gird themselves at discovering obscure Beauties in an Author. Certes the greatest and most pregnant Beauties are ever the plainest [68] and most evidently striking; and when two Meanings of a Passage can in the least ballance our Judgements which to prefer, I hold it matter of unquestionable Certainty, that neither of them are worth a farthing.'

# WILLIAM WHITEHEAD

## From *An Essay on Ridicule* (1743)

[4] Th'all-powerful Hand, that taught yon Sun to shine,  
First dress'd in Smiles the human Face divine;  
And early Innocence, unspoil'd by Art,  
Thro' the glad Eye betray'd th'o'erflowing Heart.  
No hoarded Bliss the Soul at Home confin'd,  
Self-center'd Views, the Famine of the Mind.  
No Coxcomb Cares from weak Disgusts began,  
A Brother's Frailties but proclaim'd him Man.  
Nought perfect here they found, nor ought requir'd,  
Excus'd the Weakness, and the Worth admir'd.

Proud, and more proud, succeeding Ages grew;  
They mark'd our Foibles, and would mend them too.  
This, strangely wise, saw what was just and best,  
And by his Model wou'd reform the rest:  
The rest, impatient, or reject with Scorn  
The specious Insult, or with Pride return;  
Fierce as himself, assume the *Appian* Frown,  
'Till not one secret Failing sleeps unknown;  
But all meet all with controversial Eyes,  
If wrong refute them, and if right despise.  
Not with their Lives, but pointed Wits, contend,  
Too weak to vanquish, and too vain to mend.

[5] While thus precarious waves the doubtful Field,  
Where none can conquer, and where none will yield;  
Keen Envy height'ning what weak Pride begun,  
The Sneer grows gen'ral, and Mankind's undone.

Our mirthful Age, to all Extremes a Prey,  
Ev'n courts the Lash, and laughs her Pains away.  
Declining Worth imperial Wit supplies,  
And *Momus* triumphs, while *Astræa* flies.  
His Power despotic, as his Empire wide;  
The Test of all Things, and by all apply'd.

No Truth so sacred, Banter cannot hit,  
 No Fool so stupid, but he aims at Wit.  
 Ev'n those, whose Breasts ne'er plann'd one virtuous Deed,  
 Nor rais'd a Thought beyond the Earth they tread;  
 Ev'n those can censure, those can dare deride  
 A BACON'S AV'rice, or a TULLY'S Pride;  
 And sneer at human Checks by Nature given,  
 To curb Perfection e're it rival Heaven:  
 Nay, chiefly such in these low Arts prevail,  
 Whose own No-Talents leave them Time to rail.  
 Born for no End, they worse than useless grow,  
 (As Waters poison if they cease to flow)  
 And Pests become, whom kinder Fate design'd  
 But harmless Expletives of Human kind. . . .

- [7] And whence this Lust to Laugh? what fond Pretence?  
 Why, *Shaftsb'ry* tells us, Mirth's the Test of Sense;  
 Th'enchant'd Touch, which Fraud and Falshood fear,  
 Like *Una's* Mirror, or *Ithuriel's* Spear.

Not so fair *Truth*—aloft her Temple stands  
 The Work and Glory of Immortal Hands.  
 Huge Rocks of Adamant its Base enfold,  
 Steel bends the Arch, the columns swell in Gold.  
 No Storms, no Tumults reach the sacred Fane,  
 Waves idly beat, and Winds grow loud in vain.  
 The Shaft sinks pointless, e'er it verges there,  
 And the dull Hiss but dies away in Air.

Yet let me say, howe'er secure it rise,  
 Sly Fraud may reach it, and close Craft surprize.  
 Truth, drawn like Truth, must blaze divinely bright;  
 But, drawn like Error, Truth may cheat the Sight.  
 Some aukward Epithet, with Skill apply'd,  
 Some specious Hints, that half their Meanings hide,  
 Can Right and Wrong most courteously confound,  
*Banditti* like, to stun us e'er they wound.  
 Hence, mighty *Mandeville*, thy Fame arose,  
 With Wit to strike, and Cunning to impose;

- [8] Thy veriest Falshoods so absurdly just,  
 That, where we most condemn thee, laugh we must. . . .

- [10] Fond of one Art, most Men the rest forego;  
 And all's ridiculous, but what they know.  
 Freely they censure Lands they ne'er explore,  
 With Tales they learnt from Coasters on the Shore. . . .

- [11] We oft, 'tis true, mistake the Sat'rist's Aim,  
 Not Arts themselves, but their Abuse they blame. . . .  
 Readers are few, who nice Distinctions form,  
 Supinely Cool, or credulously Warm. . . .
- [12] Where then may Censure fall? 'Tis hard to say;  
 On all that's wrong it may not, and it may. . . .
- [13] Resign we freely to th' unthinking Crowd  
 Their standing Jest, that swells the Laugh so loud . . . . ;  
 We pity Faults by Nature's Hand imprest,  
*Thersites'* Mind, but not his Form's the Jest.  
 Here then we fix, and lash without Controul  
 These mental Pests, and *Hydra's* of the Soul;  
 Acquir'd Ill-nature, ever prompt Debate,  
 A Zeal for Slander, and delib'rate Hate:  
 These court Contempt, proclaim the public Foe,  
 And each, *Ulysses* like, should aim the Blow.  
 Yet sure, ev'n here, our Motives shou'd be known;  
 Rail we to check his Spleen, or ease our own?  
 Does injur'd Virtue ev'ry Shaft supply,  
 Arm the keen Tongue, and flush th'erected Eye?  
 Or do we from Ourselves Ourselves disguise;  
 And act, perhaps, the Villain we despise?  
 Hope we to mend him? Hopes, alas, how vain!  
 He feels the Lash, not listens to the Rein.
- [14] . . . Vices when ridicul'd, Experience says,  
 First lose that Horror which they ought to raise,  
 Grow by degrees approv'd, and almost aim at Praise. . . . }
- 'Tis true, the Comic Muse, confin'd to Rules,  
 Supply'd the Laws, and sham'd the tardy Schools;  
 With living Precepts urg'd the Moral Truth,  
 And by Example form'd the yielding Youth.  
 The titled Knave with honest Freedom shown,  
 His Person mimick'd, nor his Name unknown,  
 Taught to young Breast its opening Thoughts to raise  
 From Dread of Infamy to Love of Praise,  
 From thence to Virtue; there Perfection ends,  
 As gradual from the Root the Flower ascends;  
 Strain'd thro' the varying Stems the Juices flow,  
 Bloom o'er the top, and leave their Dregs below.
- [15] 'Twas thus a while th'instructive Stage survey'd  
 From Breast to Breast its glowing Influence spread.  
 Till, from his nobler Task by Passions won,  
 The Man unravel'd what the Bard had done;

And he, whose Warmth had fir'd a Nation's Heart,  
 Debas'd to private Piques the gen'rous Art.  
 Here sunk the Muse, and, useless by degrees,  
 She ceas'd to profit, as she ceas'd to please.  
 No longer Wit a judging Audience charm'd,  
 Who rous'd not fir'd, not raptur'd, but alarm'd;  
 To well-tun'd Scandal lent a jealous Ear,  
 And thro' the faint Applause betray'd the Fear.

We, like *Menander*, more discreetly dare,  
 And well-bred Satire wears a milder Air.  
 Still Vice we brand, or titled Fools disgrace,  
 But dress in Fable's Guise the borrow'd Face.  
 Or as the Bee, thro' Nature's wild Retreats,  
 Drinks the moist Fragrance from th'unconscious Sweets,  
 To injure none, we lightly range the Ball,  
 And glean from different Knaves the copious Gall;  
 Extract, compound, with all a Chymist's Skill,  
 And claim the motley Characters who will.

Happy the Muse, cou'd thus her tuneful Aid  
 To Sense, to Virtue, wake the more than Dead!  
 [16] But few to Fiction lend attentive Ears,  
 They view the Face, but soon forget 'tis theirs.  
 " 'Twas not from them the Bard their Likeness stole,  
 "The random Pencil haply hit the Mole;  
 "Ev'n from their prying Foes such Specks retreat;"  
 —They'll hide them from themselves, and crown the Cheat.

Or should, perhaps, some softer Clay admit,  
 The sly Impressions of instructive Wit;  
 To Virtue's Side in conscious Silence steal,  
 And glow with Goodness, e'er we find they feel;  
 Yet more, 'tis fear'd, will closer Methods take,  
 And keep with Caution what they can't forsake;  
 For Fear of Man, in his most mirthful Mood,  
 May make us Hypocrites, but seldom good. . . .

Besides, in Men have varying Passions made  
 Such nice Confusions, blending Light with Shade,  
 That eager Zeal to laugh the Vice away  
 May hurt the Virtue's intermingling Ray.  
 [17] Men's Faults, like *Martin's* broider'd Coat, demand  
 The nicest Touches of the steadiest Hand.  
 Some yeild with ease, while some their Posts maintain,  
 And Parts defective will at last remain.  
 There, where they best succeed, your Labours bend,

Nor render useless, what you strive to mend. . . .

But Affectation——there, we all confess,  
Strong are the Motives, and the Danger less.  
No Nature's there, to melt our Manhood down,  
No *Gorgon* Vice, to stare us into Stone.  
Sure we may smile where Fools themselves have made,  
As balk'd Spectators of a Farce ill play'd.  
And laugh, if Satire's Breath shou'd rudely raise  
The painted Plumes which Vanity displays.

O fruitful Source of everlasting Mirth!  
For Fools, like Apes, are Mimics from their Birth.  
By Fashion govern'd, Nature each neglects,  
And barter's Graces for admir'd Defects. . . .

[18] Yet oft these Follies bask in Virtue's Shine,  
The wild Luxuriance of a Soil too fine.  
But oh, repress them, wheresoe'er they rise——  
And how perform it?——There the Danger lies.  
Short are the Lessons taught in Nature's School,  
Here, each Peculiar asks a sep'rate Rule.  
Nice is the Talk, be gen'ral if you can,  
Or strike with Caution if you point the Man:  
And think, O think, the Cause by all assign'd  
To raise our Laughter, makes it most unkind.

[19] For tho' from Nature *these* no Strength receive,  
We give them Nature when we bid them live.  
Like *Jove's Minerva* springs the gentle Train,  
The genuine Offspring of each teeming Brain;  
On which, like tend'rest Sires, we fondly doat,  
Plan future Fame in Luxury of Thought,  
And scarce at last, o'erpower'd by Foes or Friends,  
Torn from our Breasts the dear Delusion ends.

Then let Goodnature every Grace exert,  
And, while it mends it, win th'unfolding Heart.  
As in some Stream the Bank's projected Force  
Not stops the Current, but directs its Course,  
So let Goodnature o'er our Mirth preside,  
Divert, not check; without impelling, guide.  
Allur'd by this, the gath'ring Frown unbends,  
The Laugh grows gen'ral, and ev'n Wits are Friends.  
Touch'd with this trickling Balm, fair Virtue wakes,  
And gen'rous Satire heals the Wound it makes.  
Secur'd by this, ye *British* Bards, be bold,  
Let copious Humour every Source unfold,

Inventive Wit its whole Artillery play,  
Grave as *Cervantes*, or as *Lucian* gay.  
In *Clio's* number'd Prose teach Mirth to chide,  
*Clio Britannia's* Censor, and her Pride:  
[20] Let, like *Scarron's*, the strong Description glow,  
To sink at once more eminently low:  
With *Butler's* Drollery, *Garth's* Politeness vie,  
And *Rablais' Jest*, without his Ribaldry:  
Wear *Phillips' pompous*, *Gay's* ingenuous Stile,  
*Arbuthnot's* various, *Swift's* unweary'd Smile;  
Or His, who bids all *Greece* at once revive,  
Shares every Art that every Muse can give,  
And, nobly conscious whence that Influence came,  
To silence Envy, dares avow the Flame.

Thus shall my Friend by stealing Steps discern  
That soft Humanity, he loves, return:  
See moral Mirth a Face of Triumph wear,  
Yet smile unconscious of th'extorted Tear.  
See Vice, attended by his captive Train,  
Confess its Justice, while he bites his Chain;  
Deep in her Folds her Sting pale Envy hide,  
And Worth, self-valuing, own an humbler Guide;  
Pride, without Rancour, feel th'objected Fault,  
And Folly blush, as willing to be taught;  
Critics grow mild, Life's witty Warfare cease,  
And true Goodnature breathe the Balm of Peace.



# HENRY FIELDING

## From the Preface to *David Simple*, by Sarah Fielding (1744)<sup>1</sup>

[ix] I have attempted in my Preface to *Joseph Andrews* to prove, that every Work of this kind is in its Nature a comic Epic Poem, of which *Homer* left us a Precedent, tho' it be unhappily lost.

The two great Originals of a serious Air, which we have derived from that mighty Genius, differ principally in the Action, which in the *Iliad* is entire and uniform; in the *Odyssey*, is rather a Series of Actions, all tending to produce one great End. *Virgil* and *Milton* are, I think, the only pure Imitators of the former; most of the other *Latin*, as well as *Italian*, *French*, and *English* Epic Poets, chusing [x] rather the History of some War, as *Lucan* and *Silius Italicus*; or a Series of Adventures, as *Ariosto*, &c. for the Subject of their Poems.

In the same manner the Comic Writer may either fix on one Action, as the Authors of *Le Lutrín*, the *Dunciad*, &c. or on a Series, as *Butler* in Verse, and *Cervantes* in Prose have done.

Of this latter kind is the Book now before us, where the Fable consists of a Series of separate Adventures detached from, and independent on each other. . . .

This Fable hath in it these three difficult Ingredients, which will be found on Consideration to be always necessary to Works of this kind, *viz.* that the main End or Scope be at once amiable, ridiculous and natural.

If it be said, that some of the Comic Performances I have above mentioned differ in the first of these, and set before us the odious instead of the amiable; I answer, [xi] that is far from being one of their Perfections; and of this the Authors themselves seem so sensible, that they endeavour to deceive their Reader by false Glosses and Colours, and by the help of Irony at least to represent the Aim and Design of their Heroes in a favourable and agreeable Light.

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1. In the original what is here printed in Roman type is in Italic, and vice versa.



# CORBYN MORRIS

## From *An Essay toward Fixing the True Standards of Wit, Humour, Raillery, Satire, and Ridicule* (1744)

[1] WIT is the LUSTRE resulting from the quick ELUCIDATION of one Subject, by a just and unexpected ARRANGEMENT of it with another Subject.

This *Definitidn* of WIT will more clearly appear by a short Explanation.

It is the Province of WIT to *elucidate*, or *enlighten* a Subject, not by reasoning upon that Subject, but by a just and unexpected Introduction of another *similar*, or *opposite* Subject; whereby, upon their *Arrangement* together, the *original* Subject may be *set off*, and more clearly *enlighten'd*, by their obvious Comparison.

It may be proper, for the sake of Distinction, to call the Subject, which is the Basis [2] and Ground-work, the *original* Subject; and that which is introduced, in order to *elucidate* it, the *auxiliary* Subject.

That there be always an apparent Chain or Connexion, or else an obvious Agreement or Contrast, between the two Subjects, is absolutely requir'd, in order that the *Auxiliary* one may be *justly* introduced; otherwise, instead of WIT, there will only appear a rambling *Vivacity*, in wild, unprovoked Sallies.

And yet *every just* or *natural* Introduction of an *auxiliary* Subject will not produce WIT, unless a new *Lustre* is reflected from thence upon the *original* Subject.

It is further to be observed, that the Introduction of the *auxiliary* Subject ought not only to be *just*, but also *unexpected*, which are entirely consistent together; For as every Subject bears various Relations and Oppositions to other Subjects, it is evident that each of these Relations and Oppositions upon being exhibited, will be *unexpected* to the Persons, who did not perceive them before; and yet they are *just* by Supposition.

It is upon such *unexpected* Introductions of *auxiliary* Subjects, that we are struck with a *Surprize*; from whence the high *Brilliancy*, and *Sparkling* of WIT, result. . . .

[3] It is also necessary to observe, that, in WIT, the Subjects concern'd must be *ordinary* and *level*; By which are intended, not such as are *common*, but such as have no *extraordinarily exalted*, or *enlarged*, Qualities; and are not *unsizeable* in the particular Circumstances in which they are compared to each other;—otherwise it is easy to perceive, that the Result of their *Arrangement* will not be so properly WIT, as either the SUBLIME, or BURLESQUE.

To all this is to be added, that either *Gallantry*, *Raillery*, *Humour*, *Satire*, *Ridicule*, *Sarcasms*, or other Subjects, are generally blended with WIT; It has been for want of this Discovery, and of a proper Separation of these Subjects, that the Attempts which have hitherto been made to *define* WIT, have been all involv'd and overwhelm'd in Perplexity; For the different Mixtures of these foreign Ingredients with WIT, have discover'd such various and opposite *Colours* and *Substances*, as were impossible to be comprehended in one certain steady *Definition*. . . .

[12] JUDGMENT, is the Faculty of discerning the various Dimensions, and Differences, of Subjects.

INVENTION is the Faculty of finding out new Assortments, and Combinations, of Ideas.

HUMOUR is any whimsical Oddity or Foible, appearing in the Temper or Conduct of a Person in real Life.

This *whimsical Oddity* of Conduct, which generally arises from the strange *Cast*, or *Turn* of Mind of a *queer* Person, may also result from *accidental* Mistakes and Embarrassments between other Persons; who being misled by a wrong Information and Suspicion in regard to a Circumstance, shall act towards each other upon this Occasion, in the same *odd whimsical* manner, as *queer* Persons.

If a *Person* in real Life, discovers any odd and remarkable *Features* of Temper or Conduct, I call such a Person in the *Book* of *Mankind*, a *Character*. So that the chief Subjects of HUMOUR are Persons in real Life, who are *Characters*.

[13] It is easy to be perceived, that HUMOUR, and WIT are extremely different.

HUMOUR appears only in the *Foibles* and *whimsical Conduct* of *Persons* in real Life; WIT appears in *Comparisons*, either between *Persons* in real Life, or between *other Subjects*. . . .

To constitute HUMOUR, there need be no more than *one* Object concern'd, and this must be always some *Person* in real Life;—

whereas to produce WIT, there must be always *two* Objects *arranged* together, and either or both of these may be *inanimate*.

However, though HUMOUR and WIT are thus absolutely different in themselves, yet we frequently see them blended together.

Thus if any *Foible* of a *Character* in real Life is *directly* attacked, by pointing out the unexpected and ridiculous *Affinity* it bears to some *inanimate* Circumstances, this *Foible* is then ridiculed with WIT, from the *Comparison* which is made.—At the same time, as the *whimsical Oddity* of a *Character* in real Life is the *Ground* of the whole, there is also *Humour* contain'd in the Attack.

If instead of referring the *Foible* of a Person to any *inanimate* Circumstance, the *Allusion* had been made to any other ridiculous *Person* in *real Life*; As a *conceited Fellow*, perpetually recommending his own Whims, to a *Quack-Doctor*;—This *Foible* will then be ridiculed with HUMOUR; which is likewise the original *Ground*: At the same Time, from the *Comparison* which is made, there is apparently WIT in the Description. . . .

HUMOUR and WIT, as they may thus both be united in the same Subject, may also separately appear without the least Mixture together; that is, there may be HUMOUR without WIT, and WIT without HUMOUR. . . .

[15] A *Man* of WIT is *he, who is happy in elucidating any Subject*, by a just and unexpected Arrangement *and Comparison of it with another Subject*.

It may be also proper to describe a *Man* of HUMOUR, and an HUMOURIST, which are very different Persons.

A *Man* of HUMOUR is *one, who can happily exhibit a weak and ridiculous Character in real Life, either by assuming it himself, or representing another in it, so naturally, that the whimsical Oddities, and Foibles, of that Character, shall be palpably expos'd*.

Whereas an HUMOURIST is *a Person in real Life, obstinately attached to sensible peculiar Oddities of his own genuine Growth, which appear in his Temper and Conduct*.

In short, a *Man* of *Humour* is one, who can happily exhibit and expose the Oddities and Foibles of an *Humourist*, or of other *Characters*. . . .

[23] That HUMOUR gives more Delight, and leaves a more pleasurable Impression behind it, than WIT, is universally felt and established; Though the Reasons for this have not yet been assign'd.—I shall therefore beg Leave to submit the following.

1. HUMOUR is more *interesting* than WIT in general, as the *Oddities* and *Foibles* of *Persons* in *real Life* are more apt to affect

our Passions, than any Oppositions or Relations between *inanimate* Objects.

2. HUMOUR is *Nature*, or what really appears in the Subject, without any Embellishments; WIT only a Stroke of *Art*, where the original Subject, being insufficient of itself, is garnished and deck'd with auxiliary Objects.

[24] 3. HUMOUR, or the Foible of a *Character* in real Life, is usually insisted upon for some Length of Time. From whence, and from the common Knowledge of the Character, it is universally felt and understood.—Whereas the Strokes of WIT arê like sudden *Flashes*, vanishing in an Instant, and usually flying too fast to be sufficiently marked and pursued by the Audience.

4. HUMOUR, if the Representation of it be just, is compleat and perfect in its Kind, and entirely fair and unstrain'd.—Whereas in the Allusions of WIT, the Affinity is generally imperfect and defective in one Part or another; and even in those Points where the Affinity may be allow'd to subsist, some Nicety and Strain is usually requir'd to make it appear.

5. HUMOUR generally appears in such Foibles, as each of the Company thinks himself superior to.—Whereas WIT shews the Quickness and Abilities of the Person who discovers it, and places him superior to the rest of the Company.

6. HUMOUR, in the Representation of the *Foibles* of *Persons* in *real Life*, frequently exhibits very *generous benevolent* Sentiments of Heart; And these, tho' exerted in a particular odd Manner, justly command our Fondness and Love.—Whereas in the Allusions of WIT, *Severity*, *Bitterness*, and *Satire*, are frequently exhibited.—And where these are avoid[25]ed, not worthy amiable Sentiments of the *Heart*, but quick unexpected Efforts of the *Fancy*, are presented.

7. The odd Adventures, and Embarrassments, which *Persons* in *real Life* are drawn into by their *Foibles*, are fit Subjects of *Mirth*.—Whereas in pure WIT, the Allusions are rather *surprizing*, than *mirthful*; and the *Agreements* or *Contrasts* which are started between Objects, without any relation to the *Foibles* of *Persons* in real Life, are more fit to be *admired* for their *Happiness* and *Propriety*, than to excite our *Laughter*.—Besides, WIT, in the frequent Repetition of it, tires the Imagination with its precipitate Sallies and Flights; and teizes the Judgment.—Whereas HUMOUR, in the Representation of it, puts no Fatigue upon the *Imagination*, and gives exquisite Pleasure to the *Judgment*.

These seem to me to be the different Powers and Effects of HUMOUR and WIT. However, the most agreeable Representations

or Compositions of all others, appear not where they *separately* exist, but where they are *united* together in the same Fabric; where HUMOUR is the *Ground-work* and chief Substance, and WIT happily spread, *quicken*s the whole with Embellishments. . . .

[32] It may be proper to observe in this Place, that the *Business* of COMEDY is to exhibit the whimsical *unmischievous Oddities, Frolics, and Foibles* of Persons in *real Life*; And also to *expose* and *ridicule* their *real Follies, Meanness, and Vices*. The *former*, it appears, is more pleasurable to the Audience, but the *latter* has the Merit of being more instructive.

The *Business* of TRAGEDY is to exhibit the *Instability* of human Grandeur, and the unexpected *Misfortunes* and *Distresses* incident to the *Innocent* and *Worthy* in all Stations.—And also to shew the terrible *Sallies* and the *misera*[33]ble Issue and Punishment of un-govern'd Passions and Wickedness.—The *former* softens the Heart and fills it with Compassion, Humility and Benevolence.—Compositions of this Sort are the highest, most admirable, and useful in all Nature, when they are finish'd with Propriety and Delicacy, and justly wrought up with the Sublime and Simplicity.—The *latter* Species of *Tragedy* terrifies and shocks us, in exhibiting both the Crimes and the Punishments. It threatens us into Moderation and Justice, by shewing the terrible Issue of their Contraries. Pieces of this Sort, conducted with Propriety, and carrying Application to ourselves, can scarcely be desirable; But as they are generally conducted, they amount only to giving us an absurd Representation of a Murder committed by some furious foaming *Basha, or Sultan*.

To return.—*Johnson* in his COMIC Scenes has expos'd and ridicul'd *Folly* and *Vice*; *Shakespear* has usher'd in *Joy, Frolic* and *Happiness*.—The *Alchymist, Volpone* and *Silent Woman* of *Johnson*, are most exquisite *Satires*. The *comic* Entertainments of *Shakespear* are the highest Compositions of *Raillery, Wit* and *Humour*. *Johnson* conveys some Lesson in every Character. *Shakespear* some new Species of Foible and Oddity. The one pointed his Satire with masterly Skill; the other was inimitable in touching the Strings of Delight. With *Johnson* you are confin'd and instructed, with *Shakespear* un-bent and [34] dissolv'd in Joy. *Johnson* excellently concerts his Plots, and all his Characters unite in the one Design. *Shakespear* is superior to such Aid or Restraint; His Characters continually sallying from one independent Scene to another, and charming you in each with fresh Wit and Humour.

It may be further remark'd, that *Johnson* by pursuing the most useful Intention of *Comedy*, is in Justice oblig'd to *hunt down* and

*demolish* his own Characters. Upon this Plan he must necessarily expose them to your *Hatred*, and of course can never bring out an amiable Person. . . . But *Shakespear*, with happier Insight, always supports his Characters in your *Favour*. . . .

[36] It appears, that in Imagination, Invention, Jollity and gay Humour, *Johnson* had little Power; But *Shakespear* unlimited Dominion. The first was cautious and strict, not daring to sally beyond the Bounds of Regularity. The other bold and impetuous, rejoicing like a Giant to run his Course, through all the Mountains and Wilds of Nature and Fancy.

It requires an almost painful Attention to mark the Propriety and Accuracy of *Johnson*, and your Satisfaction arises from Reflection and Comparison; But the Fire and Invention of *Shakespear* in an Instant are shot into your Soul, and enlighten and clear the most indolent Mind with their own Spirit and Lustre.—Upon the whole, *Johnson's* Compositions are like finished Cabinets, where every Part is wrought up with the most excellent Skill and Exactness;—*Shakespear's* like magnificent Castles, not perfectly finished or regular, but adorn'd with such bold and magnificent Designs, as at once delight and astonish you with their Beauty and Grandeur.

RAILLERY is a genteel poignant Attack of a Person upon any slight Foibles, Oddities, or Embarrassments of his, in which he is tender, or may be supposed to be tender, and unwilling to come to a free Expl[a]nation.

[37] SATIRE is a witty and severe Attack of mischievous Habits or Vices;

RIDICULE is a free Attack of any Motly Composition, wherein a real or affected Excellence and Defect both jointly appear, glaring together, and mocking each other, in the same Subject.

Hence the Aim of *Raillery*, is to please you, by some little *Embarassment* of a Person; Of *Satire*, to scourge *Vice*, and to deliver it up to your just *Detestation*; And of *Ridicule*, to set an Object in a mean ludicrous Light, so as to expose it to your *Derision* and *Contempt*.

It appears therefore that *Raillery* and *Ridicule* differ in several Circumstances.

1. *Raillery* can only be employ'd in relation to *Persons*, but *Ridicule* may be employ'd in what relates either to *Persons*, or other *Objects*.

2. *Raillery* is us'd only upon *slight* Subjects, where no real Abilities or Merit are questioned, in order to avoid degrading the Person you attack, or rendering him contemptible; Whereas *Ridicule*



observes no such Decency, but endeavours really to degrade the Person attack'd, and to render him contemptible.

3. *Raillery* may be pointed at a whimsical Circumstance, only because a Person is known to be tender upon it; and your Pleasure will arise from the *Embarrassment* he suffers, in being put to an Explanation;—Thus a [38] young Gentleman may be *rallied* upon his Passion for a Lady;—At the same Time there may be no Ground for *Ridicule* in this Circumstance, as it may no way deserve your *Derision* or *Contempt*.

4. As it thus appears that there are Subjects of *Raillery*, into which *Ridicule* cannot justly be admitted; So there are Subjects of *Ridicule*, wherein your Derision and Contempt are so strongly excited, that they are too gross for *Raillery*;—As a person tossed in a Blanket; or the unfortunate Attack which another has made upon a Windmill.

5. In short, *Raillery*, if the Adventures it is turn'd upon are too gross and *luscious*, becomes *Ridicule*; And therefore, in Comparison together, *Raillery* appears like *Wine* of a thin Body, and delicate poignant Flavour; *Ridicule*, like a *Wine* which is fuller, and more rich, and luscious. . . .

[50] *Raillery*, and *Satire*, are extremely different;

1. *Raillery*, is a genteel poignant Attack of *slight* Foibles and Oddities; *Satire* a witty and severe Attack of *mischievous* Habits and Vices.

2. The *Intention* of *Raillery*, is to procure your *Pleasure*, by exposing the little *Embarrassment* of a Person; But the *Intention* of *Satire*, is to raise your *Detestation*, by exposing the real Deformity of his Vices.

3. If in *Raillery* the Sting be given too deep and severe, it will sink into Malice and Rudeness, And your Pleasure will not be justifiable; But *Satire*, the more deep and severe the Sting of it is, will be the more excellent; Its *Intention* being entirely to root out and destroy the Vice.

4. It is a just Maxim upon these Subjects, that in *Raillery* a good-natur'd Esteem ought always to appear, without any Resentment or Bitterness; In *Satire* a generous free Indignation, without any sneaking Fear or Ten[51]derness; It being a sort of partaking in the Guilt to keep any Terms with Vices.

It is from hence that *Juvenal*, as a *Satirist*, is greatly superior to *Horace*; But indeed many of the short Compositions of *Horace*, which are indiscriminately ranged together, under the general Name of *Satires*, are not properly such, but Pieces of *Raillery* or *Ridicule*. . . .

[53] *The POLITENESS of a Subject is the Freedom of that Subject from all Indelicacy, Aukardness, and Roughness.*

*GOOD BREEDING consists in a respectful Carriage to others, accompany'd with Ease and Politeness.*

It appears from hence that *GOOD BREEDING* and *POLITENESS* differ in this; that *GOOD BREEDING* relates only to the Manners of [54] *Persons* in their Commerce together; Whereas *Politeness* may relate also to *Books*, as well as to *Persons*, or to any Subjects of Taste and Ornament.

So that *Politeness* may subsist in a Subject, as in a *Cornish*, or *Architrave*, where *good Breeding* can't enter; But it is impossible for *good Breeding* to be offer'd without *Politeness*.

At the same time *good Breeding* is not to be understood, as merely the *Politeness* of *Persons*; But as *Respect*, tender'd with *Politeness*, in the Commerce between *Persons*.

It is easy to perceive, that *good Breeding* is a different Behaviour in different Countries, and in the same Countries at different Periods, according to the Manners which are us'd amongst *polite* Persons of those Places and Seasons. . . .

[56] *BEAUTY is the delightful Effect which arises from the joint Order, Proportion, and Harmony of all the Parts of an Object.*

*And to have a good TASTE, is to have a just Relish of BEAUTY.*

# SAMUEL SAY

## From *Poems on Several Occasions* (1745)

*On the Harmony, Variety, and Power of NUMBERS in General, whether in Prose or Verse.* . . .

### §. I.

[97] NŪmbers in Gēneral, to the Purpose I mean of the Present Enquiry, is but another Word for ORDER and PROPORTION; the Source of HARMONY and GRACE, whether in SOUNDS or MOVEMENTS, or whatever Work of Geniūs ör of ärt.

But, in the Language of Poëts and Rhetoricians, it is Such a Number of Sounds, in Such an Order and Proportion to one another, as is either proper to PLEASE the EAR, or IMPRESS the MIND in a peculiar Manner.

For the Beauty of NUMBERS consists in the GRACE or the PROPRIETY of 'em.

The PROPRIETY of 'em consists in *Sounds* adapted to the *Sense*: And the Result or Effect of such Sounds is the POWER of NUMBERS; of which the Ancients relate such Wonders: A Beauty which Every Great Genius does, *in his Diction*, principally aim at, and naturally succeeds in: But which is the peculiar Felicity of those only who CONCEIVE CLEARLY, and EXPRESS STRONGLY whatever they CONCEIVE. Now the Force of Expression consists partly in the Words themselves, and partly in the Numbers and Disposition. And they who have the *Happy Curiosity* [of HORACE] to choose Proper Words, and to give Every Word its Proper Situation and Emphasis of Sound, will be able to transfuse all the Idéas of their Own Minds into the [98] Minds of their Readers, and transport 'em, whither soever they will, into the Same Regions and Passions with themselves. . . .

The GRACE or HARMONY of NUMBERS, in the usual Sense of this Word in *English*, is the agreeable Distinction which the Ear perceives between a certain Number or Quantity of Sounds; and a kind

of Beating of Time with the Voice; sometimes at Equal, sometimes at Various, but always at Measur'd and Regular Distances.

And to This the Ear itself, and the Custom of Reading Good Authors, will unawares and insensibly lead us in some measure: But 'tis too often the mere Effect of Art and Labor: A painful Industry, or Drudgery rather, with which little Writers are wont immoderately to amuse themselves; especially in the Decline of Eloquence, and when Men begin to have lost the Taste of Fine Writing, or a Just Propriety of Words and Thought.

[99] But whenever it appears to be Natural and Unaffected, it must be acknowledged to have its Beauty, and which therefore no good Writer will utterly neglect.

And wherever the genuine Order and due Proportion of Sounds are truly, and even nicely observ'd, and yet in a manner Secret, and Imperceptible to the Reader; there the Style will be Smooth, Inoffensive, and Flowing; Easy to the Voice, and agreeable to the Ear. . . .

But the Motions of Passion are naturally stronger, and the Frecks or unaccountable Changes of Humour are less Subject to Rule and Order: And there are Images that Fill or that Fire the Mind with their Beauty, or their Grandeur. And what we feel within, we express with the Voice. 'Tis reasonable therefore to assume a different Style, and Numbers far Different, when the Like Idéas, or the Like Passions are intended to be rais'd in Those that hear us.

[100] And this belongs to the POWER of *Numbers*. . . .

## §. II.

[101] The Ear cannot long be pleas'd with One and the Same Sound continued, nor Different Impressions be made upon the Soul, by the same Motions and Percussions of the Air: Therefore Nature, or the Reason of things, has instructed the Voice in Every Language not to move by Single and Uniform Sounds, or strike forever the Same Notes, unvaried either in Tone or in Time.

Let us pronounce, for Instance, the Ten following Syllables with one perpetual Tenor of the Voice, unchang'd alike in Time or in Accent:

Bē | whāt | Yoū | will | sō | Yoū | bē | still | thē | sāme,

[102] and they will appear like Surd and Unmeaning Sounds; Painful to the Voice, and Ungrateful to the Ear. Such, 'tis observ'd, is the Pronunciation of Those who are born Deaf, and have been taught to Speak without hearing the Sound of their own Voices. But unite every Two of These Sounds into ONE MOVEMENT, and

let the Voice Rise on the One, and Fall or Rest itself on the Other, and this with a proper Mixture of Uniformity and Variety; and then immediately

Pleās'd thōu | shālt heār | ānd leārn | thē Sē | crēt Pōw'r  
 Of Hār | mōñy, | ĩn Tōnes | ānd Nūm | bērs hīt  
 Bÿ Vōice | őr Hānd— *Paradise Regain'd*, B. iv. Ver. 254.

In the First of These Movements the Voice dwells with pleasure on the First Syllable, and runs off hastily from the Second; For all the Pronouns are either ENCLITIC only, or EMPHATICAL: And therefore tho' the second Syllable ends in a Diphthong, yet as No EMPHASIS is Here to be laid upon it, the Sound is Short, and hardly either of the Vowels is heard Distinctly.

The Four Syllables which begin the Next Line are All naturally Short; but the Voice rises on the Second, and distinguishes it by a Sharper Accent. The Third and Fourth are both equally Short and Unaccented; but the Last receives Half a Time by the Comma, a Pause of the Voice after it, and therefore is mark'd with a Prick of Perfection as they call it. And by This Variety the Movements in this Second Line are Sufficiently distinguish'd from the Same Movements in the First and in the Third Line, tho' the *Caesura* be exactly the Same in every Line. The First of which begins with a *Trochee* followed by an *Iāmbick*; the Last with Two *Iāmbics*; and the Middle, if we regard the Time only, with Two *Pyrrichius's*, but the Former distinguish'd by a strong Accent, which gives it, to an *English Ear*, the Force of an *Iāmbick*.

Such is the Variety in such an Uniformity! A Grace peculiar, perhaps, to the *English Language*. . . .

### §. III.

[107] [The] Liberty of introducing Imperfect Measures is still Greater, and even Necessary in Prose to distinguish it from Verse. For Here, in the Judgment of ARISTOTLE, the Movements ought to be neither as One to One in the Graver Measures, nor as Two to One in the Sharper or Lighter Airs, but in the [*Sesquialteral*] Proportion of Two to Three: for of such Movements, *saith he*, no Verse can evēr bē fōrm'd.

[108] And these Movements are call'd the *Pæan Prior* and *Posterior*, and are compounded, the First of the *Trochee* and *Pyrrichius*, - u | u u | proper especially for the beginning of a Sentence; the Latter of the *Pyrrichius* and *Iāmbic*, u u | u - | preferr'd for the Fuller and more Perfect Close.

And how naturally we fall into Such Movements unawares to

ourselves, and without Design, the Reader may see an Instance in the Beginning and Close of the very First Sentence in this Essay; or he may read the following remarkable Period that concludes Mr. MILTON's Letter to Mr. HARTLIBB on Education.

“Only I bēlieve that this is not a Bow, for every one to shoot in that counts himself a Teacher . . . : Yet I am withal persuaded . . . That Imagination presents me with Nothing, but very Happy and very Possible, if GOD have so decreed; and This Age have Spirit and Capacity enough tō äpprēhēnd.”

Yet in These kind of Closes in our own Language the Author is very often at the Mercy of the Reader, who, by making the insensible Pauses at places he is not aware of, may run into the very Fault

These Numběrs wēre intēndēd tō ävoid.

Dwell (*e. g.*) on the Sound of the word wēre, and these Ten Syllables will form an *English Iāmbic*, tho' they close with the *Pæan Posterior*.

Nor had MILTON, probably, any intention of such a Close: At least He was not always thus Scrupulous or Nice: For how different is the Conclusion of Another and very Beautiful Sentence in the same Letter, which I shall transcribe as an equal Instance both of the *Sweetness* and *Propriety* of Sounds.

“I shall detain you no longer, (*saith He*) in the Demonstration of what we should Not do, but strait conduct ye to a Hill Side, [109] where I will point ye out the Right Path of a Noble and Virtuous Education; Laborious, indeed, at the First Ascent, but else Sō Smoōth, Sō Grēēn, Sō Füll öf Goōdly Pröspēct and mēlōdioūs Sōunds ön ēvēry Side, thät thē Hārp öf ORPHEUS wās nōt mōre chārmīng.”

A very agreeable Close, if the Ear itself māy bē thē Jūdge. . . .

#### §. V.

[115] AS FEET and NUMBERS, or RHYTHMUS, are Sometimes distinguished, and Sometimes mean the Same thing, because the General Quantity of Time may be the Same, where the ORDER is chang'd and even revers'd, so it is with RHYME and NUMBERS. For what the *Latins* call NUMBERS, the *Greeks* generally express by RHYTHMUS. So far, at least, as concerns the *Grace* and *Smoothness* of Composition; but, unless I am mistaken, so far only. For, on some [116] Occasions, a noble Neglect of the NUMBERS, that is, of the RHYTHMUS, shews so much the more plainly the irresistible *Force or Power* of NUMBERS. . . .

§. VI.

[117] But tho' NUMBERS and RHYTHMUS are frequently us'd promiscuously by the Ancients, there is another very different thing from either, which is known among the Moderns by the Name of RIME. . . . MILTON . . . as if he thought it had no more relation to the RHYTHMUS of the Ancients in Etymology than it has in reäl Beauty, wherever he speaks of it, constantly spells it RIME, without the *H*, in all the Editions of his Works which were corrected by himself, whenever he means by it the *Jingling Sound of Like Endings*; and so he spells it *five* times in the short Account of the Verse, prefixt to the *later* Copies of the FIRST EDITION of PARADISE LOST, added at the request of the Bookseller, and again in the SECOND: But his own Immortal Poëm is written properly in RHYME, as it stands fairly printed in all the Three First Editions of PARADISE LOST, B. i. Ver. 16.

But a late insolent Editor, equally remarkable for his Dogmatical Temerity, and his Tasteless Notes on This Poëm, having first corrupted the Text of his Author, [and confounded *Rhyme* and *Rime*, which the Author had so industriously distinguished] tells us, 'tis odd that MILTON should put *Rime* here as equivalent to *Verse*, when he had just before declar'd against *Rhyme* as no true Ornament to *Verse*; [118] A Declaration impossible for MILTON to have made. His Poëm therefore is written in RHYME, in the Same Sense, and Manner, in which the Same Word is us'd in his LYCIDAS, a Pastoral Ode so remarkable for the Variety and Power of Numbers, as well as for every other Beauty.

Who wou'd not sing for LYCIDAS? He knew  
Himself to sing, and build the Lofty RHYME.

To write in RHYME then is to write in *Number* and in *Measure*

[119] RHYME then may be allow'd to be Common to *Prose* and *Verse*, and yet *Prose* and *Rhyme* may be distinguish'd. And thus HORACE seems to distinguish 'em.

— — — — — *pede CERTO*  
*Differt Sermoni Sermo MERUS*—

HOR. Lib. i. Sat. 4. Ver. 47.

In VERSE 'tis emphatically RHYME, and This determin'd to a Peculiar kind of Harmony.

This in PROSE would be Absurd and Unnatural, if frequently us'd, or plainly affected: And therefore is sometimes artfully chosen, and sometimes as carefully avoided, lest the Art or Affectation should appear.

“Then was the War shiver’d, saith MILTON, into small Frays and Bickerings,

“At Woõd òr Wätërs,

“As Chånce òr Vålör,

“Advice òr Råshnëss

léd ’ëm ón;

“Cõmmándëd, ór withõüt Cõmmånd.

Every one of the closing Commas in this Sentence is a JUST and MEASUR’D NUMBER of Agreeable Sounds, which may be pronounc’d at one easy Breath, and the whole Sentence at one Respiration: And the Time in which each corresponding RHYTHMUS may be pronounc’d is nearly the SAME, and gives therefore a kind of Musical Delight to the Ear; and yet the Varying of the RHYTHMI, and the FREER SOUNDS that introduce ’em, do sufficiently distinguish ’em from Verse.

[120] And This is the Reason, that how Numerous soever the *Rhetoricians* require the Style should be even in PROSE itself, yet PROSE and NUMBERS may be justly distinguish’d, and even oppos’d to one another. And thus they are plainly distinguish’d from each other by CICERO, when he saith, *Adjunxit primus Numeros verbis solutis Isocrates.*

However, as soon as This Musical Delight was felt in Prose, or Common Conversation, the Reason was enquir’d, and the Pleasure began to be imitated in Numbers which should give it CERTAINLY and CONSTANTLY: For all Numbers, if I may so speak, are not Numerous, that is, are not [equally] Harmonious.

Therefore Fit Quantity of Syllables, or Sounds whose Measure of Time should be Equal or nearly Equal to one another, either in the Same or a Different Number of Syllables, were more industriously to be sought by Those who intended to write in Verse; and with the greater Exactness, Felicity, and Variety they were chosen, the Greater was the Harmony.

What other Accounts soëver the Learned have been pleas’d to give us, This seems the True Original of Verse; nor did the most Ancient Poëtry, perhaps, proceed any further. See *Genesis* iv. 23, 24. And the xlix throughout, particularly Ver. 6, 7. . . .

#### §. IX.

[126] . . . the Numbers, in Every Just Composition, will be as Various as the Passions and Idéas.

Which brings to my Mind the Remarks that were made some Years ago upon the Invocation or Argument to PARADISE LOST, where, for forty Lines together, the same Numbers, in every Re-



spect, are hardly once repeated; as if the Author had intended to shew us, in the very Entrance of the Poëm, what an endless Variety we were to expect. But the Moment his Thoughts were fir'd with the Grandeur and Importance of his Subject; and he was to inspire his Readers with a Sacred Indignation at the Pride and Ambition of SATAN; and at the Same time, to give us a dreadful View of his Fall and Punishment, the Numbers immediately change, or fix rather in one Impetuous Movement; and are all, tho' not Pure, yet properly and prevalently *Iâmbic* for Twelve or Twenty Lines that follow, with hardly any Variation: Which shews the Care and Judgment, or rather the prodigious Genius and Felicity of MILTON, who could never think or write in any Measures, where the NUMBERS and the IDEAS should shock and destroy each other. . . .

[127] But to give you the Clearer Notion of what I intend, I will refer you only to one Passage, which I have particular Reason to mention.

[128] *Thámmüz cāme néxt, bēhind,  
Whōse ánnüäl Wōund in Lébanōn állür'd  
Thē Síriān Dámsēls tō lámént his Fāte  
In ámōroüs Dittiēs áll ä Súmmēr's Dāy;  
While Smoōth Adōnis fróm his nātive Róck  
Rán Púrplē tō thē Seā—*

PARADISE LOST, B. i. Ver. 446.

How different are These from Those Sounds . . . address'd to the Faln Angels by the Prince of Darkness, or Those other in which a more Awful Power is introduc'd, when it had commanded

*The Gúlp of Tártarus to ôpen wide  
His fiery Cháos to receíve their Fáll.  
Sō spāke thē Sōv'rān Voice, ānd Clōuds bēgān  
Tō dárkēn All thē Hill; ānd Smoāk tō rōwle  
In dúskie wreāthes, rēlúctānt Flāmes, thē Sígn  
Of Wrāuth āwākt—*

In Like Numbers, in the Relation of RAPHAEL, but with yet stronger and more remarkable Percussions on the Ear,

*Sō—úndēr fiery Cōpe—tōgéthēr rúsh'd  
Bōth Báttēls maíne, with rūinoüs ässaült  
And ínēxtinguishāblē Rāge—áll Heáv'n  
Rēsōundēd—*

Which has made me wonder, Sir, to see . . . the Lines, which I have mention'd above, produc'd by a Learned and Ingenious Author,<sup>1</sup> as an Instance of the SWEETNESS of *Iâmbic* Measures. The following Verses are much more *Iâmbic*, but are they therefore

1. DR. PEMBERTON'S Observations on Poetry, p. 133. [—Say.]

SWEETER? I believe no body will say so. But they are, what they should be, a Hideous Peal of Hoarse and Barking Sounds, in Verses otherwise sufficiently Smooth.

[129] — — —about her Middle round  
A Crý of Héll-hounds never céasing bark'd  
With wide *Cerbertan* Móuths full loud—and rúng  
A hídeous Peal—far léss abhór'd than Thése  
Vext SCYLLA, báthing in the Seá that parts  
*CalábRia* fRóm the hoáRse *TRinácRian* ShóRe.

PARADISE LOST, B. ii. Ver. 653. . . .

[130] What is it then, you will say, that gives us so sensible a Pleasure when we read the Lines that relate to THAMMUZ or ADONIS? 'Tis because the Melting Story is told all in LIQUIDS, that is, in Letters that melt in the Mouth: in well-vowel'd Syllables: in Numbers that SOOTH the Ear, and are as SOFT and GENTLE as the Tender Subject: in Smoothest *Spondees*, I mean, tempered with the *Pyrrichius*, or enliven'd with the *Tibrachus*, the *Dactyle* or the *Anapæst*: in which PUSHING NUMBER the Wound seems to be given, as the Damsels lament it in almost the only True or Genuine *Iâmbic*.

*On the Numbers of PARADISE LOST.*

[161] . . . in agreement with the Image he had conceiv'd in his own Mind, [Milton] checks the Movements all at once in the midst of their Career, and, by a sudden Reverse of Numbers, fixes the Attention of the Reader on the Difficulty, the Pain, and the Unwieldiness of the Motion,

And tów'rds thě Gâte—rówling hě Běstiál Train.

Had he smooth'd the Verse, and run on, as he began, in continual and uninterrupted *Iâmbics*,

[162] And rówling tów'rds thě Gâte hě Běstiál Train,

He had unwarily convey'd a quite contrary *Idéa*, an *Idéa* of Ease and Celerity, painted in the Swiftmess and Rapidity of the Numbers.

# JOHN UPTON

## From *Critical Observations on Shakespeare* (1746)

[41] . . . There are many who, never having read one word of Aristotle, gravely cite his rules, and talk of the unities of time and place, at the very mentioning Shakespeare's name; they don't seem ever to have given themselves the trouble of considering, whether or no his story does not hang [42] together, and the incidents follow each other naturally and in order; in short whether or no he has not a beginning, middle and end. If you will not allow that he wrote strictly tragedies; yet it may be granted that he wrote dramatic heroic poems; in which, is there not an imitation of one action, serious, entire, and of a just length, and which, without the help of narration, raises pity and terror in the beholders breast, and refines the perturbed passions? . . .

[68] It does not follow, because a hero is one man, that the fable is therefore *one*; for one man [69] might be employed in variety of actions, and fables. So that to describe the whole hero, or the life and death of kings, and to make a histo[70]rical detail of particular facts, is writing chronicles, not poems.

But has not Shakespeare been guilty of this very fault? Are not several of his plays called historical plays . . . as *The first and second parts of king Henry IV*. But these [71] plays are independent each of the other. *The first part*, as 'tis named, ends with the settlement in the throne of king Henry IV. when he had gained a compleat victory over his rebellious subjects. *The second part* contains king Henry's death; shewing his son, afterwards Henry V, in the various lights of a good-natured rake, 'till he comes to the crown; when 'twas necessary for him to assume a more manlike character, and princely dignity. To call these two plays, *first and second parts*, is as injurious to the author-character of Shakespeare, as it would be to Sophocles, to call his two plays on Oedipus, *first and second parts of King Oedipus*. Whereas the one is *Oedipus King of Thebes*, the other, *Oedipus at Athens*. . . .

[73] FROM what has been already observed, it becomes less difficult to see into the art and design of Shakespeare, in forming and planning his dramatic poems. The unity of action he seems to have thought himself obliged to regard; but not at all the unities of time and place; no more, than if he were writing an epic poem. Aristotle (our chief authority, because he drew his observations from the most perfect models) tells us, that the epic poem has no determined time, but the dramatic he fixes to a single day: the former is to be *red*, the latter to be *seen*. Now a man cannot easily impose on himself, that what he sees represented in a continued action, at a certain period of time, and in a certain place, should take up several years, and be transacted in several places. But dramatic poetry is the art of imposing; and he is the best poet, who can best impose on his audience; and he is the wisest man, who is easiest imposed on. [74] The story therefore (which is the principal part, and as it were the very soul of tragedy) being made a *whole*, with natural dependance and connexion; the spectator seldom considers the length of time necessary to produce all these incidents, but passes all that over; as in *Julius Caesar*, *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, and in other plays of our poet.

To impose on the audience, with respect to the unity of place, there is an artificial contrivance of scenes. For my own part, I see no great harm likely to accrue to the understanding, in thus accompanying the poet in his magical operations, and in helping an innocent deceit; while he not only raises or soothes the passions, but transports me from place to place, just as it [75] pleases him, and carries on the thread of his story. . . .

[77] Whether the unity of time and place is so necessary to the drama, as some are pleased to require, I cannot determine; but this is certain, the duration should seem uninterrupted, and the story ought to be one.

[78] AS dramatic poetry is the imitation of an action, and as there can be no action but what proceeds from the manners and the sentiments; manners and sentiments are its essential parts; and the former come next to be considered, as the source and cause of action. 'Tis action that makes us happy or miserable, and 'tis manners, whereby the characters, the various inclinations, and genius of the persons are marked and distinguished. There are four things to be observed in manners.

I. That they be *good*. Not only strongly marked and distinguished, but *good* in a moral sense, as far forth as the character will allow. . . .

[80] Upon these principles I cannot defend such a character as

Richard III. as proper for the stage. But much more faulty is the Jew's character, in *The Merchant of Venice*; who is cruel without necessity. These are not pictures of human creatures, and are beheld with horror and detestation.

In this poetical painting of the manners of men, it ought to be remember'd, that 'tis the human creature in general should be drawn, not any one in particular. Now *man* is of a fixed nature, virtue and vice alternately prevailing; it being as difficult to find a person thoroughly vitious, as thoroughly virtuous. . . . [81] For it must be by long habit, and unnatural practice, that a *man* can become void of *humanity* and *human* affections: since, as our masters in this *man-science* have observed, even public robbers are not often without social and generous principles. Whenever, therefore, a human creature is made to deviate from what is fair and good, the poet is unpardonable if he does not shew the motives which led him astray, and dazled his judgment with false appearances of happiness. Meanwhile how beautiful is it to [82] see the struggles of the mind, and the passions at variance; which are wanting in the steady villain, or steady philosopher? and these are characters that seldom appear on the stage of the world. But what is tragic poetry without passion? In a word, 'tis ourselves, and our own passions, that we love to see pictured; and in these representations we seek for delight and instruction.

II. The manners ought to be *suitable*. When the poet has formed his character, the person is to act up to it. And here the age, the sex, and condition, are to be considered: thus what is commendable in one, may be faulty in another. . . .

[83] Shakespeare seems to me not to have known such a character as a fine lady; nor does he ever recognize their dignity. What tramontanes in love are his Hamlets, the young Percy, and K. Henry V.? Instead of the lady Bettys, and lady Fannys, who shine so much in modern comedies, he brings you on the stage plain Mrs. Ford and Mrs. Page, two honest good-humoured wives of two plain country gentlemen. His tragic ladies are rather seen, than heard; such as Miranda, Desdemona, Ophelia, and Portia. . . .

[85] How conformable to their characters are the ambitious Macbeth, and the jealous Othello? Tho' Falstaff is a fardle of low vices, a liar, a coward, a thief; yet his good-humour makes him a pleasant companion. If you laugh at the oddness of Fluellin, yet his bravery and honesty claim a laugh of love, rather than of contempt. These manners, and most others which the poet has painted, are agreeable to the character, and suitable to his design.

III. The poet should give his manners that resemblance which

history, or common report has published of them. This is to be understood of known characters. Shakespeare very strictly observes this rule, and if ever he varies from it, 'tis with great art; as in the character of Banquo. . . .

[88] IV. The manners ought to be uniform and consistent: and, whenever a change of manners is made, care should be taken that there appear proper motives for such a change; and the audience are to be prepared before hand. . . .

[91] As there is nothing pleases the human mind so much as order, and consistency; so when the poet has art to paint this uniformity in manners, he not only hinders confusion, but brings the audience acquainted, as it were, with the person represented; you see into his character, know how he will behave, and what part he will take on any emergency. And Shakespeare's characters are all thus strongly marked and manner'd.

[104] IF we will consider Shakespeare's tragedies, as dramatic heroic poems, some ending with a happy, others with an unhappy catastrophe; why then, if Homer introduces a buffoon character, both among his gods and heroes in his Iliad, and a ridiculous monster Polypheme in [105] his Odyssey, might not Shakespeare in his heroic drama exhibit a Falstaff, a Caliban, or clown? Here is no mixture of various fables: tho' the incidents are many, the story is one. 'Tis true, there is a mixture of characters, not all proper to excite those tragic passions, pity and terror; [106] the serious and comic being so blended, as to form in some measure what Plautus calls tragicomedy; where, not two different stories, the one tragic, the other comic, are preposterously jumbled together, as in the Spanish Fryar, and Oroonoko: but the unity of the fable being preserved, several ludicrous characters are interspersed, as in a heroic poem. Nor does the mind from hence suffer any violence, being only accidentally called off from the serious story, to which it soon returns again, and perhaps better prepared by this little refreshment. . . .

[107] But so far at least must be acknowledged true of our dramatic poet, that he is always a strict observer of *decorum*; and constantly a friend to the cause of virtue: hence he shews, in it's proper light, into what miseries mankind are led by indulging wrong opinions. No philosopher seems ever to have more minutely examined into the different manners, passions, and inclinations of mankind; nor is there known a character, perhaps that of Socrates only excepted, where refined ridicule, raillery, wit, and humour, were so mixed and united with what is most grave and serious in morals and philosophy. This is the magic with which he works such wonders.

# PETER WHALLEY

## From *An Enquiry into the Learning of Shakespeare* (1746)

[16] [Eugenius is speaking.] To begin with his Plots, the Ground-work and Basis of the whole: These are usually taken from some History or Novel; he follows the Thread of the Story as it lies before him, and seldom makes any Addition or Improvement to the Incidents arising from it: He copies the old Chronicles almost *verbatim*, and gives a faithful Relation of the several Characters they have left us of our Kings and Princes. It is needless to remark, how erroneous this must render the Plan of his Drama, and what Violation it must necessarily offer to the Unities, as prescribed by *Aristotle*. Yet it does not in the least abate my Veneration for our Poet, that the *French Connoisseurs* have fixed on him the Imputation of Ignorance and Barbarism. It would agree, I believe, as little with their Tempers to be freed from a sovereign Authority in [17] the Empire of Wit and Letters, as in their civil Government. An absolute Monarch must preside over Affairs of Science, as well as over those of the Cabinet; and it is pleasant enough to observe what Pain they are put to, upon the least Appearance of offending against the Laws of the *Stagyrite*. But not withstanding the Imperfection, and even the Absurdity of the Plots of *Shakespeare*, he continues unrivaled for his masterly Expression of the Characters and Manners; and the proper Execution of these is undoubtedly more useful, and perhaps more conducive to the Ends of Tragedy, than the Design and Conduct of the Plot. A great Part of this unjustifiable Wildness of the Fable, must be placed to the Taste and Humour of the Times; the People had been used to the Marvellous and Surprizing in all their Shews and Sports; they had seen different Kingdoms, in different Quarters of the World, engaged in the same Scene of Business, and could not be hastily confined from so unlimited a Latitude to a narrower Compass. I allow their Appetites to have been much

depraved; yet probably some kind of *Regimen*, not very different from what they were before accustomed to, was the properest Method to bring them to a better. Nevertheless, were we to make a Dissection of his Plays, we should discover more Art and Judgment than we are commonly aware of, both in the Contrast and Consistency of his principal Characters, and in the different Underparts, which are all made subservient towards carrying out the main Design; and we should observe, that still there was a Simplicity of Manner, which Nature only can give, [18] and as wonderful a Diversity. *Homer* is admired for that Perfection of Beauty which represents Men as they are affected in Life, and shews us in the Persons of others, the Oppositions of Inclination, and the Struggles between the Passions of Self-love, and those of Honour and Virtue, which we often feel in our own Breasts. This is that Excellence for which he is deservedly admired, as much as for the Variety of his Characters. May we not apply this Remark with an equal Propriety to *Shakespeare*, in whom we find as surprizing a Difference, and as natural and distinct a Preservation of his Characters? And is not this agreeable Display of Genius, interposed *Neander*, infinitely preferable to that studied Regularity and lifeless Drawing practised by our later Poets? . . .



# SAMUEL FOOTE

## From *The Roman and English Comedy Consider'd and Compar'd* (1747)

[5] The first Design of Dramatic Poetry, was to amend the Heart, improve the Understanding, and, at the same Time, please the Imagination. To Tragedy, one Species of the Drama was allotted, the Description of those Passions, which, when loose and ungoverned, are productive of the most terrible Conse[6]quences on the one Hand; but if, on the other, they are kept within proper Limits, and chuse Reason for their Guide and Director, they become highly conducive to the Happiness of Mankind. To Comedy was assigned the Correction of Vices and Follies of an inferior sort.

In the first Instance, we are taught, by a Collection of fatal Events, to avoid Ruin and Misery; in the last, by a Representation of fashionable Foibles, and particular extravagant Humours, to shun Ridicule and Absurdity.

Sir *Richard Steele* has apologized for his Mixture of the Tragic with the Comic, by saying, that there is a sort of Distress too mean for Tragedy, and which (as it would be cruel to deprive the World of such useful Lessons) ought to have a Place in Comedy.

Did Tragedy owe its Essence to the Adventures and Misfortunes of People in High Life only, Sir *Richard's* Argument might have some Weight: But it is the Distresses, not the Situations of Mankind, that are its Objects: If the Incidents are truly interesting, and the [7] Story affecting[,] the Rank and Quality of the *Personae* are of no great Consequence.

[11] . . . here it may not be improper to examine, what is, or ought to be meant, by the Words *Characters of Humours*.

There is scarce a Play-follower, or Dabler in Criticism, but has that Expression constantly in his Mouth; and yet not one in five hundred of them, has a determinate Idea of what it means; some mistake Wit for it, others Buffoonry, &c. &c. Perhaps my Judg-

ment may be as wrong as theirs, but as it will assist my present Enquiries, give me Leave to be absolute in my Definition of, and Distinction between, the Humourist, and Man of Humour.

In my Sense, then, these Characters should be never separated: The first is the Person to be exposed, and that by the Means and Assistance of the last; the latter we laugh with, but at the former.

The Humourist is a Man, who, from some Extravagance, or Disease of the Mind, is al[12]ways saying or doing something absurd and ridiculous; but at the same Time is firmly persuaded, that his Actions and Expressions are exactly proper and right. And so absolutely requisite is this last Circumstance, to the Constitution of a Humourist, that a very elegant and judicious Writer, has made it the Mark by which you are to distinguish him; as Ridicule (says he) is the Test of Truth, so is Gravity of Humour.

The Man of Humour, on the other Hand, is always joyous and pleasant; the Humourist is his Food; like the Carrion and Crow, they are never asunder; it is to the Labour and Pleasantry of the former, that you are indebted for all the Entertainment you meet with in the latter.

[19] To begin then with the Unities of *Aristotle*, which regard Time, Place, and Action; to [20] which we have added another, disregarded by the Writers of other Countries, Unity of Character.

The Rules prescribed by these Unities are, that your Time be limited to a natural Day; your Place unchanged; and your Action single. The fourth Unity requires, that your Character be preserved to the End in every Circumstance; and that he neither say, or do, any thing that might as well have been said, or done, by any other Person of the Play.

As to the Unities of Time, Place, and Action, I cannot say that we have strictly attended to them, unless in some particular Instances; such as the *Alchymist*, and most of the Plays of *Johnson*, *Shakespear's Merry Wives of Windsor*; to which I might add some others; but, in general, these Bonds do not hit the Taste and Genius of the free-born luxuriant Inhabitants of this Isle: They will no more bear a Yoke in Poetry than Religion.

No political nor critical Monarch shall give Laws to them: They have indeed sometimes given Proofs, that they do not despise these Mandates of *Aristotle*, because it is not in their capacity to comply with them, but because [21] they will not be indebted to any other Country for what they can obtain without its Assistance.

I do not believe, that it ever was in the Power of Man, to furnish out a more elegant, pleasing, and interesting Entertainment, than

*Shakespear* has, in many Instances, given us, without observing any one Unity, but that of Character; his adhering to that alone, with the Variety of his Incidents, the Propriety of his Sentiments, the Luxuriancy of his Fancy, and the Purity and Strength of his Dialogue, have produced, in one Instance alone, more Matter for Delight and Instruction, than can be collected from all the starv'd, strait-lac'd Brats, that every other Bard has produc'd. . . .

[22] The next Requisite, to an Observation of the Unities (if we allow it a Requisite) is the *sine qua non*, the Essence of Comedy, Humour; and in this Particular we stand unrival'd; no Nation has more Comedies, no Comedies more diversified humourous Characters.

This may indeed, in a great Measure, be owing to the Nature of our Constitution, and the Complection of our Inhabitants.

In *France*, one Coxcomb is the Representation of the whole Kingdom. In *England* scarce any two are alike. I don't know but this Variety of Humour may, in a great Measure, derive its Source from Vanity. Property, with us, is so equally diffused, that the Distinctions arising from it are very trifling. In order then to procure a Pre-eminence, we have recourse to particular Singularities, which, though at first affected, are at last by Habit so closely rivited to the Mind, as to make it impossible for the Possessor ever to divest himself of it. . . .

[23] Wit is not what it has been by many imagined to be, the Essence of Comedy; so far from it, that it is of no Use, but as it is subservient to Character.



# HENRY FIELDING

From *Tom Jones* (1749)

BOOK V. / CHAP. I.

*Of THE SERIOUS in writing; and for what Purpose it is introduced.*

[II, 110] . . . Who ever demanded the Reasons of that nice Unity of Time or Place which is now established to be so essential to dramattick Poetry? What Critick hath been ever asked why a Play may not contain two Days as well as one, or why the Audience (provided they travel like Electors, without any Expence) may not be wafted Fifty Miles as well as five! Hath any Commentator well accounted for the Limitation which an ancient Critic hath set to the Drama, which he will have contain neither more nor less than five Acts . . . [111]? Upon all these Occasions, the World seems to have embraced a Maxim of our Law, viz. *Cuicumq; in Arte sua perito credendum est*: For it seems, perhaps, difficult to conceive that any one should have had enough of Impudence, to lay down dogmatical Rules in any Art or Science without the least Foundation. In such Cases, therefore, we are apt to conclude there are sound and good Reasons at the Bottom, tho' we are unfortunately not able to see so far.

Now, in Reality, the World have paid too great a Compliment to Critics, and have imagined them Men of much greater Profundity than they really are. From this Complaisance, the Critics have been emboldened to assume a Dictatorial Power, and have so far succeeded that they are now become the Masters, and have the Assurance to give Laws to those Authors, from whose Predecessors they originally received them.

The Critic, rightly considered, is no more than the Clerk, whose Office i[t] is to transcribe the Rules and Laws laid down by those great Judges, whose vast Strength of Genius hath placed them in the Light of [11] Legislators in the several Sciences over which they presided. This Office was all which the Critics of old aspired

to, nor did they ever dare to advance a Sentence, without supporting it by the Authority of the Judge from whence it was borrowed.

But in Process of Time, and in Ages of Ignorance, the Clerk began to invade the Power and assume the Dignity of his Master. The Laws of Writing were no longer founded on the Practice of the Author, but on the Dictates of the Critic. The Clerk became the Legislator, and those very peremptorily gave Laws, whose Business it was, at first, only to transcribe them.

Hence arose an obvious, and, perhaps, an unavoidable Error: For these Critics being Men of shallow Capacities, very easily mistook mere Form for Substance. They acted as a Judge would, who should adhere to the lifeless Letter of Law, and reject the Spirit. Little Circumstances which were, perhaps, accidental in a great Author, were, by these Critics, considered to constitute his chief Merit, and transmitted as Essentials to be observed by all his Successors. To these Encroachments, Time and Ignorance, [113] the two great Supporters of Imposture, gave Authority; and thus, many Rules for good Writing have been established, which have not the least Foundation in Truth or Nature; and which commonly serve for no other Purpose than to curb and restrain Genius, in the same Manner; as it would have restrained the Dancing-master, had the many excellent Treatises on that Art, laid it down as an essential Rule, that every Man must dance in Chains.

#### BOOK VIII. / CHAP. I.

*A wonderful long Chapter concerning the Marvelous; being much the longest of all our introductory Chapters.*

[III, 139] AS we are now entering upon a Book, in which the Course of our History will oblige us to relate some Matters of a more strange and surprizing Kind than any which have hitherto occurred, it may [140] not be amiss in the prolegomenous, or introductory Chapter, to say something of that Species of Writing which is called the Marvellous. To this we shall, as well for the Sake of ourselves, as of others, endeavor to set some certain Bounds; and indeed nothing can be more necessary, as Criticks<sup>1</sup> of different Complexions are here apt to run into very different Extremes; for while some are, with M. *Dacier*, ready to allow, that the same Thing which is impossible may be yet probable,<sup>2</sup> others have so little Historic or Poetic Faith, that they believe nothing to be either possible or probable, the like to which hath not occurred to their own Observation.

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1. By this Word here, and in most other Parts of our Work, we mean every Reader in the World. [—Fielding.]

2. It is happy for M. *Dacier* that he was not an *Irishman*. [—Fielding.]

First then, I think, it may very reasonably be required of every Writer, that he keeps within the Bounds of Possibility; and still remembers that what it is not possible for Man to perform, it is scarce possible for Man to believe he did perform. This Conviction, perhaps, gave Birth to many Stories of the antient Heathen Deities (for most of them are of poetical Original). [141] The Poet, being desirous to indulge a wanton and extravagant Imagination, took Refuge in that Power, of the Extent of which his Readers were no Judges, or rather which they imagined to be infinite, and consequently they could not be shocked at any Prodigies related of it. This hath been strongly urged in Defence of *Homer's* Miracles; and it is, perhaps, a Defence; not, as Mr. *Pope* would have it, because *Ulysses* told a Set of foolish Lies to the *Phæacians*, who were a very dull Nation; but because the Poet himself wrote to Heathens, to whom poetical Fables were Articles of Faith. For my own Part, I must confess, so compassionate is my Temper, I wish *Polypheme* had confined himself to his Milk Diet, and preserved his Eye; nor could *Ulysses* be much more concerned than myself, when his Companions were turned into Swine by *Circe*, who shewed, I think, afterwards, too much Regard for Man's Flesh to be supposed capable of converting it into Bacon. I wish, likewise, with all my Heart, that *Homer* could have known the Rule prescribed by *Horace*, to introduce supernatural Agents as seldom as possible. We should not then have seen his Gods coming on trivial Errands, and often behaving themselves so as not only to forfeit all Title to [142] Respect, but to become the Objects of Scorn and Derision. A Conduct which must have shocked the Credulity of a pious and sagacious Heathen; and which could never have been defended, unless by agreeing with a Supposition to which I have been sometimes almost inclined, that this most glorious Poet, as he certainly was, had an Intent to burlesque the superstitious Faith of his own Age and Country.

But I have rested too long on a Doctrine which can be of no Use to a Christian Writer: For as he cannot introduce into his Works any of that heavenly Host which make a Part of his Creed; so is it horrid Puerility to search the Heathen Théology for any of those Deities who have been long since dethroned from their Immortality. Lord *Shaftesbury* observes, that nothing is more cold than the Invocation of a Muse by a Modern; he might have added that nothing can be more absurd. A modern may with much more Elegance invoke a Ballad, as some have thought *Homer* did, or a Mug of Ale with the Author of *Hudibras*; which latter may perhaps have inspired much more Poetry as well as Prose, than all the Liquors of *Hippocrene* or *Helicon*.

[143] The only supernatural Agents which can in any Manner be allowed to us Moderns are Ghosts; but of these I would advise an Author to be extremely sparing. These are indeed like Arsenic, and other dangerous Drugs in Physic, to be used with the utmost Caution; nor would I advise the Introduction of them at all in those Works, or by those Authors to which, or to whom a Horse-Laugh in the Reader, would be any great Prejudice or Mortification.

As for Elves and Fairies, and other such Mummery, I purposely omit the Mention of them, as I should be very unwilling to confine within any Bounds those surprizing Imaginations, for whose vast Capacity the Limits of human Nature are too narrow; whose Works are to be considered as a new Creation; and who have consequently just Right to do what they will with their own.

Man therefore is the highest Subject (unless on very extraordinary Occasions indeed) which presents itself to the Pen of our Historian, or of our Poet; and in relating his Actions, great Care is to be taken, that we [144] do not exceed the Capacity of the Agent we decribe.

Nor is Possibility alone sufficient to justify us, we must keep likewise within the Rules of Probability. It is, I think, the Opinion of *Aristotle*; or if not, it is the Opinion of some wise Man, whose Authority will be as weighty, when it is as old; 'that it is no Excuse for a Poet who relates what is incredible, that the thing related is really Matter of Fact.' This may perhaps be allowed true with regard to Poetry, but it may be thought impractical to extend it to the Historian: For he is obliged to record Matters as he finds them; though they may be of so extraordinary a Nature, as will require no small Degree of historical Faith to swallow them. Such was the successful Armament of *Xerxes*, described by *Herodotus*, or the successful Expedition of *Alexander* related by *Arrian*. Such of later Years was the Victory of *Agincourt* obtained by *Harry* the Fifth, or that of *Narva*, won by *Charles* the Twelfth of *Sweden*. All which Instances, the more we reflect on them, appear still the more astonishing.

Such Facts, however, as they occur in the Thread of the Story; nay, indeed, as [145] they constitute the essential Parts of it, the Historian is not only justifiable in recording as they really happened; but indeed would be unpardonable, should he omit or alter them. But there are other Facts not of such Consequence nor so necessary, which tho' ever so well attested, may nevertheless be sacrificed to Oblivion in Complaisance to the Scepticism of a Reader. Such is that memorable Story of the Ghost of *George Vill[i]ers*, which might with more Propriety have been made a Present of to Dr.



*Drelincourt*, to have kept the Ghost of Mrs. *Veale* Company, at the Head of his Discourse upon Death, than have been introduced into so solemn a Work as the History of the Rebellion.

To say the Truth, if the Historian will confine himself to what really happened, and utterly reject any Circumstance, which, tho' never so well attested, he must be well assured is false, he will sometimes fall into the Marvellous, but never into the Incredible. He will often raise the Wonder and Surprize of his Reader, but never that incredulous Hatred mentioned by *Horace*. It is by falling into Fiction therefore, that we generally offend against this Rule, of deserting Probability, which the Historian [146] seldom if ever quits, till he forsakes his Character, and commences a Writer of Romance. In this, however, those Historians who relate publick Transactions, have the Advantage of us who confine ourselves to Scenes of private Life. The Credit of the former is by common Notoriety supported for a long Time; and public Records, with the concurrent Testimony of many Authors bear Evidence to their Truth in future Ages. Thus a *Trajan* and an *Antoninus*, a *Nero* and a *Caligula*, have all met with the Belief of Posterity; and no one doubts but that Men so very good, and so very bad, were once the Masters of Mankind.

But we who deal in private Characters, who search into the most retired Recesses, and draw forth Examples of Virtue and Vice, from Holes and Corners of the World, are in a more dangerous Situation. As we have no publick Notoriety, no concurrent Testimony, no Records to support and corroborate what we deliver, it becomes us not only to keep within the Limits of Possibility, but of Probability too; and this more especially in painting what is greatly good and amiable. Knavery and Folly, though never so exorbitant, will more easily meet [147] with Assent: for Ill-nature adds great Support and Strength to Faith. . . .

[150] In the last Place, the Actions should be such as may not only be within the Compass of human Agency, and which human Agents may probably be supposed to do; but they should be likely for the very Actors and Characters themselves to have performed: For what may be only wonderful and surprizing in one Man, may become improbable, or indeed impossible, when related of another.

This last Requisite is what the dramatic Critics call Conservation of Character, and it requires a very extraordinary Degree of [151] Judgment, and a most exact Knowledge of human Nature.

It is admirably remarked by a most excellent Writer, That Zeal can no more hurry a Man to act in direct Opposition to itself, than

a rapid Stream can carry a Boat against its own Current. I will venture to say, that for a Man to act in direct Contradiction to the Dictates of Nature, is, if not impossible, as improbable and as miraculous as any Thing which can well be conceived. Should the best Parts of the Story of *M. Antoninus* be ascribed to *Nero*, or should the worst Incidents of *Nero's* Life be imputed to *Antoninus*, what would be more shocking to Belief than either Instance; whereas both these being related of their proper Agent, constitute the Truly Marvellous. . . .

[152] Within these few Restrictions, I think, every Writer may be permitted to deal as much in the Wonderful as he pleases; nay, the more he can surprise the Reader, if he thus keeps within the Rules of Credibility, the more he will engage his Attention, and the more he will charm him. As a Genius of the highest Rank observes in his 5th Chapter of the *Bathos*, 'The great Art of all Poetry is to mix Truth with Fiction; in order to join the Credible with the Surprising.'

[153] For though every good Author will confine himself within the Bounds of Probability, it is by no means necessary that his Characters, or his Incidents, should be trite, common, or vulgar; such as happen in every Street, or in every House, or which may be met with in the home Articles of a News-paper. Nor must he be inhibited from shewing many Persons and Things, which may possibly have never fallen within the Knowledge of great Part of his Readers. If the Writer strictly observes the Rules abovementioned, he hath discharged his Part; and is then intitled to some Faith from his Reader, who is indeed guilty of critical Infidelity if he disbelieves him. . . .

#### BOOK IX. / CHAP. I.

*Of those who lawfully may, and of those who may not write such Histories as this.*

[305] To invent good Stories, and to tell them well, are possibly very rare Talents, and yet I have observed few Persons who have scrupled to aim at both; and if we examine the Romances and Novels with which the World abounds, I think we may fairly con[306]clude, that most of the Authors would not have attempted to shew their Teeth (if the Expression may be allowed me) in any other Way of Writing; nor could indeed have strung together a dozen Sentences on any other Subject whatever. *Scribimus indocti doctiq; passim*,<sup>3</sup> may be more truly said of the Historian and Biographer, than of any other Species of Writing: For all the Arts and

3. —Each desperate Blockhead dares to write,  
Verse is the Trade of every living Wight.  
FRANCIS. [—Fielding.]

Sciences (even Criticism itself) require some little Degree of Learning and Knowledge. Poetry indeed may perhaps be thought an Exception; but then it demands Numbers, or something like Numbers; whereas to the Composition of Novels and Romances, nothing is necessary but Paper, Pens and Ink, with the manual Capacity of using them. This, I conceive, their Productions shew to be the Opinion of the Authors themselves; and this must be the Opinion of their Readers, if indeed there be any such.

Hence we are to derive that universal Contempt, which the World, who always denominate the Whole from the Majority, have cast on all historical Writers, who do [307] not draw their Materials from Records. And it is the Apprehension of this Contempt, that hath made us so cautiously avoid the Term Romance, a Name with which we might otherwise have been well enough contented. Though as we have good Authority for all our Characters, no less indeed than Doomsday Book, or the vast authentic Book of Nature, as is elsewhere hinted, our Labours have sufficient Title to the Name of History. Certainly they deserve some Distinction from those Works, which one of the wittiest of Men regarded only as proceeding from a Pruritus, or indeed rather from a Looseness of the Brain. . . . [308] To prevent therefore for the future, such intemperate Abuses of Leisure, of Letters, and of the Liberty of the Press, especially as the World seems at present to be more than usually threatened with them, I shall here venture to mention some Qualifications, every one of which are in a pretty high Degree necessary to this Order of Historians.

The first is Genius, without a rich Vein of which, no Study, says *Horace*, can avail us. By Genius I would understand that Power, or rather those Powers of the Mind, which are capable of penetrating into all Things within our Reach and Knowledge, and of distinguishing their essential Differences. These are no other than Invention and Judgment; and they are both called by the collective Name of Genius, as they are of those Gifts of Nature which we bring with us into the World. Concerning each of which many seem to have fallen into very great Errors: For by Invention, I believe, is generally understood a creative Faculty; which would indeed prove most Romance-[309]Writers to have the highest Pretensions to it; whereas by Invention is really meant no more, (and so the Word signifies) than Discovery, or finding out; or to explain it at large, a quick and sagacious Penetration into the true Essence of all the Objects of our Contemplation. This, I think, can rarely exist without the Concomitancy of Judgment: For how we can be said to have discovered the true Essence of two Things, without discerning

their Difference, seems to me hard to conceive; now this last is the undisputed Province of Judgment, and yet some few Men of Wit have agreed with all the dull Fellows in the World, in representing these two to have been seldom or never the Property of one and the same Person.

But tho' they should be so, they are not sufficient for our Purpose without a good Share of Learning; for which I could again cite the Authority of *Horace*, and of many others, if any was necessary to prove that Tools are of no Service to a Workman, when they are not sharpened by Art, or when he wants Rules to direct him in his Work, or hath no Matter to work upon. All these Uses are supplied by Learning: For Nature can only furnish us with Capa[310]city, or, as I have chose to illustrate it, with the Tools of our Profession; Learning must fit them for Use, must direct them in it; and lastly, must contribute, Part at least, of the Materials. A competent Knowledge of History and of the *Belles Lettres*, is here absolutely necessary; and without this Share of Knowledge at least, to affect the Character of an Historian, is as vain as to endeavour at building a House without Timber or Mortar, or Brick or Stone. *Homer* and *Milton*, who, though they added the Ornament of Numbers to their Works, were both Historians of our Order, were Masters of all the Learning of their Times.

Again, there is another Sort of Knowledge beyond the Power of Learning to bestow, and this is to be had by Conversation. So necessary is this to the understanding the Characters of Men, that none are more ignorant of them than those learned Pedants, whose Lives have been entirely consumed in Colleges, and among Books: For however exquisitely Human Nature may have been described by Writers, the true practical System can only be learnt in the World. Indeed the like happens in every other Kind of Knowledge. Neither [311] Physic, nor Law, are to be practically known from Books. Nay, the Farmer, the Planter, the Gardener, must perfect by Experience what he hath acquired the Rudiments of by Reading. How accurately soever the ingenious Mr. *Miller* may have described the Plant, he himself would advise his Disciple to see it in the Garden. As we must perceive, that after the nicest Strokes of a *Shakespear*, or a *Johnson*, of a *Wycherly*, or an *Otway*, some Touches of Nature will escape the Reader, which the judicious Action of a *Garrick*, of a *Cibber*, or a *Clive*,<sup>4</sup> can convey to him; so on the real

4. There is a peculiar Propriety in mentioning this great Actor, and these two most justly celebrated Actresses in this Place; as they have all formed themselves on the Study of Nature only; and not on the Imitation of their Predecessors. Hence they have been able to excel all who have gone before them; a Degree of Merit which the servile Herd of Imitators can never possibly arrive at. [—Fielding.]

Stage, the Character shews himself in a stronger and bolder Light, than he can be described. And if this be the Case in those fine and nervous Descriptions, which great Authors themselves have taken from Life, how much more strongly will it hold when the Writer himself takes his Lines not from Nature, but from Books! Such Characters are only the faint Copy of a Copy, and can have neither the Justness nor Spirit of an Original.

[312] Now this Conversation in our Historian must be universal, that is, with all Ranks and Degrees of Men: For the Knowledge of what is called High-Life, will not instruct him in low, nor *e converso*, will his being acquainted with the inferior Part of Mankind, teach him the Manners of the superior. And though it may be thought that the Knowledge of either may sufficiently enable him to describe at least that in which he hath been conversant; yet he will even here fall greatly short of Perfection: for the Follies of either Rank do in reality illustrate each other. For Instance, the Affectation of High-life appears more glaring and ridiculous from the Simplicity of the Low; and again the Rudeness and Barbarity of this latter, strikes with much stronger Ideas of Absurdity, when contrasted with, and opposed to the Politeness which controuls the former. Besides, to say the Truth, the Manners of our Historian will be improved by both these Conversations: For in the one he will easily find Examples of Plainness, Honesty, and Sincerity; in the other of Refinement, Elegance, and a Liberality of Spirit; which last Quality I myself have scarce ever seen in Men of low Birth and Education.

[313] Nor will all the Qualities I have hitherto given my Historian avail him, unless he have what is generally meant by a good Heart, and be capable of feeling. The Author who will make me weep, says *Horace*, must first weep himself. In reality, no Man can paint a Distress well, which he doth not feel while he is painting it; nor do I doubt, but that the most pathetic and affecting Scenes have been writ with Tears. In the same Manner it is with the Ridiculous. I am convinced I never make my Reader laugh heartily, but where I have laughed before him, unless it should happen at any Time, that instead of laughing with me, he should be inclined to laugh at me. Perhaps this may have been the Case at some Passages in this Chapter, from which Apprehension I will here put an End to it.

BOOK XIV. / CHAP. I.

*An Essay to prove that an Author will write the better, for having some Knowledge of the Subject on which he writes.*

[V, 107] AS several Gentlemen in these Times, by the wonderful Force of Genius only, without the least Assistance of Learning, perhaps, without being well able to read, have made a considerable Figure in the Republic of Letters; the modern Critics, I am told, have lately begun to assert, that all kind of Learning is entirely useless to a Writer; and, indeed, no other than a kind of Fetters on the natural Spriteliness and Activity of the Imagination, which is thus weighed down, and prevented from soaring to those high Flights which otherwise it would be able to reach.

This Doctrine, I am afraid, is, at present, carried much too far: For why should Writing differ so much from all other Arts? The Nimbleness of a Dancing-Master is not at all prejudiced by being taught to move; nor doth any Mechanic, I believe, exercise his Tools the worse by knowing how to use them. For my own Part, I cannot conceive that *Homer* or *Virgil* would have writ with more Fire, if, instead of being Masters of all the Learning of their Times, they had really been as ignorant as most of the Authors of the present Age. . . .

[109] I would not here be understood to insist on the same Fund of Learning in any of my Brethren, as *Cicero* perswades us is necessary to the Composition of an Orator. On the contrary, very little Reading is, I conceive, necessary to the Poet, less to the Critic, and the least of all to the Politician. For the first, perhaps, *Byss[h]e's* Art of Poetry, and a few of our modern Poets, may suffice; for the second, a moderate Heap of Plays; and for the last, an indifferent Collection of political Journals.

To say the Truth, I require no more than that a Man should have some little Knowledge of the Subject on which he treats, according to the old Maxim of Law, *Quam quisque norit artem in eâ se exercent.* With this alone a Writer may sometimes do tolerably well; and indeed without this, all the other Learning in the World will stand him in little stead. . . .

[110] To avoid a Multiplicity of Examples in so plain a Case, and to come at once to my Point, I am apt to conceive, that one Reason why many *English* Writers have totally failed in describing the Manners of upper Life, may possibly be, that in Reality they know nothing of it.

This is a Knowledge unhappily not in the Power of many Authors to arrive at. Books will give us a very imperfect Idea of it; nor will

the Stage a much better: The fine Gentleman formed upon reading the former will almost always turn out a Pedant, and he who forms himself upon the latter, a Coxcomb.

[111] Nor are the Characters drawn from these Models better supported. *Vanbrugh* and *Congreve* copied Nature; but they who copy them draw as unlike the present Age, as *Hogarth* would do if he was to paint a Rout or a Drum in the Dresses of *Titian* and of *Vandyke*. In short, Imitation here will not do the Business. The Picture must be after Nature herself. A true Knowledge of the World is gained only by Conversation, and the Manners of every Rank must be seen in order to be known.





# SAMUEL JOHNSON

## From *The Rambler* (1750)

No. 4<sup>1</sup>

[19] THE Works of Fiction, with which the present Generation seems more particularly delighted, are such as exhibit Life in its true State, diversified only by the Accidents that daily happen in the World, and influenced by those Passions and Qualities which are really to be found in conversing with Mankind.

THIS Kind of Writing may be termed not improperly the Comedy of Romance, and is to be conducted nearly by the Rules of Comic Poetry. Its Province is to bring about natural Events by easy Means, and to keep up Curiosity without the Help of Wonder; it is therefore precluded from the Machines and Expedients of the Heroic Romance.

[20] . . . almost all the Fictions of the last Age will vanish, if you deprive them of a Hermit and a Wood, a Battle and a Shipwreck.

WHY this wild Strain of Imagination found Reception so long, in polite and learned Ages, it is not easy to conceive; but we cannot wonder, that, while Readers could be procured, the Authors were willing to continue it: For when a Man had, by Practice, gained some Fluency of Language, he had no farther Care than to retire to his Closet, to let loose his Invention, and heat his Mind with Incredibilities; and a Book was produced without Fear of Criticism, without the Toil of Study, without Knowledge of Nature, or Acquaintance with Life.

THE Task of our present Writers is very different; it requires, together with that Learning which is to be gained from Books, that Experience which can never be attained by solitary Diligence, but must arise from general Converse, and accurate Observation of the living World. Their Performances have . . . little Indulgence, and therefore more Difficulty. They are engaged in Portraits of which every one knows the Original, and can therefore detect any

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1. Text of the first collected edition, London: J. Payne and J. Bouquet, 1751.

Deviations from Exactness of Resemblance. Other Writings are safe, except from the Malice of Learning; but these are in danger from every common Reader. . . .

But the Danger of not being approved as just Copyers of human Manners, is not the most important Apprehension that an Author of this Sort ought to have before him. These Books are written chiefly to the Young, the Ignorant, and the Idle, to whom they serve as Lectures of Conduct, and Introductions into Life. . . .

[21] In the Romances formerly written every Transaction and Sentiment was so remote from all that passes among Men, that the Reader was in very little danger of making any Applications to himself. . . .

BUT when an Adventurer is levelled with the rest of the World, and acts in such Scenes of the universal Drama, as may be the Lot of any other Man, young Spectators fix their Eyes upon him with closer Attention, and hope by observing his Behaviour and Success to regulate their own Practices, when they shall be engaged in the like Part.

FOR this Reason these familiar Histories may perhaps be made of greater Use than the Solemnities of professed Morality, and convey the Knowledge of Vice and Virtue with more Efficacy than Axioms and Definitions. But if the Power of Example is so great, as to take Possession of the Memory by a kind of Violence, and produce Effects almost without the Intervention of the Will, Care ought [22] to be taken that, when the Choice is unrestrained, the best Examples only should be exhibited. . . .

THE chief Advantage which these Fictions have over real Life is, that their Authors are at liberty, tho' not to invent, yet to select Objects, and to cull from the Mass of Mankind, those Individuals upon which the Attention ought most to be employ'd. . . .

It is justly considered as the greatest Excellency of Art, to imitate Nature; but it is necessary to distinguish those Parts of Nature, which are most proper for Imitation . . . . If the World be promiscuously described, I cannot see of what Use it can be to read the Account; or why it may not be as safe to turn the Eye immediately upon Mankind, as upon a Mirrour which shows all that presents itself without Discrimination.

It is therefore not a sufficient Vindication of a Character, that it is drawn as it appears; for many Characters ought never to be drawn; nor of a Narrative, that the Train of Events is agreeable to Observation and Experience; for that Observation which is called Knowledge of the World, will be found much more frequently to

make Men cunning than good. The Purpose of these Writings is surely not only to show Mankind, but to provide that they may be seen hereafter with less Hazard; . . . to increase Prudence without impairing Virtue.

[23] MANY Writers for the sake of following Nature, so mingle good and bad Qualities in their principal Personages, that they are both equally conspicuous; and as we accompany them through their Adventures with Delight, and are led by Degrees to interest ourselves in their Favour, we lose the Abhorrence of their Faults, because they do not hinder our Pleasure, or, perhaps, regard them with some Kindness for being united with so much Merit. . . .

[24] IN Narratives, where historical Veracity has no Place, I cannot discover why there should not be exhibited the most perfect Idea of Virtue; of Virtue not angelical, nor above Probability; for what we cannot credit we shall never imitate; but of the highest and purest Kind that humanity can reach, which, when exercised in such Trials as the various Revolutions of Things shall bring upon it, may, by conquering some Calamities, and enduring others, teach us what we may hope, and what we may perform. Vice, for Vice is necessary to be shewn, should always excite disgust; nor should the Graces of Gaiety, or the Dignity of Courage, be so united with it, as to reconcile it to the Mind. Wherever it appears, it should raise Hatred by the Malignancy of its Practices; and Contempt, by the Meanness of its Stratagems; for while it is supported by either Parts or Spirit, it will be seldom heartily abhorred. . . . there are thousands of the Readers of Romances willing to be thought wicked, if they may be allowed to be Wits. It is therefore to be always inculcated, that Virtue is the highest Proof of a superior Understanding, and the only solid Basis of Greatness; and that Vice is the natural Consequence of narrow Thoughts; that it begins in Mistake, and ends in Ignominy.



# ISAAC HAWKINS BROWNE

From *On Design and Beauty* (1768)<sup>1</sup>

- [100] On trifles ne'er let Art her strength exhaust,  
There is a littleness in lavish cost:  
Who read thee, Swift, so frugal is thy skill,  
Think they supply, when they but comment still.  
True elegance appears with mild restraint,  
Decent, discreet, and proper, yet not quaint.  
Some works are made too accurate to please;  
But graceful those, that seem perform'd with ease:  
It profits oft to play the careless part,  
As tumblers trip but to conceal their Art;  
Nature alone can move: the pow'rs of wit  
Her shape assuming, charm but while they cheat.  
Be thou not formal, yet with method free;  
Sole fountain this, of perspicuity:  
'Tis lucid Order will the parts unite,  
Like parts to like, opposing opposite.
- [101] In sound, 'tis Harmony that charms the ear,  
Yet discords intermingled here and there,  
Still make the sweet similitude appear.  
Each by its opposite a lustre gains,  
As hills the vales assist, and woods the plains;  
Grateful variety! so fair DESIGN  
Loves to distinguish where it cannot join;  
Yet then, to Truth and Nature ever just,  
Nor joins, nor separates, but when it must.  
Fondly some authors deck the dainty piece  
With false resemblance, false antithesis;

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1. Although Browne's *Essay* was not published until 1768, after his death, it is included here because it was composed (according to the article on Browne in the *Dictionary of National Biography*) prior to 1744 and probably after 1727 and thus falls within the time limits of this collection. The *Essay's* influence was not, naturally, widespread until it was published; but it circulated in manuscript among Browne's friends and acquaintances and therefore merits consideration as a production of the second quarter of the century.

Fantastic apes of BEAUTY, who beget  
Romance in science, quaint conceits in wit;  
Such phantoms, when we think the substance near,  
Mock our embrace, and vanish into air.

Of all, which late posterity will own,  
Truth is the basis, lasting Truth alone.  
For what can symmetry of parts avail,  
T<sup>o</sup> uphold a building, of materials frail?

[102] To reach perfection then, whoe'er aspires,  
Extent of knowledge adds to native fires. . . .

At length when searching thought, and ceaseless toil,  
Have gather'd and secur'd the noble spoil;  
Well may the learned Artist then DESIGN,  
His fancy teeming, fraught has magazine;  
Thence draw materials, next, in order range,  
Compare, distinguish, raise, diminish, change,

[103] Aggroupe the figures here, and there oppose,  
To these a lustre give, a shade to those:  
Till each with each consenting form a Whole,  
Firm as a phalanx, as a concert, full.

Such charms the pow'rs of symmetry dispense,  
Bright Emanation of Intelligence!  
From Mind alone delightful Order springs,  
She tempers and adjusts the mass of things;  
From darkness calls forth light, design from chance,  
And bids each atom into form advance. . . .

[104] Search then Perfection, BEAUTY search, around  
Through all her forms, fairest in Virtue found.  
Else could the memory of each ancient sage,  
Themselves unknown, delight a distant age?

[105] Ancients, who life enrich'd with Arts, and Laws;  
Or fell, or conquer'd, in their country's cause:  
What shrines, what altars to their ashes rear'd,  
As heroes honour'd, and as Gods rever'd;  
And Godlike They, whose virtues unconfin'd  
Bless latest times, and dignify mankind;  
Not with low duties fill a private space,  
But are the guardian pow'rs of human race.

Virtue, the more diffus'd, the fairer shows;  
Fairest, That only which no limits knows.  
Hail sov'reign Good! unmixt, unfading Good!  
BEAUTY, whose essence fills infinitude!

Whate'er of fair and excellent is found  
Through earth, through heav'n, above, beneath, around,  
All that in Art, and Nature can invite,  
Are but faint beamings of thy perfect light. . . .

[107] True Poets are themselves a Poem, each  
A pattern of the lovely rules they teach;  
Those fair ideas that their fancy charm,  
Inspire their lives, and every action warm;  
And when they chaunt the praise of high desert,  
They but transcribe the dictates of their heart.

[108] Thus is Apollo's laureat priest endow'd,  
Himself a temple worthy of the God.  
Such, Homer, Solon, Phineus are enroll'd;  
Sages, and lawgivers, and prophets old:  
All Poets, all inspir'd; an awful train,  
Seated on Pindus' head, apart from the profane.





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[The purpose of the following bibliography is twofold: (1) to provide citations to secondary works referred to in the introduction, and (2) to present a brief and selective bibliography of secondary works dealing with English literary criticism 1726-1750 which have been consulted in the preparation of this collection and which would be useful to a student of the period. A list of abbreviations of periodicals will be found at the end of the bibliography.]

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## *Abbreviations of Periodicals*

<i>ELH</i>	Journal of English Literary History
<i>HLQ</i>	Huntington Library Quarterly
<i>JAAC</i>	Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism
<i>JEGP</i>	Journal of English and Germanic Philology
<i>MLN</i>	Modern Language Notes
<i>MP</i>	Modern Philology
<i>PMLA</i>	Publications of the Modern Language Association of America
<i>PQ</i>	Philological Quarterly
<i>SP</i>	Studies in Philology
<i>SQ</i>	Shakespeare Quarterly



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