

idiom of their language, he did not enough comply with the idiom of ours. If I would compare him with Shakespeare, I must acknowledge him the more correct poet, but Shakespeare the greater wit.⁹ Shakespeare was the Homer, or father of our dramatic poets; Jonson was the Virgil, the pattern of elaborate writing; I admire him, but I love Shakespeare. To conclude of him; as he has given us the most correct plays, so in the precepts which he has laid down in his *Discoveries*, we have as many and profitable rules for perfecting the stage, as any wherewith the French can furnish us."

1668

From The Author's Apology for Heroic Poetry and Heroic License¹

["Boldness" of Figures and Tropes Defended:
The Appeal to "Nature"]

* * * They, who would combat general authority with particular opinion, must first establish themselves a reputation of understanding better than other men. Are all the flights of heroic poetry to be concluded bombast, unnatural, and mere madness, because they are not affected with their excellencies? It is just as reasonable as to conclude there is no day, because a blind man cannot distinguish of light and colors. Ought they not rather, in modesty, to doubt of their own judgments, when they think this or that expression in Homer, Virgil, Tasso, or Milton's *Paradise* to be too far strained, than positively to conclude that 'tis all fustian and mere nonsense? 'Tis true there are limits to be set betwixt the boldness and rashness of a poet; but he must understand those limits who pretends to judge as well as he who undertakes to write: and he who has no liking to the whole ought, in reason, to be excluded from censuring of the parts. He must be a lawyer before he mounts the tribunal; and the jurisdiction of one court, too, does not qualify a man to preside in another. He may be an excellent pleader in the Chancery, who is not fit to rule the Common Pleas. But I will presume for once to tell them that the boldest strokes of poetry, when they are managed artfully, are those which most delight the reader.

Virgil and Horace, the severest writers of the severest age, have made frequent use of the hardest metaphors and of the strongest hyperboles; and in this case the best authority is the best argument, for generally to have pleased, and through all ages, must bear the force of universal tradition. And if you would appeal from thence to right reason, you will gain no more by it in effect than, first, to set up your reason against those authors, and, secondly, against all those who have admired them. You must prove why that ought not to have pleased which has pleased the most learned and the most judicious; and, to be thought knowing, you must first put the fool upon all mankind. If you can enter more deeply than they have done into the causes and resorts² of that

9. Genius.

1. This essay was prefixed to Dryden's *State of Innocence*, the libretto for an opera (never produced), based on *Paradise Lost*. Dryden had been ridiculed for the extravagant and bold imagery and rhetorical figures that are typical of the style of his rhymed heroic plays. This preface is a defense not only of his own predilection for

what Samuel Johnson described as "wild and daring sallies of sentiment, in the irregular and eccentric violence of wit"; but also of the theory that heroic and idealized materials should be treated in lofty and boldly metaphorical style; hence his definition of wit as poetry.

2. Mechanical springs that set something in motion.

which moves pleasure in a reader, the field is open, you may be heard: but those springs of human nature are not so easily discovered by every superficial judge: it requires philosophy, as well as poetry, to sound the depth of all the passions, what they are in themselves, and how they are to be provoked; and in this science the best poets have excelled. * * * From hence have sprung the tropes and figures,³ for which they wanted a name who first practiced them and succeeded in them. Thus I grant you that the knowledge of Nature was the original rule, and that all poets ought to study her, as well as Aristotle and Horace, her interpreters.⁴ But then this also undeniably follows, that those things which delight all ages must have been an imitation of Nature—which is all I contend. Therefore is rhetoric made an art; therefore the names of so many tropes and figures were invented, because it was observed they had such and such effect upon the audience. Therefore catachreses and hyperboles⁵ have found their place amongst them; not that they were to be avoided, but to be used judiciously and placed in poetry as heightenings and shadows are in painting, to make the figure bolder, and cause it to stand off to sight. * * *

[Wit as "Propriety"]

* * * [Wit] is a propriety of thoughts and words; or, in other terms, thought and words elegantly adapted to the subject. If our critics will join issue on this definition, that we may *convenire in aliquo tertio*;⁶ if they will take it as a granted principle, it will be easy to put an end to this dispute. No man will disagree from another's judgment concerning the dignity of style in heroic poetry; but all reasonable men will conclude it necessary that sublime subjects ought to be adorned with the sublimest, and, consequently, often with the most figurative expressions. * * *

1677

From A Discourse Concerning the Original and Progress of Satire¹

[The Art of Satire]

* * * How easy is it to call rogue and villain, and that wittily! But how hard to make a man appear a fool, a blockhead, or a knave without using any of those opprobrious terms! To spare the grossness of the names, and to do the thing yet more severely, is to draw a full face, and to make the nose and cheeks

3. I.e., such figures of speech as metaphors and similes; "Tropes"; the use of a word in a figurative sense.

4. In the words of the French critic René Rapin, the translations were made by Dryden and other writers, among them William Congreve. Dryden traces the origin and development of verse satire in Rome and in a very fine passage contrasts Horace and Juvenal as satiric poets. It is plain that he prefers the "tragic" satire of Juvenal to the urbane and laughing satire of Horace. But in the passage printed here, he praises his own satiric character of Zimri (the duke of Buckingham) in *Abelom and Achitophel* for the very reason that it is modeled on Horatian "raillery," not Juvenalian invective.

5. Deliberate overstatement or exaggeration. "Catachresis"; the use of a word in a sense remote from its normal meaning.

6. "To find some means of agreement, in a third term, between the two opposites" (W. P. Ker's note).

1. This passage is an excerpt from the long and ram-

28

stand out; and yet not to employ any depth of shadowing.² This is the mystery of that noble trade, which yet no master can teach to his apprentice; he may give the rules; but the scholar is never the nearer in his practice. Neither is it true that this fineness of railery³ is offensive. A witty man is tickled while he is hurt in this manner, and a fool feels it not. The occasion of an offense may possibly be given, but he cannot take it. If it be granted that in effect this way does more mischief; that a man is secretly wounded, and though he be not sensible himself, yet the malicious world will find it out for him; yet there is still a vast difference betwixt the slovenly butchering of a man, and the fineness of a stroke that separates the head from the body, and leaves it standing in its place. A man may be capable, as Jack Ketch's⁴ wife said of his servant, of a plain piece of work, a bare hanging; but to make a malefactor die sweetly was only belonging to her husband. I wish I could apply it to myself, if the reader would be kind enough to think it belongs to me. The character of Zimri in my *Absalom*⁵ is, in my opinion, worth the whole poem: it is not bloody, but it is ridiculous enough; and he, for whom it was intended, was too witty to resent it as an injury. If I had railed,⁶ I might have suffered for it justly; but I managed my own work more happily, perhaps more dexterously. I avoided the mention of great crimes, and applied myself to the representing of blindides, and little extravagancies; to which, the wittier a man is, he is generally the more obnoxious.⁷ It succeeded as I wished; the jest went round, and he was laughed at in his turn who began the frolic. * * *

1693

From The Preface to *Fables Ancient and Modern*¹

[In Praise of Chaucer]

In the first place, as he is the father of English poetry, I hold him in the same degree of veneration as the Grecians held Homer, or the Romans Virgil. He is a perpetual fountain of good sense; learned in all sciences;² and, therefore, speaks properly on all subjects. As he knew what to say, so he knows also when to leave off; a continence which is practiced by few writers, and scarcely by any of the ancients, excepting Virgil and Horace. * * *

Chaucer followed Nature everywhere, but was never so bold to go beyond her; and there is a great difference of being *poeta* and *nimis poeta*,³ if we may believe Catullus, as much as betwixt a modest behavior and affectation. The verse of Chaucer, I confess, is not harmonious to us; but 'tis like the eloquence

2. Early English miniaturists prided themselves on the art of giving roundness to the full face without painting in shadows.

3. Satirical mirth, good-natured satire.

4. A notorious public executioner of Dryden's time (d. 1686). His name later became a generic term for all members of his profession.

5. *Absalom and Achitophel*, lines 544-568 (pp. 1804-5).

6. Reviled, abused. Observe that the verb differed in meaning from its noun, defined above.

7. Liable.
1. Dryden's final work, published in the year of his death, was a collection of translations from Homer,

of one whom Tacitus commends, it was *auribus istius temporis accommodata*:⁴ they who lived with him, and some time after him, thought it musical; and it continues so, even in our judgment, if compared with the numbers of Lydgate and Gower,⁵ his contemporaries; there is the rude sweetness of a Scotch tune in it, which is natural and pleasing, though not perfect. 'Tis true I cannot go so far as he who published the last edition of him;⁶ for he would make us believe the fault is in our ears, and that there were really ten syllables in a verse where we find but nine; but this opinion is not worth confuting; 'tis so gross and obvious an error that common sense (which is a rule in everything but matters of faith and revelation) must convince the reader that equality of numbers in every verse which we call heroic⁷ was either not known, or not always practiced in Chaucer's age. It were an easy matter to produce some thousands of his verses which are lame for want of half a foot, and sometimes a whole one, and which no pronunciation can make otherwise. We can only say that he lived in the infancy of our poetry, and that nothing is brought to perfection at the first. * * *

He must have been a man of a most wonderful comprehensive nature, because, as it has been truly observed of him, he has taken into the compass of his *Canterbury Tales* the various manners and humors (as we now call them) of the whole English nation in his age. Not a single character has escaped him. All his pilgrims are severally distinguished from each other; and not only in their inclinations but in their very physiognomies and persons. Baptista Porta⁸ could not have described their natures better than by the marks which the poet gives them. The matter and manner of their tales, and of their telling, are so suited to their different educations, humors, and callings that each of them would be improper in any other mouth. Even the grave and serious characters are distinguished by their several sorts of gravity: their discourses are such as belong to their age, their calling, and their breeding; such as are becoming of them, and of them only. Some of his persons are vicious, and some virtuous; some are unlearned, or (as Chaucer calls them) lewd, and some are learned. Even the ribaldry of the low characters is different: the Reeve, the Miller, and the Cook are several⁹ men, and distinguished from each other as much as the mencing Lady Prioresse and the broad-speaking, gap-toothed Wife of Bath. But enough of this; there is such a variety of game springing up before me that I am distracted in my choice, and know not which to follow. 'Tis sufficient to say, according to the proverb, that here is God's plenty. * * *

1700

4. "Suitable to the ears of that time." Tacitus was a Roman historian and writer on oratory (A.D. ca. 55-ca. 117).

5. John Gower (d. 1408) was a poet and friend of Chaucer. John Lydgate (ca. 1370-ca. 1449) wrote poetry that shows the influence of Chaucer. "Numbers": versification.

6. Thomas Speght's Chaucer, which Dryden used, was first published in 1598; the second edition, published in 1602, was reprinted in 1687.

7. The pentameter line. In Dryden's time few readers knew how to pronounce Middle English, especially the syllabic *e*. Moreover, Chaucer's works were known only in corrupt printed texts. As a consequence Chaucer's verse seemed rough and irregular.

8. Ciambattista della Porta (ca. 1535-1615), author of a Latin treatise on physiognomy.

9. Different.

29

Wit is Nature; it instances something that we have all thought, but whose sheer truth the poet now makes compelling through his or her language. True wit is subtle, sharp, and, above all, surprising—a striking image, a vivid metaphor, a paradoxical figure of speech. Addison and Johnson also delve into the nature of wit, but it is Pope who exemplifies the meanings of this complex word and idea more inventively than any other writer in the canon of eighteenth-century English literature.

The most memorable assessment of the *Essay* remains Samuel Johnson's: "[The *Essay*] exhibits every mode of excellence that can embellish or dignify didactic composition, selection of matter, novelty of arrangement, justness of precept, splendour of illustration, and propriety of digression." It is a hopeful work, all the more affecting in light of the political quarrels and ferocious literary feuds in which Pope engaged later in his career. These climaxed in his gigantic satire of literary idiosyncrasy, *The Dunciad*, in *Four Books*, published in October 1743. In this great last text of his poetic career, Pope describes the sublime awfulness of hordes of pedants, false poets, and dunces. His dazzling punitive wit here takes on the grotesque grandeur of mock-epic, on a scale eclipsing that displayed in the elegant, highly cultivated early work. *The Dunciad* shows Pope's angry realization of the difficulty in winning wide acceptance for the neoclassical views that he had advocated and had described with both power and grace in *An Essay on Criticism*.

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Alexander Pope

An Essay on Criticism

—Si quid novisti rectius istis,
Candidus imperti; si non, his utere mecum.

—HORAT.

Tis hard to say, if greater Want of Skill
Appear in Writing or in Judging ill;
But, of the two, less dang'rous is th' Offence,
To tire our Patience, than mis-lead our Sense:
Some few in that, but Numbers err in this,
A Fool might once himself alone expose,
Now One in Verse makes many more in Prose.
Tis with our Judgments as our Watches, none
Go just alike, yet each believes his own.
In Poets as true Genius is but rare,
True Taste as seldom is the Critick's Share;
Both must alike from Heav'n derive their Light,
These born to Judge, as well as those to Write.
Let such teach others who themselves excell,
And censure freely who have written well.
Authors are partial to their Wit, 'tis true,
But are not Criticks to their Judgment too?
Yet if we look more closely, we shall find
Most have the Seeds of Judgment in their Mind;
Nature affords at least a glimmering Light,
The Lines, tho' touch'd but faintly, are drawn right,
But as the slightest Sketch, if justly trac'd,
Is by ill Colouring but the more disgrac'd,
So by false Learning is good Sense defac'd,
Some are bewilder'd in the Maze of Schools,
And some are wilder'd in the Maze of Fools.
In search of Wit these lose their common Sense,
And then turn Criticks in their own Defence.

30 Each burns alike, who can, or cannot write,
Or with a *Rival's*, or an *Ennuch's* spite,
All *Fools* have still an Itching to deride,
And faint *wou'd* be upon the *Laughing Side*:
If *Mævius* Scribble in *Apollo's*⁴ spight

35 There are, who *judge* still *worse* than he can *write*.
Some have at first for *Wits*, then *Poets* past,
Turn'd *Criticks* next, and prov'd plain *Fools* at last,
Some neither can for *Wits* nor *Criticks* pass,
As heavy Mules are neither *Horse* nor *Ass*.

40 Those half-learn'd *Witlings*, num'rous in our *Isle*,
As half-form'd *Insects* on the Banks of *Nile*:⁵
Unfinish'd Things, one knows not what to call,
Their Generation's so *equivocal*:
To tell 'em, wou'd a *hundred Tongues* require,

45 Or *one vain Wit's*, that might a hundred tire.
But you who seek to *give* and *merit* Fame,
And justly bear a *Critick's* noble Name,
Be sure *your self* and your own *Reach* to know,
How far your *Genius*, *Taste*, and *Learning* go;

50 Launch not beyond your *Depth*, but be discreet,
And mark that *Point* where *Sense* and *Duiness meet*.
Nature to all things fix'd the *Limits* fit,
And wisely curb'd proud *Man's* pretending *Wit*:
As on the *Land* while *here* the *Ocean* gains,
In *other Parts* it leaves wide sandy *Plains*;

55 Thus in the *Soul* while *Memory* prevails,
The solid *Pow'r* of *Understanding* fails;
Where Beams of warm *Imagination* play,
The *Memory's* soft *Figures* melt away.
One *Science*⁷ only will one *Genius* fit;
So vast is *Art*,⁸ so *narrow* Human *Wit*:
Not only bounded to *peculiar Arts*,
But oft in *those*, confin'd to *single Parts*.

60 Like *Kings* we lose the *Conquests* gain'd before,
By *vain Ambition* still to make them more:
Each might his *several Province* well command,
Wou'd all but *stoop* to what they *understand*.
First follow *NATURE*,⁹ and your *Judgment* frame
By her just *Standard*, which is still the same:¹
Unerring Nature, still divinely bright,
One *clear, unchang'd*, and *Universal* Light,
Life, *Force*, and *Beauty*, must to all impart,
At once the *Source*, and *End*, and *Test* of *Art*.

70

4. Greek and Roman god of poetry. Mævius: a bad poet (1st c. B.C.E.), to whom both Virgil (*Eclogue* 3) and Horace (*Epode* 10) allude.

5. The ancients believed that forms of animal and insect life were spontaneously generated on the banks of the Nile River.

6. Count.

7. Branch of learning.

8. Pope alludes to a maxim attributed to Hippocrates (469–399 B.C.E.), celebrated Greek phys-

cian: "Life is short, but art [sometimes translated 'science'] is long, opportunity fleeting, experiment dangerous, judgment difficult."

9. The term encompasses the physical world, the sum of human experiences, and the principle of order and coherence in the universe.

1. Compare JOHN DRYDEN's claim in *Parallel* *Poetry and Painting* (1695): "For Nature is still the same in all ages, and can never be contrary to herself."

Art from that *Fund* each *just Supply* provides,
Works *without Show*,² and *without Pomp* presides:
In some fair *Body* thus th' informing *Soul*
With *Spirits* feeds, with *Vigour* fills the whole,
Each *Motion* guides, and ev'ry *Nerve* sustains;
It *self unseen*, but in th' *Effects*, remains.

80 Some, to whom *Heav'n* in *Wit* has been profuse,
Want as much more, to turn it to its use;
For *Wit's* and *Judgment* often are at strife,
Tho' meant each other's *Aid*, like *Man* and *Wife*.
'Tis more to *guide* than *spur* the *Muse's Steed*,⁴
Restrain his *Fury*, than provoke his *Speed*.

85 Shows most true *Mettle* when you *check* his *Course*.
Those *RULES* of old *discover'd*, not *devis'd*,
Are *Nature* still, but *Nature Methodiz'd*,
Nature, like *Liberty*,⁵ is but restrain'd
By the same *Laws* which first *herself* ordain'd.
Hear how learn'd *Greece* her useful *Rules* indites,

90 When to repress, and when indulge our *Flights*:
High on *Parnassus*⁷ Top her *Sons* she show'd,
And pointed out those arduous *Paths* they trod,
Held from afar, aloft, th' *Immortal Prize*,
And urg'd the rest by equal *Steps* to rise;
Just *Precepts* thus from great *Examples* giv'n,
She drew from *them* what they deriv'd from *Heav'n*.

95 The gen'rous *Critick* fann'd the *Poet's Fire*,
And taught the *World*, with *Reason* to *Admire*.
Then *Criticism* the *Muse's* *Handmaid* prov'd,
To dress her *Charms*, and make her more *belov'd*;
But following *Wits* from that *Intention* stray'd,
Who cou'd not win the *Mistress*, wou'd the *Maid*;

100 Against the *Poets* their *own Arms* they turn'd,
Sure to hate most the *Men* from whom they *learn'd*.
So modern *Poethecaries*, taught the *Art*
By *Doctor's Bills*⁸ to play the *Doctor's Part*,
Bold in the *Practice* of *mistaken Rules*,
Prescribe, apply, and call their *Masters Fools*.
Some on the *Leaves*⁹ of ancient *Authors* prey,
Nor *Time* nor *Moths* e'er spoil'd so much as they:

105 Some *dryly plain*, without *Invention's Aid*,
Write dull *Receipts*¹ how *Poems* may be made:
These leave the *Sense*, their *Learning* to display,
And these explain the *Meaning* quite away.

110

115

Pope here recalls the familiar Latin maxim *ars est celare artem* (the art is to conceal the art).

2. Wit has a range of meanings, including reason-

ing power; intelligence; mental soundness; sanity;

3. The term encompasses the physical world, the sum of human experiences, and the principle of

order and coherence in the universe.

4. Compare JOHN DRYDEN's claim in *Parallel*

Poetry and Painting (1695): "For Nature is still the same in all ages, and can never be contrary

to herself."

5. Branch of learning.

6. Pope alludes to a maxim attributed to Hippocrates (469–399 B.C.E.), celebrated Greek phys-

9 daughters of Memory who preside over the arts and all intellectual pursuits.

5. High spirited, noble.

6. In the manuscript, Pope wrote "monarchy"

7. Mountain in central Greece, sacred to Apollo, the *Muses*, and *Dionysus*.

8. Medical prescriptions. "Poethecaries": druggists.

9. Pages.

1. Recipes; prescriptions.

120 You then whose Judgment the right Course wou'd steer,
 Know well each ANCIENT's proper Character,
 His *Fable*, *Subject*, *Scope*: in ev'ry Page,
 Religion, Country, Genius of his Age;
 Without all these at once before your Eyes,
Cavil you may, but never Criticize.
 125 Be *Homer's* Works² your *Study*, and *Delight*,
 Read them by Day, and meditate by Night,
 Thence form your Judgment, thence your Maxims bring,
 And trace the *Muses upward* to their *Spring*:³
 Still with *It self compar'd*, his *Text* peruse;
 And let your *Comment* be the *Mantuan Muse*.⁴
 130 When first young *Maro* in his boundless Mind
 A Work t'outlast *Immortal Rome* design'd,
 Perhaps he seem'd *above* the Critick's Law,
 And but from *Nature's Fountains* scorn'd to draw:
 But when t'examine ev'ry Part he came,
 135 *Nature* and *Homer* were, he found, the same:
 Convinc'd; amaz'd, he checks the bold Design,
 And Rules as strict his labour'd Work confine,
 As if the *Stagyrie*⁵ o'erlook'd each Line.
 Learn hence for *Ancient Rules* a just Esteem;
 To copy *Nature* is to copy *Them*.
 140 Some Beauties yet, no Precepts can declare,
 For there's a *Happiness*⁶ as well as *Care*.
Musick resembles *Poetry*, in each
 Are *nameless Graces* which no Methods teach,
 145 And which a *Master-Hand* alone can reach.
 If, where the *Rules* not far enough extend,
 (Since Rules were made but to promote their End)
 Some *Lucky LICENSE* answers to the full
 Th' Intent propos'd, that *License* is a *Rule*.
 150 Thus *Pegasus*, a nearer way to take,
 May boldly deviate from the common Track.
 Great Wits sometimes may *gloriously offend*,
 And rise to *Fausts*: true Criticks *dare not mend*,
 From *vulgar Bounds* with *brave Disorder* part,
 155 And *snatch* a *Grace* beyond the Reach of Art,
 Which, without passing thro' the *Judgment*, gains
 The *Heart*, and all its End at once attains.
 In *Prospects*, thus, some *Objects* please our Eyes,
 Which out of *Nature's common Order* rise,
 The shapeless *Rock*, or hanging *Precipice*.
 160 But tho' the *Ancients* thus their *Rules* invade,
 (As *Kings* dispense with *Laws* *Themselves* have made)
Moderns, beware! Or if you must offend

2. As the earliest Greek literature, *Homer's Iliad* and *Odyssey* (ca. 8th c. B.C.E.) were considered the source of all subsequent poetry.
 3. Hippocrene, a spring sacred to the Muses on Mt. Helicon, in central Greece.
 4. Virgil (70-19 B.C.E.), born near Mantua (his full name was Publius Vergilius Maro). As the

author of the greatest Latin epic, the *Aeneid*, he is often linked with *Homer*.
 5. ARISTOTLE (384-322 B.C.E.), born in Stagira (in Macedonia). Later critics derived the "rules" for tragedy and epic from his *Poetics* (see above).
 6. Good luck; felicity.

165 Against the *Precept*, ne'er transgress its *End*,
 Let it be *seldom*, and *compell'd* by *Need*,
 And have, at least, *Their Precedent* to plead.
 The Critick else proceeds without Remorse,
 Seizes your *Fame*, and puts his *Laws* in force.
 170 I know there are,⁷ to whose presumptuous Thoughts
 Those *Freer Beauties*, ev'n in *Them*, seem *Faults*:⁸
 Some *Figures monstrous* and *mis-shap'd* appear,
 Consider'd singly, or beheld too near,
 Which, but *proportion'd* to their *Light*, or *Place*,
 Due *Distance reconciles* to *Form* and *Grace*.
 175 A prudent Chief not always must display
 His Pow'rs in *equal Ranks*, and *fair Array*,
 But with th' *Occasion* and the *Place* comply,
Conceal his Force, nay seem sometimes to *Fly*.
 Those oft are *Stratagems* which *Errors* seem,
 180 Nor is it *Homer Nods*,⁹ but *We* that *Dream*.
 Still green with *Bays*! each *ancient Altar* stands,
 Above the reach of *Sacrilegious Hands*,
 Secure from *Flames*, from *Envy's fiercer Rage*,
 Destructive *War*, and all-involving *Age*.
 185 See, from each *Clime* the *Learn'd* their *Incence* bring;
 Hear, in all *Tongues* consenting² *Pæans* ring!
 In Praise so just, let ev'ry Voice be join'd,³
 And fill the *Gen'ral Chorus* of *Mankind*!
 190 Hail *Bards Triumphant*! born in *happier Days*,
Immortal Heirs of *Universal Praise*!
 Whose *Honours* with *Increase* of *Ages grow*,
 As *Streams* roll down, *enlarging* as they flow!
 Nations *unborn* your mighty Names shall sound,
 195 And *Worlds* applaud that must not yet be *found*!
 Oh may some *Spark* of *your Celestial Fire*
 The last, the meanest of your *Sons* inspire,
 (That on weak *Wings*, from far, pursues your *Flights*;
*Glow*s while he *reads*, but *trembles* as he *writes*)
 To teach vain *Wits* a *Science little known*,
 200 T' *admire* Superior Sense, and *doubt* their own!

OF all the Causes which conspire to blind
 Man's erring Judgment, and misguide the Mind,
 What the weak Head with strongest *Byass*⁴ rules,
 Is *Pride*, the *never-failing Vice* of *Fools*.
 205 Whatever Nature has in *Worth* deny'd,
 She gives in large *Recruits*⁵ of *needful Pride*;
 For as in *Bodies*, thus in *Souls*, we find
 What wants in *Blood* and *Spirits*, swell'd with *Wind*,
Pride, where *Wit* fails, steps in to our *Defence*,

That is, I know there are those.
 Pronounced "fawts."

Compare *Horace*, Ars *Poetica*, lines 358-59:
 "good Homer goes to sleep" (often translated "muds").
 Laurels, associated with *Apollo* and thus with

poetry.
 2. In harmony.
 3. Pronounced "lined."
 4. Bias, a term from lawn bowling: the irregularity in the shape of the ball that causes it to swerve.
 5. Supplies, troops, reinforcements.

210 And fills up all the mighty Void of Sense!
 If once right Reason drives that Cloud away,
 Truth breaks upon us with resistless Day;
 Trust not upon self; but your Defects to know,
 Make use of ev'ry Friend—and ev'ry Foe.
 215 A little Learning is a dang'rous Thing;
 Drink deep, or taste: not the Pierian⁶ Spring:
 There shallow Draughts intoxicate the Brain,
 And drinking largely sobers us again.
 220 Fir'd at first Sight with what the Muse imparts,
 In fearless Youth we tempt⁷ the Heights of Arts,
 While from the bounded Level of our Mind,
 Short Views we take, nor see the Lengths behind,
 But more advanc'd, behold with strange Surprise
 225 New, distant Scenes of endless Science rise!
 So pleas'd at first, the towering Alps we try,
 Mount o'er the Vales, and seem to tread the Sky;
 Th' Eternal Snows appear already past,
 And the first Clouds and Mountains seem the last:
 230 But those attain'd, we tremble to survey
 The growing Labours of the lengthen'd Way,
 Th' increasing Prospect tires our wandring Eyes,
 Hills peep o'er Hills, and Alps on Alps arise!
 A perfect Judge will read each Work of Wit
 235 With the same Spirit that its Author writ,
 Survey the Whole, nor seek slight Faults to find,
 Where Nature moves, and Rapture warms the Mind,
 Nor lose, for that malignant dull Delight,
 The gen'rous Pleasure to be charm'd with Wit.
 240 But in such Lays⁸ as neither ebb, nor flow,
 Correctly cold, and regularly low,
 That shunning Faults, one quiet Tenour keep;
 We cannot blame indeed—but we may sleep.
 In Wit, as Nature, what affects our Hearts
 245 Is not th' Exactness of peculiar Parts;
 'Tis not a Lip, or Eye, we Beauty call,
 But the joint Force and full Result of all.
 Thus when we view some well-proportion'd Dome,⁹
 (The World's just Wonder, and ev'n thine O Rome!)
 250 No single Parts unequally surprize;
 All comes united to th' admiring Eyes;
 No monstrous Height, or Breadth, or Length appear,
 The Whole at once is Bold, and Regular.
 Whoever thinks a faultless Piece to see,
 255 Thinks what ne'er was; nor is, nor e'er shall be.
 In ev'ry Work regard the Writer's End,
 Since none can compass more than they Intend,
 And if the Means be just, the Conduct true,

Applause, in spite of trivial Faults, is due.¹
 As Men of Breeding, sometimes Men of Wit,
 260 T' avoid great Errors, must the less commit,
 Neglect the Rules each Verbal Critick lays,
 For not to know some Trifles, is a Praise.
 Most Criticks, fond of some subservient Art,
 Still make the Whole depend upon a Part,
 265 They talk of Principles, but Notions prize,
 And All to one lov'd Folly Sacrifice.
 Once on a time, La Mancha's Knight,² they say,
 A certain Bard encountering on the Way,
 Discours'd in Terms as just, with Looks as Sage,
 270 As e'er cou'd Dennis,³ of the Grecian Stage:
 Concluding all were desprate Sots and Fools,
 Who durst depart from Aristotle's Rules.
 Our Author, happy in a Judge so nice,⁴
 Produc'd his Play, and beg'd the Knight's Advice,
 275 Made him observe the Subject and the Plot,
 The Manners, Passions, Unities,⁵ what not?
 All which, exact to Rule were brought about,
 Were but a Combate in the Lists⁶ left out.
 What! Leave the Combate out? Exclaims the Knight;
 280 Yes, or we must renounce the Stagyrte.
 Not so by Heav'n (he answers in a Rage)
 Knights, Squires, and Steeds, must enter on the Stage.
 So vast a Throng the Stage can ne'er contain.
 Then build a New, or act it in a Plain.
 285 Thus Criticks, of less Judgment than Caprice,
 Curtous,⁷ not Knowing, not exact, but nice,
 Form short Ideas; and offend in Arts
 (As most in Manners) by a Love to Parts.
 Some to Conceits alone their Taste confine,
 290 And glittering Thoughts struck out⁹ at ev'ry Line;
 Pleas'd with a Work where nothing's just or fit;
 One glaring Chaos and wild Heap of Wit:
 Poets like Painters, thus, unskill'd to trace
 The naked Nature and the living Grace,
 295 With Gold and Jewels cover ev'ry Part,
 And hide with Ornaments their Want of Art.
 True Wit is Nature to Advantage drest,
 What oft was Thought, but ne'er so well Express'd,
 Something, whose Truth convinc'd at Sight we find,
 300 That gives us back the Image of our Mind:
 As Shades more sweetly recommend the Light,

1. Compare John Dryden, "The Author's Apology for Heroic Poetry" (1677): "His malicious and maliciously to snarl at the little lapses of a pen, from which Virgil himself stands not exempted."
 2. Don Quixote, title character of the work by Miguel de Cervantes (1605, 1615); but Pope's story is taken from a spurious sequel to Don Quixote written by Don Alonso Fernandez de Avellaneda (trans. 1705).
 3. John Dennis (1657-1734), English critic and playwright.
 4. Precise, overrefined.
 5. The neoclassical unities (of action, time, and place) thought to govern drama; see PIERRE CORNEILLE, *Of the Three Unities*. (1660; above).
 6. Field for jousting.
 7. Particular; difficult to satisfy.
 8. The extravagant use of similes and metaphors.
 9. Produced by a stroke of invention.

6. Belonging to the Pierides, another name for the Muses (the spring is Hippocrene).
 7. Attempt, dare.
 8. Songs; narrative poems or ballads.
 9. Specifically, the dome of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome (16th c.).

So modest Plainness sets off sprightly Wit:
 For Works may have more Wit than does 'em good,
 As Bodies perish through Excess of Blood.¹
 Others for Language all their Care express,
 And value Books, as Women Men, for Dress:
 Their Praise is still—*The Style is excellent*:
 The Sense, they humbly take upon Content.²
 Words are like Leaves; and where they most abound,
 Much Fruit of Sense beneath is rarely found.
False Eloquence, like the *Prismatic Glass*,
 Its gawdy Colours spreads on ev'ry place;³
 The Face of Nature we no more Survey,
 All glares alike, without *Distinction* gay:
 But true *Expression*, like th' unchanging Sun,
 Clears, and improves what'er it shines upon,
 It gilds all Objects, but it alters none.
 Expression is the Dress of Thought, and still
 Appears more decent as more suitable;
 A vile Conceit in pompous Words express,
 Is like a Clown in regal Purple dress;
 For different Styles with different Subjects sort,
 As several Garbs with Country, Town, and Court.
 Some by Old Words to Fame have made Pretence;
 Ancients in Phrase, meer Moderns in their Sense!
 Such labour'd Nothings, in so strange a Style,
 Amaze th'unlearn'd, and make the Learned Smile.
 Unlucky, as *Fungoso*⁴ in the Play,
 These Sparks with awkward Vanity display
 What the Fine Gentleman wore Yesterday!
 And but so mimic ancient Wits at best,
 As Apes our Grandires in their Doublets dress.
 In Words, as Fashions, the same Rule will hold;
 Alike Fantastick, if too New, or Old;
 Be not the first: by whom the New are try'd,
 Nor yet the last to lay the Old aside.
 But most by Numbers⁵ judge a Poet's Song,
 And smooth or rough, with them, is right or wrong;
 In the bright Muse tho' thousand Charms conspire,
 Her Voice is all these tuneful Fools admire,
 Who haunt Parnassus but to please their Ear,
 Not mend their Minds; as some to Church repair,
 Not for the Doctrine, but the Musick there.
 These Equal Syllables alone require,
 Tho' off the Ear the open Vowels tire,⁶
 While Expletives⁷ their feeble Aid do join,

1. Standard medical practice of Pope's time included bleeding patients to reduce their "excess of blood."
 2. Accept on authority.
 3. An allusion to Isaac Newton's *Optics* (1703), which discusses the prism and spectrum.
 4. A poor student in Ben Jonson's play *Every Man out of His Humour* (1599), who tries without success to keep up with the fashions.
 5. Meters.
 6. That is, when a word ending in a vowel is followed by a word beginning with one (e.g., the open). Throughout this passage, Pope exemplifies in his verse the fault or virtue discussed.
 7. Words used to complete the number of feet needed in a line of verse without adding to the sense.

And ten low Words oft creep in one dull Line,
 While they ring round the same unvary'd Chimes,
 With sure Returns of still expected Rhymes.
 Where'er you find the cooling Western Breeze,
 In the next Line, it whispers thro' the Trees;
 If *Chrystal Streams* with pleasing Murmurs creep,
 The Reader's threaten'd (not in vain) with Sleep.
 Then, at the last, and only Couplet fraught
 With some unmeaning Thing they call a Thought,
 A needless *Alexandrine*⁸ ends the Song,
 That like a wounded Snake, drags its slow length along.
 Leave such to tune their own dull Rhimes, and know
 What's roundly smooth, or languishingly slow;
 And praise the *Easie Vigor* of a Line,
 Where *Denham's* Strength, and *Waller's* Sweetness join.⁹
 True Ease in Writing comes from Art, not Chance,
 As those move easiest who have learn'd to dance.
 'Tis not enough no Harshness gives Offence,
 The Sound must seem an *Eccho* to the Sense.
 Soft is the Strain when *Zephyr*¹ gently blows,
 And the smooth Stream in smoother Numbers flows;
 But when loud Surges lash the sounding Shore,
 The hoarse, rough Verse should like the Torrent roar.
 When *Ajax*² strives, some Rock's vast Weight to throw,
 The Line too labours, and the Words move slow;
 Not so, when swift *Camilla*³ scours the Plain,
 Flies o'er th'unbending Corn, and skims along the Main.
 Hear how *Timotheus*⁴ vary'd Lays surprize,
 And bid Alternate Passions fall and rise!
 While, at each Change, the Son of *Lybian Jove*⁵
 Now burns with Glory, and then melts with Love;
 Now his fierce Eyes with sparkling Fury glow;
 Now Sights steal out, and Tears begin to flow:
 Persians and Greeks like *Turns of Nature*⁶ found,
 And the World's Victor stood subdu'd by Sound!
 The Pow'r of Musick all our Hearts allow,
 And what *Timotheus* was, is *Dryden* now.
 Avoid *Extrains*; and shun the Fault of such,
 Who still are pleas'd too little, or too much.
 At ev'ry Trifle: scorn to take Offence,
 That always shows Great Pride, or Little Sense;
 Those Heads as *Stomachs* are not sure the best
 Which nauseate all, and nothing can digest.

A line of 12 syllables (rather than the usual 10),
 Pope, like Dryden before him, admired the
 English poets John Denham (1615–1669) and
 especially Edmund Waller (1606–1687) for
 their improved English versification (in particu-
 lar the heroic couplet, the form used in this
 poem).
 like west wind; a gentle breeze.
 A Greek hero in the *Iliad*, known for his great
 strength.
 3. A woman warrior who fought against the Tro-
 jans in Italy. In *Aeneid* 7:808–11, Virgil describes
 her ability to skim over ears of wheat (i.e., "corn")
 and over the sea.
 4. Greek poet (ca. 450–ca. 360 B.C.E.).
 5. Alexander the Great (356–323 B.C.E.), who
 liked to claim that Zeus (identified with the Roman
 Jupiter) was his father. Priests of the celebrated
 oracle of Zeus Ammon in Siwa, north of the Libyan
 desert, greeted Alexander as the son of Zeus.
 6. Alternations of feelings.
 7.

390 Yet let not each gay Turn thy Rapture move,
 For Fools *Admire*, but Men of Sense *Approve*;⁷
 As things seem large which we thro' *Mists* descry,
Dulness is ever apt to *Magnify*.

395 Some foreign Writers, some our own despise;
 The Ancients only, or the *Moderns* prize:
 (Thus *Wit*, like *Faith*, by each Man is apply'd
 To one small *Sect*, and All are damn'd beside.)
 Meantly they seek the Blessing to confine,
 And force that *Sun* but on a *Part* to Shine;
 Which not alone the *Southern Wit* sublimes,⁸
 But ripens Spirits in cold *Northern Climes*;
 Which from the first has shone on *Ages past*,
 Enlightens the *present*, and shall warm the *last*:
 (Tho' each may feel *Increases* and *Decays*,
 And see now *clearer* and now *darker Days*)
 Regard not then if *Wit* be *Old* or *New*,
 But blame the *False*, and value still the *True*.

400 Some ne'er advance a Judgment of their own,
 But catch the *spreading Notion* of the *Town*;
 They reason and conclude by *Precedent*,
 And own *stale Nonsense* which they ne'er invent.
 Some judge of Authors' *Names*, not *Works*, and then
 Nor praise nor blame the *Writings*, but the *Men*.
 Of all this *Servile Herd* the worst is He
 That in *proud Dulness* joins with *Quality*,⁹
 A constant Critick at the Great-man's Board,
 To *fetch and carry* Nonsense for my Lord.
 What *woful stuff* this Madrigal wou'd be,
 In some star'd Hackny Sonneteer, ¹ or me?
 But let a Lord once own the *happy Lines*,
 How the *Wit brightens*! How the *Style refines*!
 Before his sacred Name flies ev'ry Fault,
 And each *exalted Stanza teems* with *Thought*!
 The *Vulgar* thus through *Imitation* err,
 As oft the *Learn'd* by being *Singular*;
 So much they scorn the Crowd, that if the Throng
 By *Chance* go right, they *purposely* go wrong;
 So Schismatics² the *plain Believers* quit,
 And are but damn'd for having *too much Wit*.

405 Some praise at Morning what they blame at Night;
 But always think the *last Opinion right*.
 A Muse by these is like a *Mistress us'd*,
 This hour she's *idoliz'd*, the next *abus'd*,
 While their weak Heads, like Towns unfortify'd,
 Twixt Sense and Nonsense daily change their Side.
 Ask them the Cause; *They're wiser still*, they say;
 And still to *Morrow's wiser* than to Day.
 We think our *Fathers Fools*, so wise we grow;

440 Our wiser Sons, no doubt, will think us so.
 Once *School-Divines*³ this zealous Isle o'erspread,
 Who knew most *Sentences*⁴ was *deepest read*;
 Faith, Gospel, All, seem'd made to be *disputed*,
 And none had *Sense enough* to be *Confuted*.
 Scotists and *Thomists*,⁵ now, in Peace remain,
 Amidst their *kindred Cobwebs* in *Duck-Lane*.⁶
 If *Faith* it self has *different Dresses* worn,
 What wonder *Modes* in *Wit* shou'd take their Turn?
 Oft, leaving what is *Natural* and fit,
 The *current Folly* proves the *ready Wit*.⁷
 And Authors think their Reputation safe,
 Which lives as long as *Fools* are pleas'd to *Laugh*.
 Some valuing those of their own *Side*, or *Mind*,
 Still make themselves the measure of Mankind;
 Fondly⁸ we think we honour Merit then,
 When we but praise *Our selves* in *Other Men*.
 Parties in *Wit* attend on those of *State*,
 And publick Faction doubles private Hate.
Pride, Malice, Folly, against *Dryden* rose,
 In various Shapes of *Parsons, Criticks, Beaus*;⁹
 But *Sense* surviv'd, when *merry Jest* were past;
 For rising Merit will *buoy up* at last.
 Might he return, and bless once more our Eyes,
 New *Blackmores* and new *Milbourns*¹ must arise;
 Nay shou'd great *Homer* lift his awful² Head,
*Zotius*³ again would start up from the Dead.
Envy will Merit as its *Shade* pursue,
 But like a Shadow, proves the *Substance true*;
 For envy'd Wit, like *Sol* Eclips'd, makes known
 Th' *opposing Body's* Grossness, not its *own*.
 When first that Sun too powerful Beams displays,
 It draws up Vapours which obscure its Rays;
 But ev'n those Clouds at last adorn its Way,
 Reflect new Glories, and augment the Day.
 Be thou the *first true Merit* to befriend;
 His Praise is lost, who stays till *All* commend;
 Short is the *Date*, alas, of *Modern Rhymes*;
 And 'tis but just to let 'em live *betimes*.⁴
 No longer now that Golden Age appears,

460 Medieval theologians.

A reference to Peter Lombard's *Four Books of Sentences* (ca. 1145–51), which in a long series of questions presents the views of the fathers and doctors of the church on complex doctrinal matters. It became the standard theological text of the Middle-Ages.

The two main schools of medieval philosophy were the followers of Duns Scotus (ca. 1270–1308) and of THOMAS AQUINAS (1225–1274).

At London street where old books were sold.

Facile, clever expression.

Boastfully.

John Wilmot (1647–1680) 9. second earl of Rochester, and George Villiers (1627–1687), second duke of Buckingham. "Parsons": these

included Jeremy Collier (1650–1726), whose *Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage* (1698) targeted Dryden. "Criticks": these included Thomas Shadwell (ca. 1642–1692), an English dramatist and poet who savagely attacked Dryden in the 1680s.

1. Luke Milbourne (1649–1720), a clergyman whose *Notes on Dryden's Virgil* (1698) criticized the translation. Sir Richard Blackmore (1654–1729), physician and poet who criticized Dryden in *Satire against Wit* (1700).

2. Awe-inspiring.

3. A 4th-century B.C.E. philosopher and grammarian notorious for his bitter attacks on the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.

4. Before it is too late.

7. Judge with discrimination (vs. wonder at without comprehension).
 8. Raises up.
 9. People of high rank.
 1. Hiring poet.
 2. Sectarians in religion.

When *Patriarch-Wits* surviv'd a *thousand Years*;
Now Length of *Fame* (our *second Life*) is lost,
And bare Threescore is all ev'n That can boast:
Our Sons their *Fathers' failing Language* see,
And such as *Chaucer* is, shall *Dryden* be.⁵
So when the faithful *Pencil* has design'd
Some *bright Idea* of the *Master's Mind*,
Where a *new World* leaps out at his command,
And ready Nature waits upon his Hand;

When the ripe Colours *soffen* and *unite*,
And sweetly *melt* into just Shade and Light,
When mellowing Years their full Perfection give,
And each *Bold Figure* just begins to *Live*;
The *treach'rous Colours* the fair *Art* betray,
And all the bright Creation fades away!

Unhappy *Wit*, like most mistaken Things,
Attunes not for the *Envy* which it brings.
In *Youth* alone its empty Praise we boast,
But soon the Short-liv'd Vanity is lost!

Like some fair *Flow'r* the early *Spring* supplies,
That gaily Blooms, but ev'n in blooming *Dies*:
What is this *Wit* which must our Cares employ?
The *Owner's Wife*, that *other Men* enjoy,

Then most our *Trouble* still when most *admir'd*,
And still the more we *give*, the more *requir'd*;
Whose *Fame* with *Pains* we guard, but lose with *Ease*,
Sure *some* to *vex*, but never *all* to *please*;

'Tis what the *Vicious fear*, the *Virtuous shun*;
By *Fools* 'tis *hated*, and by *Knaves undone*!
If *Wit* so much from *Ign'rance* undergo,
Ah let not *Learning* too commence its *Foe*!

Of *old*, those met *Rewards* who cou'd excel,
And such were *Prais'd* who but *endeavour'd well*:
Tho' *Triumphs* were to *Gen'rals* only due,
Crowns were reserv'd to grace the *Soldiers* too.⁶

Now, they who reach *Parnassus'* lofty Crown,
Employ their *Pains* to spurn some others down,
And while *Self-Love* each jealous *Writer* rules,
Contenting Wits become the *Sport of Fools*:
But still the *Worst* with most *Regret* commend,
For each *Ill Author* is as bad a *Friend*.

To what base Ends, and by what abject Ways,
Are *Mortals* urg'd thro' *Sacred Lust of Praise*!
Ah ne'er so *dire* a *Thirst of Glory* boast,
Nor in the *Crick* let the *Man* be lost!
Good-Nature and *Good-Sense* must ever join;
To Err is *Humane*;⁸ to Forgive, *Divine*.

But if in Noble Minds some Dregs remain,
Not yet purg'd off, of Spleen and sow'r Disdain,
Discharge that Rage on more Provoking Crimes,
Nor fear a Dearth in these Flagitious⁹ Times.

No Pardon vile *Obscenity* should find,
Tho' *Wit* and *Art* conspire to move your Mind;
But *Dulness* with *Obscenity* must prove
As Shameful sure as *Impotence* in *Love*.

In the fat Age of Pleasure, Wealth, and Ease,
Sprung the rank Weed, and thriv'd with large Increase;
When *Love* was all an ease Monarch's¹ Care;
Seldom at *Council*, never in a *War*:

Jits rul'd the State, and Statesmen *Farces* writ;
Nay *Wits* had *Pensions*, and young *Lords*² had *Wit*:
The Fair state panting at a *Courtier's Play*,
And not a *Mask*³ went *un-improv'd* away:

The modest Fan was lifted up no more,
And *Virgins smil'd* at what they *blush'd* before—
The following Licence of a Foreign Reign⁴
Did all the Dregs of bold *Socinus*⁵ drain;

Then Unbelieving Priests reform'd the Nation,
And taught more *Pleasant* Methods of Salvation;
Where Heav'n's Free Subjects might their *Rights* dispute,
Lest God himself shou'd seem too *Absolute*.

Pulpits their *Sacred Satire* learn'd to spare,
And *Vice admir'd*⁶ to find a *Flatt'rer* there!
Encourag'd thus, *Wit's Titans*⁷ brav'd the Skies,
And the Press groan'd with Licenc'd *Blasphemies*—

These Monsters, Criticks! with your Darts engage,
Here point your Thunder, and exhaust your Rage!
Yet shun their Fault, who, *Scandalously nice*,
Will needs *mistake* an Author *into Vice*;

All seems Infected that th' Infected spy,
As all looks yellow to the Jaundic'd Eye.⁸

LEARN then what *MORALS* Criticks ought to show,
For 'tis but *half a Judge's Task*, to *Know*.

'Tis not enough, Taste, Judgment, Learning, join;
In all you speak, let Truth and Candor⁹ shine:
That not alone what to your *Sense* is due,
All may allow; but seek your *Friendship* too.

Be *silent* always when you *doubt* your *Sense*;

Extremely wicked, heinous.

Charles II (1630–1685).
These include George Villiers, John Wilmot,
and Charles Sackville, sixth earl of Dorset (1638–
1706). "Jills": harlots, here Charles's mistresses.

Charles Sedley, *The Rehearsal* (1671); Sir
George Etherege, *The Man of Mode* (1676).

Fashionable women often wore masks to the
theater.

England's William III (1650–1702), whose poli-
tics increased toleration toward religious Noncon-
formists, came from the Netherlands.

5. Faustus Socinus (1539–1604), who developed
a doctrine rejecting the divinity of Christ that was
first espoused by his uncle, the Italian theologian
Laelius Socinus (1525–1562).

6. Was amazed.

7. Giants born of Earth and Heaven, whom Zeus
and the Olympian gods defeated in battle.

8. The Romans believed that to those suffering
from jaundice (a yellow discoloration of the skin
and the whites of the eyes), everything takes on a
yellow tinge.

9. Impartiality.

And speak, tho' sure, with seeming Diffidence:
Some positive persisting Fops we know,
Who, if once wrong, will needs be always so;
But you, with Pleasure own your Errors past,
And make each Day a Critick¹ on the last.

¹Tis not enough your Counsel still be true,
Blunt Truths more Mischief than nice Falshoods do;
Men must be taught as if you taught them not;
And Things unknown propos'd as Things forgot:
Without Good Breedings, Truth is disapprov'd;
That only makes Superior Sense below'd.

Be Niggards of Advice on no Pretence;
For the worst Avarice is that of Sense:
With mean Complacence² ne'er betray your Trust,
Nor be so Civil as to prove Unjust;
Fear not the Anger of the Wise to raise;
Those best can bear Reproof, who merit Praise.

²Twere well, might Criticks still this Freedom take;
But Appius³ reddens at each Word you speak,
And stares, Tremendous! with a threatening Eye,
Like some fierce Tyrant in Old Tapestry!
Fear most to tax an Honourable Fool,
Whose Right it is, uncensur'd to be dull;

Such without Wit are Poets when they please,
As without Learning they can take Degrees.⁴
Leave dang'rous Truths to unsuccessful Satyrs,⁵
And Flattery to fuisome Dedicators,

Whom, when they Praise, the World believes no more,
Than when they promise to give Scribbling o'er.
³Tis best sometimes your Censure to restrain,
And charitably let the Dull be vain:

Your Silence there is better than your Spite,
For who can rail so long as they can write?
Still humming on, their drowzy Course they keep,
And lash'd so long, like Tops, are lash'd asleep.⁶
False Steps but help them to renew the Race,
As after Stumbling, Jades⁷ will mend their Pace.

What Crouds of these, impenitently bold,
In Sounds and jingling Syllables grown old,
Still run on Poets in a raging Vein,
Ev'n to the Dregs and Squeezings of their Sense,
Strain out the last, dull droppings of their Sense,
And Rhyme with all the Rage of Impotence!

Such shameless Bards we have; and yet 'tis true,
There are as mad; abandon'd Criticks too.
The Bookful Blockhead, ignorantly read,
With Loads of Learned Lumber in his Head,

615 With his own Tongue still edifies his Ears,
And always List'ning to Himself appears.
All Books he reads, and all he reads assails,
From Dryden's Fables down to Duffey's Tales.⁸
With him, most Authors steal their Works, or buy;
Garth⁹ did not write his own Dispensary.

620 Name a new Play, and he's the Poet's Friend,
Nay show'd his Faults—but when wou'd Poets mend?
No Place so Sacred from such Fops is barr'd,
Nor is Paul's Church more safe than Paul's Church-yard:¹
Nay, fly to Altars; there they'll talk you dead;
For Fools rush in where Angels fear to tread.

625 Distrustful Sense with modest Caution speaks;
It still looks home, and short Excursions makes;
But rating Nonsense in full Volleys breaks;
And never shock'd, and never turn'd aside,
Bursts out, restless, with a thundring Tyde!

630 But where's the Man, who Counsel can bestow,
Still pleas'd to teach, and yet not proud to know?
Unbias'd, or² by Favour or by Spite;
Not dully preposset, nor blindly right;
Tho' Learn'd, well-bred; and tho' well-bred, sincere;
Modestly bold, and Humanly severe?

635 Who to a Friend his Faults can freely show,
And gladly praise the Merit of a Foe?
Blest with a Taste exact, yet unconfin'd;
A Knowledge both of Books and Humankind;
Gen'rous Converse;³ a Soul exempt from Pride;
And Love to Praise, with Reason on his Side?

640 Such once were Criticks, such the Happy Few,
Athens and Rome in better Ages knew.
The mighty Stagyrte first left the Shore,
Spread all his Sails, and durst the Deeps explore;
He steer'd securely, and discover'd far,
Led by the Light of the Mæonian⁴ Star.

650 Poets, a Race long unconfin'd and free,
Still fond and proud of Savage Liberty,
Receiv'd his Laws,⁵ and stood convinc'd 'twas fit
Who conquer'd Nature, shou'd preside o'er Wit.

655 Horace still charms with graceful Negligence,
And without Method talks us into Sense,
Will like a Friend familiarly convey
The truest Notions in the easiest way.⁶

660 He, who Supream in Judgment, as in Wit,
Might boldly censure, as he boldly writ,

1. Where booksellers had stalls.
2. Either.
3. Well-bred conversation.
4. Of Maconia (region of Asia Minor), where Homer was said to have been born.
5. Rules for literary composition.
6. Least formal, highly accessible.

8. *Tragedical and Comical* (1704), by Thomas Duffey, (1653–1723). Dryden's *Fables*, *Fables Ancient and Modern* (1700), a set of verse translations.
9. Samuel Garth (1661–1719), later a friend of Pope's, was (wrongly) accused of falsely claiming authorship of the mock-heroic *The Dispensary* (1699).

1. Critique of, commentary on.
2. Desire to please.
3. John Dennis; Appius, in his tragedy *Appius and Virginia* (1709), was highly sensitive to criticism. Dennis frequently used the word "tremendous."
4. Those in certain positions (e.g., privy council-ors) could receive university degrees without fulfilling any requirements.
5. Satires.
6. When tops spin rapidly they "sleep," seeming not to move.
7. Worn-out horses.

Yet judg'd with Coolness tho' he sung with Fire;
His Precepts teach but what his Works inspire.
Our Criticks take a contrary Extream,
They judge with Fury, but they write with Fle'me?
Nor suffers Horace more in wrong Translations
By Wits, than Criticks in as wrong Quotations.

See *Diomysius*⁸ Homer's Thoughts refine,
And call new Beauties forth from ev'ry Line!
Fancy and Art in gay *Petronius*⁹ please,
The Scholar's Learning, with the Courtier's Ease.

In grave *Quintilian*'s copious Work we find
The justest Rules, and clearest Method join'd;
Thus useful Arms in Magazines² we place,
All rang'd in Order, and dispos'd with Grace,
But less to please the Eye, than arm the Hand,
Still fit for Use, and ready at Command.

Thee, bold *Longinus*!³ all the Nine⁴ inspire,
And bless their Critick with a Poet's Fire.
An ardent Judge, who Zealous in his Trust,
With Warmth gives Sentence, yet is always Just;
Whose own Example strengthens all his Laws,
And Is himself that great Sublime he draws.

Thus long succeeding Criticks justly reign'd,
License repress'd, and useful Laws ordain'd;
Learning and Rome alike in Empire grew
And Arts still follow'd where her Eagles⁵ flew;
From the same Foes, at last, both felt their Doom,
And the same Age saw Learning fall, and Rome.

With Tyranny, then Superstition join'd,
As that the Body, this enslav'd the Mind;
Much was Believ'd, but little understood,
And to be dull was constru'd to be good;
A second Deluge Learning thus o'er-erun,
And the Monks finish'd what the Goths begun.⁶
At length, *Erasmus*,⁷ that great, injur'd Name,
(The Glory of the Priesthood, and the Shame!)
Stemm'd the wild Torrent of a barb'rous Age,
And drove those Holy Vandals off the Stage.

But see! each Muse, in Leo's⁸ Golden Days,
Starts from her Trance, and trims her wither'd Bays!

7. Phlegm, thought to cause sluggishness and indifference; it was one of the four humors in early physiology.

8. Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Greek rhetor and historian active in Rome ca. 30–7 B.C.E.

9. Petronius Arbiter, the author of the *Satyricon* (1st c. C.E.); he may have been the courtier Petronius who was the judge on questions of taste at the court of Nero (emperor 54–68).

1. Roman rhetorician (ca. 30/35–100 C.E.); his "copious work" is the 12-volume *Institutio Oratoria* (see above).

2. Storehouses.

3. Greek rhetorician (1st c. C.E.), to whom the

treatise *On Sublimity* is attributed (see above).

4. The 9 Muses.

5. Emblems on the Roman army's banners. That is, the medieval theologians put the finishing touches on the damage done to learning by the Goths and Vandals, the Germanic peoples who had earlier sacked Rome.

6. Dutch scholar and philosopher (1466–1536) author of *The Praise of Folly*, a humanist satire on the abuses of learning. He was "the glory of the priesthood" because of his erudition and goodness and his "shame" in that he was persecuted.

8. Pope Leo X (1475–1521), a patron of learning and the arts during the Italian Renaissance.

Rome's ancient Genius,⁹ o'er its Ruins spread,
Shakes off the Dust, and rears his rev'rend Head!
Then Sculpture and her Sister-Arts revive;
Stones leap'd to Form, and Rocks began to live;
With sweeter Notes each rising Temple rung;
A Raphael painted, and a Vida¹ sung!

Immortal Vida! on whose honour'd Brow
The Poet's Bays and Critick's Ivy² grow:
*Cremona*³ now shall ever boast thy Name,
As next in Place to Mantua, next in Fame.

But soon by Impious Arms from *Latium*⁴ chas'd,
Their ancient Bounds the banish'd Muses past;
Thence Arts o'er all the Northern World advance;
But Critic Learning flourish'd most in France.

The Rules, a Nation born to serve, obeys,
And *Boileau*⁵ still in Right of *Horace* sways,
But we; brave Britons, Foreign Laws despis'd,
And kept unconquer'd, and unciviliz'd,
Fierce for the Liberties of Wit, and bold,
We still defy'd the Romans, as of old.

Yet some there were, among the sounder Few
Of those who less presum'd, and better knew,
Who durst assert the juster Ancient Cause,
And here restor'd Wit's Fundamental Laws.

Such was the Muse, whose Rules and Practice tell,
Nature's chief Master-piece is writing well.⁶
'Such was Roscomon⁷—not more learn'd than good,
With Manners gen'rous as his Noble Blood;
To him the Wit of Greece and Rome was known,
And ev'ry Author's Merit, but his own.

Such late was *Walsh*,⁸—the Muse's Judge and Friend,
Who justly knew to blame or to commend;
To Fallings mild, but zealous for Desert;
The clearest Head, and the sincerest Heart.

This humble Praise, lamented Shade! receive,
This Praise at least a grateful Muse may give!
The Muse, whose early Voice you taught to Sing,
Prescrib'd her Heights, and prun'd her tender Wing,
(Her Guide now lost) no more attempts to rise,
But in low Numbers short Excursions tries:

Content, if hence th' Unlearn'd their Wants may view,
The Learn'd reflect on what before they knew:
Careless of Censure, nor too fond of Fame,

Guardian or protective spirit of a place.

1. Marco Girolamo Vida (ca. 1480–1566), Italian who wrote in Latin. Raphael. Raffaello Santi (1483–1520), Italian painter.

2. Symbol of poetry and learning.

3. City in northern Italy.

4. Italy; Rome was sacked by Hapsburg mercenaries in 1527; Pope suggests that learning then fled to other parts of Europe, especially France.

5. Nicolas Boileau (1636–1711), French critic and poet; his works include the poem *L'Art poé-*

tique (1674).

6. Quoted from the *Essay on Poetry* (1682), by Pope's friend and supporter John Sheffield (1648–1721).

7. Wentworth Dillon (ca. 1633–1685), fourth earl of Roscommon, poet and critic; author of the *Essay on Translated Verse* (1684).

8. William Walsh (1663–1708), whom Dryden praised as "the best critic of our nation"; he was Pope's friend and mentor.

Still pleas'd to praise, yet not afraid to blame,
Averse alike to Flatter, or Offend,
Not free from Faults; nor yet too vain to mend.

1711

SAMUEL JOHNSON 1709-1784

As countless anecdotes attest, Samuel Johnson was cantankerous and dogmatic. He inveighed against the philosopher George Berkeley's (1685-1753) apparent denial of the reality of the external world by kicking a stone and declaring, "I refute him *thus*." And he coined many mordant aphorisms, such as "The road to hell is paved with good intentions" and "Patriotism is the last refuge of a scoundrel." Theatrical, deliberately provocative, and beloved by many friends and admired by fellow writers, Johnson is one of the most influential critics in English literary history. "The best part of every author," Johnson affirmed, "is in general to be found in his book," and this is true in his own case. Though he often chastised himself for indolence, fearful that salvation would be denied to him because he was not fully using his great gifts, he was in fact astonishingly productive, and in many genres. His literary labors include a monumental *Dictionary of the English Language*, a comprehensive edition of Shakespeare, and the *Lives of the English Poets*, a set of insightful, vividly written biographical and literary portraits of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century authors.

Johnson was born at Lichfield, Staffordshire, a town about 100 miles northwest of London. His father was a bookseller, and his education consisted largely of the volumes in his father's bookshop and what was "whipped" into him by the master of the grammar school in Lichfield. He attended Pembroke College at Oxford for only a year, leaving in December 1729 because he lacked the funds to continue. At Oxford, he later recounted, "I was miserably poor, and I thought to fight my way by my literature and my wit"; the fight, continuing in later years, would leave him in poverty for most of his life.

Johnson was an intense, discerning reader; as the economist Adam Smith recalled, "Johnson knew more books than any man alive." While at Oxford, he pored over the popular devotional tract *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life* (1729), by the schoolmaster and minister William Law. He termed Law's book "the finest piece of hortatory theology in any language," and it is the foundation for the prayers and meditations that he composed later in his life.

In July 1735 Johnson married Elizabeth Jervis Porter, a forty-six-year-old widow and mother of three children. With money from her, Johnson opened a school in Edial, near Lichfield, in 1736. One of his students was David Garrick, who became a poet, essayist, and acclaimed actor. While there, Johnson worked on an historical tragedy, *Irene*, which recounts the story of the love of Sultan Mahomet for the lovely Irene, a Christian slave captured in Constantinople. (The play was not performed until 1749, in a production that Garrick organized.) The school soon proved a failure, however, in part because Johnson lacked the credential of a university degree.

In 1737 Johnson and Garrick traveled to London, with a population between 650,000 and 700,000, it had become the largest city in Europe. Johnson found the carnivorous and later famously professed: "Whv. Sir. you find no man. at all intellect

tual; who is willing to leave London. No, Sir, when a man is tired of London, he is tired of life; for there is in London all that life can afford." Once settled there, he began his association with the *Gentleman's Magazine*, contributing to it not only prose and poetry but also, from 1741 to 1744, a series of speeches purporting to represent debates in the House of Commons: he re-created them, relying solely on notes and reports.

Johnson was working on and planning larger projects as well. In 1745 he wrote *Miscellaneous Observations on the Tragedy of Macbeth*, along with a proposal for an edition of Shakespeare; in the following year, he outlined his "Plan of a Dictionary of the English Language." His major prose publication of this period was *An Account of the Life of Mr. Richard Savage* (1744), a book that details the trials of a failed poet whom Johnson knew and the tribulations of Grub Street, the address of many literary hacks and desperate writers. In verse his central achievement was "The Vanity of Human Wishes," published in 1749. This solemn, disquieting rumination on the futility of worldly hopes and endeavors was the first composition that Johnson issued under his own name.

In the 1750s Johnson wrote many periodical essays. The best of this work appeared in *The Rambler*, which was published twice weekly from March 1750 to March 1752. The twentieth-century critic Walter Jackson Bate has described these pieces as "saturated with thought to an extent unexceeded by any other writer of English prose since Francis Bacon." Johnson's wife Elizabeth told him at the time: "I thought very well of you before this; but I did not imagine you could have written any thing equal to this." She died on March 17, 1752, three days after the publication of its last number. Johnson also contributed essays to his friend John Hawkesworth's periodical *The Adventurer*; and from 1758 to 1760, he wrote yet another series of essays, titled *The Idler*, which were published in a weekly newspaper, *The Universal Chronicle*. But Johnson's greatest accomplishment of the decade was *A Dictionary of the English Language*, published in two large folio volumes in April 1755. Nine years in the making, and compiled by Johnson and six assistants, it consists of 40,000 defined words and 114,000 quotations that illustrate the meanings.

In one week's time in January 1759, Johnson wrote his only long fictional work, *Rasselas*, so that he could pay for his mother's funeral and settle her debts. Three years later he received from King George III an annual pension of 300 pounds, winning at last a measure of economic security. Soon after, he met the Scotsman James Boswell, a twenty-two-year-old lawyer less interested in law than in literature and politics. Boswell cultivated Johnson's friendship; watched him in action at literary clubs with Adam Smith, the painter Joshua Reynolds, EDMUND BURKE, and other luminaries; sparred with him in conversation; and gathered facts and anecdotes about him. Boswell made Johnson the subject of what is often called the greatest biography in English, *The Life of Samuel Johnson, LL.D.* (1791).

Johnson's eight-volume edition of Shakespeare was published in October 1765. The much-delayed work was flawed: Johnson neither performed the complete collation of texts he had promised nor examined carefully the sources that Shakespeare had drawn on. And while he ignored the sonnets and poems, he (like the Romantic critics) treats the plays not as works for the stage but as texts to be read. Nonetheless, the preface—one of our selections—and the many interpretive notes amount to a compelling assessment. Johnson celebrates Shakespeare's gifts in portraying character and revealing truths about human nature and, more important, defends the playwright against charges of violating the dramatic unities of time and place and improperly mixing the genres of tragedy and comedy. Johnson was not the first to propose that authors be granted freedom to depart from classical rules and prescriptions for literary composition, but his authority and formidable style gave this position irresistible legitimacy. SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE, William Hazlitt, and other critics in the early 1800s balked at (even as they oversimplified) Johnson's neoclassical principles and disputed his evaluations of authors, yet his support for rule-breaking