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O N
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AN
E S S A Y
ON
P O E T R Y.

OF things in which Mankind does most excel,
Nature's chief Master-piece is *Writing well*;
And of all sorts of Writing none there are
That can the least with *Poetry* compare:
No kind of Work require so nice a touch,
And if well finish'd, nothing shines so much;
But Heav'n forbid we should be so profane,
To grace the *Vulgar* with that Sacred Name;
'Tis not a flash of *Fancy* which sometimes
Dazling our minds, sets off the slightest Rhimes;
Bright as a Blaze, but in a Moment done;
True Wit is everlasting, like the Sun;
Which tho' sometimes behind a Cloud retir'd,
Breaks out again, and is by all admir'd.

Number, and Rhime, and that harmonious Sound
Which never does the Ear with *Harshness* wound,
Are necessary, yet but *vulgar* Arts,
For all in vain these superficial parts
Contribute to the Structure of the whole
Without a *Genius* too, for that's the *Soul* ;
A *Spirit* which inspires the Work throughout,
As that of *Nature* moves the World about ;
A *Heat* which glows in every word that's writ,
Tis something of *Divine*, and more than *Wit* ;
It self unseen, yet all things by it shown,
Describing all Men, but describ'd by none.
Where dost thou dwell? What *Caverns* of the Brain
Can such a vast, and mighty thing contain ?
When I, at idle Hours, in vain thy absence mourn
O where dost thou retire? and why dost thou return
Sometimes with powerful charms to hurry me away
From *Pleasures* of the Night and *Business* of the Day
Ev'n now to far transported, I am fain
To check thy Course, and use the needful Rein.
As all is *Dulness*, when the *Fancy's* bad,
So without *Judgment* *Fancy* is but mad ;
And *Judgment* has a boundless Influence,
Not only in the choice of *Words* or *Sense*,
But on the *World*, on *Manners*, and on *Men* ;
Fancy is but the *Feather* of the *Pen* ;

Reason

Reason is that substantial useful part,
Which gains the *Head*, while 't'other wins the *Heart*;

Here I should all the various sorts of Verse,
And the whole *Art of Poetry* rehearse,
But who that task can after *Horace* do?
The best of *Masters* and *Examples* too!
Ecchoes at best, all we can say is vain,
Dull the Design, and fruitless were the pain;
'Tis true, the *Ancients* we may rob with ease,
But who with that sad shift himself can please,
Without an *Actors* pride? A *Player's Art*
Is above his, who writes a *borrowed* part.

Yet *modern* Laws are made for *later* Faults,
And new *Absurdities* inspire new *Thoughts*;
What need has *Satyr* then to live on *Theft*
When so much *fresh* occasion still is left?
Fertile our Soil, and full of rankest Weeds,
And Monsters worse than ever *Nilus* breeds.
But hold, the *Fools* shall have no cause to fear,
'Tis *Wit* add *Sense* that is the subject here
Defects of witty Men *deserve* a *Cure*,
And those who are so, will ev'n *this* endure.

First then of *Songs*, which now so much abound;
Without his *Song* no *Fop* is to be found; *Songs.*
A most offensive *Weapon* which he draws
On all he meets against *Appollo's* *Laws*:
Tho' nothing seems more easie, yet no part
Of *Poetry* requires a *nicer* *Art*;

For

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For as in rows of *richest* Pearl there lies
Many a Blemish that escapes our Eyes,
The least of which *Defects* is plainly shewn
In some *small Ring*, and brings the value down :
So *Songs* should be to just *Perfection* wrought ;
Yet where can we see one without a fault ;
Exact *Propriety* of Words and Thought ?
Expression easie, and the *Fancy* high,
Yet *that* not seem to *creep*, nor *this* to *fly* ;
No Words *transpos'd*, but in such *order all*,
As, tho' hard *wrought*, may seem by chance to *fall*
Here, as in all things else, is most unfit
Bare *Ribaldry*, that poor *Pretence* to Wit ;
Such *nauseous Songs* by a late Author made
Call an *unwilling* Censure on his *Shade*.

Not that warm Thoughts of the transporting Joy,
Can shock the *chastest*, or the *niciest* cloy ;
But *obscene* Words, too gross to move Desire,
Like Heaps of Fewel do but *choak* the Fire.
On other Themes he well deserves our Praise,
But palls that Appetite he meant to raise.

Next, *Elegy*, of *sweet* but *solemn* Voice, *Elegy*
And of a *Subject* grave exacts the Choice,
The Praise of *Beauty*, *Valor*, *Wit* contains,
And there too oft despairing *Love* complains ;
In vain alas, for who by *Wit* is moved,
That *Phoenix*-*she* deserves to be beloved ;

But noisy Nonsense, and such Fops as vex
Mankind, take most with that Fantastick Sex.
This to the Praise of those who better knew;
The Many raise the value of the Few.

} But here, as all our Sex to oft have try'd,
Women have drawn my wandring Thoughts aside
Their greatest Fault who in this kind have writ,
Is not defect in words, nor want of Wit;
But should this Muse harmonious Numbers yield,
And every Couplet be with Fancy fill'd,
If yet a just Coherence be not made
Between each Thought, and the whole Model laid
So right, that every Step may higher rise,
Like goodly Mountains, till they reach the Skies?
Trifles like such perhaps of late have past,
And may be lik'd a while, but never last;
'Tis Epigram, 'tis Point, 'tis what you will,
But nor an Eleg, nor Writ with Skill,
No * Panegyrick, nor a † Coopers-Hill.

A higher Flight, and of a happier Force
Are * ODES, the Muses most unruly Horse;
That bounds so fierce, the Rider has no rest,
But foams at Mouth, and moves like oue posselt.
The Poet here must be indeed inspired,
With Fury too, as well as Fancy fired.

* Waller's † Denham's * Pindarick Odes.

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Cowley might boast to have performed this part,
Had he with *Nature* joyn'd the Rules of *Art* ;
But ill *Expression* gives sometimes *Allay*
To that *rich* Fancy, which can ne'er *decay* :
Tho' all appear in Heat and Fury done,
The *Language* still must *soft* and *easy* run.
These Laws may seem a little too severe,
But *Judgment* yields, and *Fancy* governs there ;
Which, tho' extravagant, this *Muse* allows,
And makes the *Work* much easier than it shews.

Of all the Ways that wisest Men could find *Satyr*
To mend the Age, and mortify Mankind,
Satyr well writ has most successful prov'd,
And cures, because the *Remedy* is lov'd.
'Tis hard to write on such a subject more,
Without repeating Things said oft before.
Some vulgar Errors only we remove,
That stain a Beauty which so much we love.
Of well chose Words some take not care enough,
And think they should be as the Subject rough ;
This great work must be more exactly made,
And sharpest Thoughts in smoothest words convey'd :
Some think, if sharp enough, they cannot fail,
As if their only Business was to rail ;
But human Frailty nicely to unfold,
Distinguishes a *Satyr* from a Scold.

Rage you must hide, and Prejudice lay down,
A Satyr's Smile is sharper than his Frown ;
 So, while you seem to *sight* some Rival Youth,
 Malice it self may pass sometimes for Truth.
 The * *Laureat* here may justly claim our Praise,
 Crown'd by † *Mac-Fleckno* with immortal Bays ;
 Tho' *prais'd* and *punish'd* for another's * Rhimes,
 His own deserve as great Applause sometimes ;
 But once his *Pegasus* has born *dead weight*,
 Rid by some *lumpish* Minister of State.
 Here rest, my *Muse*, suspend my Cares a while,
 A greater Enterprize attends thy toil ;
 And as some *Eagle* that designs to fly
 A long *unwonted* Journey through the Sky.
Considers all the dangerous way before,
 Over what *Lands* and *Seas* she is to soar,
Doubts her own strength so far, and justly *fears*
 That lofty Road of *Airy Travellers* ;
 But yet incited by some fair Design,
 That does her *Hopes* beyond her *Fears* incline,
 Prunes every Feather, views her self with Care,
 At last *resolved*, she cleaves the yielding Air.
 Away she flies, so strong, so high, so fast,
 She *lessons* to us, and is *lost* at last.

* Mr. D——n.

† A famous Satyrical Poem of his.

* A Libel, for which he has both applauded and wounded, tho intirely innocent of the whole matter.

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So (but too weak for such a weighty thing)
The Muse inspires a sharper Note to sing ;
And why should Truth offend when only told
To guide the *Ignorant*, and warn the *Bold* ;
On then my Muse, adventrously engage,
To give Instructions that concern the Stage.

The *Unities* of Action, Time and Place, *Plays*
Which if observed, give Plays so great a Grace,
Are, tho' but little *practis'd*, too well *known*
To be taught here, where we pretend alone
From *nicer* Faults to purge the present Age,
Less obvious Errors of the *English* Stage.

First then, Soliloques had we be few,
Extremely *short*, and spoke in *passion* too ;
Our Lovers talking to themselves for want,
Of others, make the *Pit* their *Confidant* ;
Nor is the matter mended yet, if thus
They trust a Friend, only to tell it us ;
Th' occasion should as *naturally* fall,
As when * *Bellarion* confesses all.

Figures of Speech, which Poets think so fine,
Art's *needless* Varnish to make Nature shine,
Are all but *Paint* upon a beauteous Face,
And in *Description* only claim a place.
But to make *Rage declaim*, and *Grief Discourse*,
From Lovers in despair *fine* things to force,

* *Philaster*. A Play of Beaumont and Fletcher.

Must needs succeed, for who can chuse but pity
A *dying* Hero miserably witty?

But oh, the Dialogues, where jest, and mock
Is held up like a Rest at Shirtle-cock!

Or else like Bells, eternally they chime,
They *sigh* in *Simile*, and *die* in *Rhime*.

What *Things* are these who would be, *Poets* thought,
By *Nature* not inspir'd, nor *Learning* taught?

Some Wit they have, and therefore may deserve
A better Course than this by which they *starve*;

But to write Plays! why 'tis a bold pretence

To *Judgment*, *Breeding*, *Wit* and *Eloquence*;

Nay more; for they must Look *within* to find

Those *secret Turns* of Nature in the Mind;

Without this part in vain would be the whole,

And but a Body all without a Soul:

All this together yet is but a part

Of Dialogue, that great and powerful Art,

Now almost lost, which the old *Grecians* knew,

From whence the *Romans* Fainter Copies drew,

Scarce comprehended since but by a few:

Plato and *Lucian* are the best Remains

Of all the Wonders which this Art contains;

Yet to our selves, we Justice must allow,

Shakespear and *Fletcher* are the Wonders now:

Consider them, and read them o'er and o'er,

Go see them play'd, then read them as before,

For tho in many things they grossly fail,
 Over our passions still they so prevail,
 That our own Grief by theirs is rock'd asleep,
 The *Dull* are forc'd to feel, the *wise* to weep.
 Their Beauties imitate, avoid their Faults ;
 First on a *Plot* employ thy careful Thoughts :
 Turn it with time a thousand several ways,
 This oft alone has given success to Plays :
 Reject that *valgar Error* which appears
 So fair, of making *perfect* Characters ;
 There's no such thing in Nature, and you'll draw
 A *faultless Monster*, which the *V*World ne'er saw :
 Some *Faults* must be, that his Misfortunes drew,
 But such as may deserve Compassion too.
 Besides the main Design compos'd with Art,
 Each *moving Scence* must be a *Plot* apart :
 Contrive each little *turn*, mark every place,
 As *Painters* first *chalk* out the future Face :
 Yet be not fondly your own Slave for this,
 But change hereafter what appears amiss.
 Think not so much where *shining* thoughts to place,
 As what a Man would say in *such* a Case.
 Neither in *Comedy* will this suffice,
 The *Player* too must be before your Eyes,
 And tho 'tis *Drudgery* to stoop so low,
 To him you must your utmost meaning show.

Expose no *single* Fop, but lay the Load
 More *equally*, and spread the Folly broad :
 The other way is *vulgar* oft we see
 A Fool *derided* by as bad as he ;
Hawks fly at *nobler* Game; in this low way,
 A very *Owl* may prove a *Bird of Prey* :
All Poets so will one poor Fop devour ;
 But to *collect*, like *Bees* from every Flower,
Ingredients to *compose* that precious Juice
 Which serves the *World* for *Pleasure* and for *use*,
 In spite of *Faction* this would Favour get :
 But * *Falstaff* seems unimitable yet.

Another Fault which often does befall,
 Is when the *VVit* of some great Poet shall
 So *overflow*, that is, be none at all,
 That all his Fools speak *Sence*, as if *possess*,
 And each by *Inspiration* breaks his *Fest* ;
 If once the *Justness* of each part be lost,
Well we may laugh, but at the Poets Cost.
 That silly thing, Men call *Sheer-wit*, avoid,
With which our age so nauceously is cloy'd ;
Humour is all, *Wit*-should be only brought
 To turn agreeably some *proper* Thought.
 But since the Poet we of late have known,
 Shine in no *Dress* so much as in their *own*,

* An admirably Character in a Play of *Shakespeare's*.

The better by *Example* to convince,
Cast but a view on this *wrong side* of Sence.

First a Soliloquy is *calmly* made,
Where every Reason is *exactly* weigh'd ;
Which once perform'd, most opportunely comes
A *Hero* frighted at the Noise of Drums
For *her* sweet sake, whom at *first sight* he loves,
And all in *Metaphor* his passion *proves* ;
But some sad accident, tho yet unknown,
Parting this Pair, to leave the Swain alone,

He streight grows *jealous*, yet we know not why
And to *oblige* his *Rival*, need's will *dye* ;
But first he makes a *Speech*, wherein he tells
The *abscent* Nymph how much his Flame excels,
And yet bequeaths her *generously* now
To that dear Rival whom he does not know,
Who streight appears (but who can Fate withstand ?)
Too late alas to hold his hasty Hand,
That just hast giv'n himself the cruel Stroke,
At which this very *Stranger's* Heart is broke ;
He more to his *new* Friend than Mistress kind,
Most sadly mourns at being left behid,
Of such a Death prefers the pleasing *Charms*
To *Love*, and living in a Lady's Arms.

How shameful, and what monstrous things are
(these ?

And then they rail at those they cannot please,

Conclude us only partial for the *Dead*,
And grudge the Sign of old *Ben. Johnson's* Head;
When the *intr insick* Value of the Stage;
Can scarce be judg'd but by a *following* Age;
For Dances, Flutes, *Italian* Songs, and Rhime
May keep up *sinking* Nonsense for a time.
But that may fail, which now so much o'r-rules,
And *Sence* no longer will *submit* to Fools.

By painful Steps we are at last got up *Epick Po-*
Parnassus Hill on whose bright Arty Top *etry.*
The *Epick Poets* so divinely show,
And with *just Pride* behold the rest below.
Heroick Poems have a just pretence
To be the utmost reach of human Sence,
A Work of such inestimable Worth,
There are but *two* the World has yet brought forth,
Homer and *Virgil*: with what awful sound
Do those meer Words the Ears of Poets wound!
Just as a *Changeling* seems below the rest
Of Men, or rather is a two-legg'd Beast,
So these *Gigantick* Souls amaz'd we find
As much above the rest of human kind.
Nature's whole strength *united!* endless Fame,
And universal Shouts attend their Name.
Read *Homer* once, and you can read no more,
For all things else appear so dull and poor.

Verse will seem *Prose*, yet often on him look,
And you will hardly need another Book.
Had * *Bossu* never writ, the VWorld had still,
Like *Indians*, view'd this wondrous piece of Skill,
As something of *Divine* the VVork admired,
Not hoped to be *Instructed*, but *Inspired*;
But he disclosing sacred *Mysteries*,
Has shown, where all the mighty *Magick* lies,
Describ'd the *Seeds*, and in what order sown,
That have to such a vast proportion grown;
Sure from some *Angel* he the *Secret* knew,
VWho through this *Labyrinth* has given the *Clue*!
But what alas, avails it poor Mankind
To see this *promised Land*, yet stay *behind*?
The way is shewn, but who has strength to go?
Who can all *Sciences* exactly know?
Whose *Fancy* flies beyond weak *Reason's* Sight,
And yet has *Judgment* to direct it *right*?
Whose *just* Discernment, *Virgil* like, is such,
Never to say too little, or too much?
Let such a man begin without delay,
But he must do much more than I can say,
Must above *Cowley*, nay and *Milton* too prevail,
Succeed where great *Torquato*, and our greater *Spem-*
(*cer* fail.

* A late Author,

F I N I S .

