

The Present State of Wit (1711) eBook

The Present State of Wit (1711) by John Gay

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Essays on Wit

No. 3

John Gay, *The Present State of Wit (1711)*

With an Introduction by

Donald F. Bond

and

a Bibliographical Note

and

Excerpts from

The English Theophrastus: or the Manners of the Age (1702)

With an Introduction by

W. Earl Britton



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Lithoprinted from Author's Typescript

EDWARDS BROTHERS, INC.

Lithoprinters

ANN ARBOR, MICHIGAN

1947

THE

Present State

OF

WIT,

IN A

LETTER

TO A



B O O K R A G S

Friend in the Country.

LONDON Printed in the Year, MDCCXI

(Price 3 d.)

INTRODUCTION

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Gay's concern in his survey of *The Present State of Wit* is with the productions of wit which were circulating among the coffee-houses of 1711, specifically the large numbers of periodical essays which were perhaps the most distinctive kind of "wit" produced in the "four last years" of Queen Anne's reign. His little pamphlet makes no pretence at an analysis of true and false wit or a refining of critical distinctions with regard to wit in its relations to fancy and judgment. Addressed to "a friend in the country," it surveys in a rapid and engaging manner the productions of Isaac Bickerstaff and his followers which are engrossing the interest of London. In other words it is an early example of a popular eighteenth-century form, of which Goldsmith's more extended *Inquiry into the Present State of Polite Learning* is the best known instance.

As such it well deserves a place in the Augustan Reprints series on wit. It has been reproduced before in this century, in *An English Garner: Critical Essays and Literary Fragments* (Westminster, 1903, pp. 201-10), with an attractive and informative introduction by J. Churton Collins. More information, however, is now at our disposal in the forty year interval since Collins wrote, both in regard to John Gay and to the bibliography of periodical literature in Queen Anne's time. Furthermore, the Arber reprint is difficult to obtain.

Gay is writing, he tells us, without prejudice "either for Whig or Tory," but the warm praise which he extends to Steele and Addison makes his pamphlet sound like the criticism of one very close to the Whigs. Though Gay is ordinarily associated with the Tory circle of Swift and Pope, he was in 1711 still in the somewhat uncertain position of a youngster willing to be courted by either group. His earliest sympathies were if anything on the side of the Whigs, in spite of the turn of events in the autumn of 1710. Gay's interests in these early years are nowhere so well analyzed as in the early pages of W.H. Irving's *John Gay: Favorite of the Wits* (Durham, N.C., 1940): cf. the title of the second chapter: "Direction Found—the Year 1713." Even as late as 1715 Swift apparently thought of him as a Whig (Swift's *Letters*, ed. Ball, II, 286, cited by Irving, p. 91).

One need not be surprised, then, to find Gay eulogizing Captain Steele as "the greatest scholar and best casuist of any man in England," an essayist whose writings "have set all our wits and men of letters on a new way of thinking." Swift's reaction is well known. "Dr. Freind was with me," he writes to Stella on May 14th, "and pulled out a two-penny pamphlet just published, called, *The State of Wit*, giving a character of all the papers that have come out of late. The author seems to be a Whig, yet he speaks very highly of a paper called the *Examiner*, and says the supposed author of it is Dr. Swift. But above all things he praises the *Tatlers* and *Spectators*; and I believe Steele and Addison were privy to the printing of it. Thus is one treated by these impudent dogs" (*Journal to Stella*, ed. J.K. Moorhead, Everyman's Library, p. 168).

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In addition to the *Tatler* and *Spectator* Gay discusses a dozen other periodical publications which are of some interest to-day. Dr. King's "monthly *Philosophical Transactions*," mentioned in the third paragraph, had begun as a parody of the Royal Society's publications, but they had failed to hold the public interest, in spite of the wit of the author of the *Art of Cookery*: "though that gentleman has a world of wit..., the town soon grew weary of his writings." King's *Useful Transactions in Philosophy* had in fact run to only three numbers in the early months of 1709. The *Monthly Amusement* of John Ozell, mentioned in the following paragraph, which Churton Collins erroneously considered to be not a periodical but "simply his frequent appearances as a translator" (p. xxxii)—a statement, repeated by Lewis Melville in his *Life and Letters of John Gay* (London, 1921, p. 12)—ran for only six numbers, from April to September 1709. Gay's statement that it "is still continued" may refer to the better known *Delights for the Ingenious; or a Monthly Entertainment for the Curious of Both Sexes* (edited by John Tipper) which was currently appearing in 1711.

As to the political papers Gay's observations are moderate in tone. *Defoe's Review* (1704-13) and *The Observer* (1702-12), begun by John Tutchin, are noticed in rather supercilious fashion. *The Examiner* (1710-14) is damned with faint praise: though "all men, who speak without prejudice, allow it to be well written" and "under the eye of some great persons who sit at the helm of affairs," Gay's admiration is reserved for its two chief opponents, Addison's short-lived *Whig Examiner* (1710) and *The Medley* (1710-12).

The real hero of the pamphlet, however, is Richard Steele, with his coadjutor Mr. Addison, "whose works in Latin and English poetry long since convinced the world, that he was the greatest master in Europe of those two languages." The high praise which Gay lavishes upon this pair—comparable in their own field, he says, to Lord Somers and the Earl of Halifax—is eloquent testimony to the immense interest aroused by their two papers in the London of 1709-12. There is no need to review here the particulars of Gay's eulogy, but one or two points may be noted. In the first place, Gay's remarks are not extravagant when compared with other contemporary testimony. Many of these tributes were brought together by Aitken in his monumental biography of Steele, and since 1889 other contemporary sources have been published which give corroborating support. Hearne first mentions the *Spectator* on April 22, 1711, in a comment on No. 43, and even this crusty Tory and Jacobite notes in his diary: "But Men that are indifferent commend it highly, as it deserves" (*Remarks and Collections*, ed. Doble, III, Oxford, 1895, p. 154). The published reports of the Historical Manuscripts Commission,



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too, contain many contemporary references (see, e.g., *Manuscripts of the Hon. Frederick Lindley Wood* (1913), p. 247; *Manuscripts of the Marquess of Downshire, I* (1924, 889)). It is interesting to observe, further, that Gay makes no reference to the political prejudices of the *Spectator* though it was not without criticism at the time for its meddling in politics. *The Plain Dealer* of May 24, 1712, for example, objected to the publication of No. 384 (the reprinting of the Bishop of St. Asaph's Introduction to his *Sermons*) and hinted at a "Mercenary Consideration" behind this sorry attempt to "propagate ill Principles." Gay's attitude on this point would, be another reason for Swift's dislike of the pamphlet.

The "continuations" of the *Tatler* are given due attention by Gay, as well as three of its imitators: *The Grouler* (6 numbers, 1711), *The Whisperer* (one number, 1709), and *The Tell Tale*, which may be *The Tatling Harlot* (3 numbers, 1709), or, as Churton Collins conjectured, *The Female Tatler* (1709-10). Gay's postscript makes an agreeable reference to *The British Apollo* (1708-11), which has "of late, retreated out of this end of the town into the country," where "it still recommends itself by deciding wagers at cards, and giving good advice to shopkeepers and their apprentices," an interesting comment in view of Gay's own possible connection with this journal (cf. Irving, pp. 40-56). It is these casual remarks, as well as the more extensive critical comments on the present state of "wit," which give Gay's pamphlet a permanent interest.

The typescript copy of the *Present State of Wit* is taken from the pamphlet owned by the Henry E. Huntington Library.

Donald F. Bond

University of Chicago

THE

PRESENT STATE

of

WIT, &c.

SIR,

You Acquaint me in your last, that you are still so busie Building at -----, that your Friends must not hope to see you in Town this Year; At



the same time you desire me that you may not be quite at a loss in Conversation among the Beau Monde next Winter, to send you an account of the present State of Wit in Town; which, without further Preface, I shall therefore endeavour to perform, and give you the Histories and Characters of all our Periodical Papers, whether Monthly, Weekly, or Diurnal, with the same freedom I used to send you our other Town News.

I shall only premise, that as you know I never cared one Farthing either for Whig or Tory, So I shall consider our Writers purely as they are such, without any respect to which Party they may belong.

Dr. King has for some time lain down his MONTHLY PHILOSOPHICAL TRANSACTIONS, which the Title Page informed us at first, were only to be continued as they Sold; and tho' that Gentleman has a World of Wit, yet as it lies in one particular way of Raillery, the Town soon grew weary of his Writings; tho' I cannot but think, that their Author deserves a much better Fate, than to Languish out the small remainder of his Life in the Fleet Prison.

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About the same time that the Doctor left off Writing, one Mr. Ozell put out his MONTHLY AMUSEMENT, (which is still continued) and as it is generally some French Novel or Play indifferently Translated, is more or less taken Notice of, as the Original Piece is more or less Agreeable.

As to our Weekly Papers, the Poor REVIEW is quite exhausted, and grown so very Contemptible, that tho' he has provoked all his Brothers of the Quill round, none of them will enter into a Controversy with him. This Fellow, who had excellent Natural Parts, but wanted a small Foundation of Learning, is a lively instance of those Wits, who, as an Ingenious Author says, will endure but one Skimming.

The OBSERVATOR was almost in the same Condition, but since our Party-Struggles have run so high, he is much mended for the better; which is imputed to the Charitable Assistance of some out-lying Friends.

These Two Authors might, however, have flourish'd some time longer, had not the Controversie been taken up by much abler Hands.

The EXAMINER is a Paper, which all Men, who speak without Prejudice, allow to be well Writ. Tho' his Subject will admit of no great Variety, he is continually placing it on so many different Lights, and endeavouring to inculcate the same thing by so many Beautiful Changes of Expressions, that Men, who are concern'd in no Party, may Read him with Pleasure. His way of assuming the Question in Debate, is extremely Artful; and his Letter to Crassus, is, I think, a Master-piece. As these Papers, are suppos'd to have been Writ by several Hands, the Criticks will tell you, That they can discern a difference in their Stiles and Beauties, and pretend to observe, that the first EXAMINERS abound chiefly in Wit, the last in Humour.

Soon after their first appearance, came out a Paper from the other Side, called the WHIG EXAMINER, writ with so much Fire, and in so excellent a Stile, as put the Tories in no small pain for their favourite Hero, every one cry'd Bickerstaff must be the Author, and People were the more confirm'd in this opinion, upon its being so soon lay'd down; which seem'd to shew, that it was only writ to bind the EXAMINERS to their good Behaviour, and was never design'd to be a Weekly Paper. The EXAMINERS therefore have no one to Combat with at present, but their Friend the MEDLEY; The Author of which Paper, tho' he seems to be a Man of good Sense, and expresses, it luckily enough now and then, is, I think, for the most part, perfectly a Stranger to fine Writing.

I presume I need not tell you that the EXAMINER carries much the more Sail, as 'tis supposed to be writ by the Direction, and under the Eye of some Great Persons who sit at the helm of Affairs, and is consequently look'd on as a sort of publick Notice which way they are steering us.



The reputed Author is Dr. S—t, with the assistance, sometimes, of Dr. Att—y; and Mr. P—r.

The MEDLEY, is said to be Writ by Mr. Old—n, and supervised by Mr. Mayn—g, who perhaps might intirely write those few Papers which, are so much better than the rest.



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Before I proceed further in the account of our Weekly Papers, it will be necessary to inform you, that at the beginning of the Winter, to the infinite surprize of all Men, Mr. Steele flung up His TATLER, and instead of Isaac Bickerstaff Esq.; Subscrib'd himself Richard Steele to the last of those Papers, after an handsome Compliment to the Town for their kind acceptance of his Endeavours to divert them. The Chief Reason he thought fit to give for his leaving off writing, was, that having been so long look'd on in all publick Places and Companies as the Author of those Papers, he found that his most intimate Friends and Acquaintance were in Pain to Act or Speak before him. The Town was very far from being satisfied with this Reason; and most People judg'd the true cause to be, either that he was quite spent, and wanted matter to continue his undertaking any longer, or that he lay'd it down as a sort of Submission to, and Composition with the Government for some past Offences; Or lastly, that he had a Mind to vary his Shape, and appear again in some new Light.

However that were, his disappearing seem'd to be bewailed as some general Calamity, every one wanted so agreeable an Amusement, and the Coffee-houses began to be sensible that the Esquires Lucubrations alone, had brought them more Customers than all their other News papers put together.

It must indeed be confess'd, that never Man threw up his Pen under Stronger Temptations to have imployed it longer: His Reputation was at a greater height than, I believe, ever any living Author's was before him. 'Tis reasonable to suppose that his Gains were proportionably considerable; Every one Read him with Pleasure and Good Will, and the Tories, in respect to his other Good Qualities, had almost forgiven his unaccountable Imprudence in declaring against them.

Lastly, It was highly improbable that if he threw off a Character, the Ideas of which were so strongly impress'd in every one's mind, however finely he might write in any new form, that he should meet with the same reception.

To give you my own thoughts of this Gentleman's Writings, I shall in the first place observe, that there is this noble difference between him and all the rest of our Polite and Gallant Authors: The latter have endeavour'd to please the Age by falling in with them, and incouraging them in their fashionable Vices, and false notions of things. It would have been a jest, sometime since, for a Man to have asserted, that any thing Witty could be said in praise of a Marry'd State, or that Devotion and Virtue were any way necessary to the Character of a fine Gentleman. Bickerstaff ventur'd to tell the Town, that they were a parcel of Fops, Fools, and vain Cocquets; but in such a manner, as even pleased them, and made them more than half enclin'd to believe that he spoke Truth.

Instead of complying with the false Sentiments or Vicious tastes of the Age, either in Morality, Criticism, or Good Breeding, he has boldly assur'd them, that they were

altogether in the wrong, and commanded them with an Authority, which perfectly well became him, to surrender themselves to his Arguments, for Vertue and Good Sense.

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'Tis incredible to conceive the effect his Writings have had on the Town; How many Thousand follies they have either quite banish'd, or given a very great check to; how much Countenance they have added to Vertue and Religion; how many People they have render'd happy, by shewing them it was their own fault if they were not so; and lastly, how intirely they have convinc'd our Fops, and Young Fellows, of the value and advantages of Learning.

He has indeed rescued it out of the hands of Pedants and Fools, and discover'd the true method of making it amiable and lovely to all mankind: In the dress he gives it, 'tis a most welcome guest at Tea-tables and Assemblies, and is relish'd and caressed by the Merchants on the Change; accordingly, there is not a Lady at Court, nor a Banker in Lumbard-Street, who is not verily perswaded, that Captain Steele is the greatest Scholar, and best Casuist, of any Man in England.

Lastly, His Writings have set all our Wits and Men of Letters upon a new way of Thinking, of which they had little or no Notion before; and tho' we cannot yet say that any of them have come up to the Beauties of the Original, I think we may venture to affirm, that every one of them Writes and Thinks much more justly than they did some time since.

The vast variety of Subjects which he has treated of in so different manners, and yet All so perfectly well, made the World believe that 'twas impossible they should all come from the same hand. This set every one upon guessing who was the Esquires Friend, and most people at first fancied it must be Dr. Swift; but it is now no longer a Secret, that his only great and constant assistant was Mr. Addison.

This is that excellent Friend to whom Mr. Steele ow's so much, and who refuses to have his Name set before those Pieces, which the greatest Pens in England would be Proud to own. Indeed, they could hardly add to this Gentleman's Reputation, whose Works in Latin and English Poetry, long since convinc'd the World, that he was the greatest Master in Europe of those Two Languages.

I am assur'd from good hands, That all the Visions, and other Tracts in that way of Writing, with a very great number of the most exquisite Pieces of Wit and Raillery throughout the Lucubrations, are intirely of this Gentleman's Composing; which may in some Measure account for that different Genius, which appears in the Winter Papers from those of the Summer; at which time, as the EXAMINER often hinted, this Friend of Mr. Steele's was in Ireland.

Mr. Steele confesses in his last Volume of the TATLERS, that he is oblig'd to Dr. Swift for his "Town Shower," and the "Description of the Morn," with some other hints received from him in Private Conversation.



I have also heard, that several of those Letters, which came as from Unknown Hands, were writ by Mr. Henly; which is an Answer to your Query, Who those Friends are, whom Mr. Steele speaks of in his last TATLER?



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But to proceed with my account of our other Papers: The Expiration of Bickerstaff's Lucubrations, was attended with much the same Consequences as the Death of Melibaeus's Ox in Virgil; as the latter engendred Swarms of Bees, the former immediately produc'd whole Swarms of little Satyrical Scriblers.

One of these Authors, call'd himself The GROWLER, and assur'd us, that to make amends for Mr. Steele's Silence, he was resolv'd to Growl at us Weekly, as long as we should think fit to give him any Encouragement. Another Gentleman, with more Modesty, call'd his Paper The WHISPERER; and a Third, to Please the Ladies, Christen'd his, The TELL-TALE.

At the same time came out several TATLERS; each of which, with equal Truth and Wit, assur'd us, That he was the Genuine Isaac Bickerstaff.

It may be observ'd, That when the Esquire laid down his Pen, tho' he could not but foresee that several Scriblers would soon snatch it up, which he might, one would think, easily have prevented, he Scorn'd to take any further Care about it, but left the Field fairly open to any Worthy Successor. Immediately some of our Wits were for forming themselves into a Club, headed by one Mr. Barrison, and trying how they could shoot in this Bow of Ulysses; but soon found that this sort of Writing, requires so fine and particular a manner of Thinking, with so exact a Knowledge of the World, as must make them utterly Despair of Success.

They seem'd indeed at first to think, that what was only the Garnish of the former TATLERS, was that which recommended them, and not those Substantial Entertainments which they every where abound in.

According they were continually talking of their Maid, Night-Cap, Spectacles, and Charles Lillie. However there were now and then some faint endeavours at Humour and Sparks of Wit, which the Town, for want of better Entertainment, was content to hunt after, through an heap of Impertinencies; but even those are at present, become wholly Invisible, and quite swallow'd up in the Blaze of the SPECTATOR.

You may remember I told you before, that one Cause assign'd for the laying down the TATLER was, want of Matter; and indeed this was the prevailing Opinion in Town, when we were Surpriz'd all at once by a paper called The SPECTATOR, which was promised to be continued every day, and was writ in so excellent a Stile, with so nice a Judgment, and such a noble profusion of Wit and Humour, that it was not difficult to determine it could come from no other hands but those which had penn'd the Lucubrations.

This immediately alarm'd these Gentlemen, who (as 'tis said Mr. Steele phrases it) had The Censorship in Commission. They found the new SPECTATOR come on like a Torrent and swept away all before him; they despaired ever to equal him in Wit, Humour, or Learning; (which had been their true and certain way of opposing him) and

therefore, rather chose to fall on the Author, and to call out for help to all Good Christians, by assuring them again and again, that they were the First, Original, True, and Undisputed Isaac Bickerstaff.

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Mean while The SPECTATOR, whom we regard as our shelter from that Flood of False Wit and Impertinence which was breaking in upon us, is in every ones Hand, and a constant Topick for our Morning Conversation at Tea-Tables, and Coffee-Houses. We had at first indeed no manner of Notion, how a Diurnal paper could be continu'd in the Spirit and Stile of our present SPECTATORS; but to our no small Surprize, we find them still rising upon us, and can only wonder from whence so Prodigious a Run of Wit and Learning can proceed; since some of our best Judges seem to think that they have hitherto, in general, out-shone even the Esquires first TATLERS.

Most People Fancy, from their frequency, that they must be compos'd by a Society; I, with all, Assign the first places to Mr. Steele and His Friend.

I have often thought that the Conjunction of those two Great Genius's (who seem to stand in a Class by themselves, so high above all our other Wits) resembled that of two famous States-men in a late Reign, whose Characters are very well expressed in their two Mottoes (viz.) Prodesse quam conspicui, and Otium cum Dignitate. Accordingly the first was continually at work behind the Curtain, drew up and prepared all those Schemes and Designs, which the latter Still drove on, and stood out exposed to the World to receive its Praises or Censures.

Mean time, all our unbyassed well-wishers to Learning, are in hopes, that the known Temper and Prudence of one of these Gentlemen, will hinder the other from ever lashing out into Party, and rend'ring that wit which is at present a Common Good, Odious and Ungrateful to the better part of the Nation.

If this piece of imprudence do's not spoil so excellent a Paper, I propose to my self, the highest Satisfaction, in Reading it with you over a Dish of Tea, every Morning next Winter.

As we have yet had nothing new since the SPECTATOR, it only remains for me to assure you, that I am

Yours, &c.
J.G.

Westminster,
May 3, 1711.

POSTSCRIPT.

Upon a Review of my Letter, I find I have quite forgot The BRITISH APOLLO; which might possibly happen, from its having of late Retreated out of this end of the Town into the City; where I am inform'd however, That it still recommends its self by deciding Wagers at Cards, and giving good Advice to Shop-keepers, and their Apprentices.



FINIS.

The / Present State / of / Wit, / in a / Letter / to a / Friend in the Country. / [double rule] /
London / Printed in the Year, MDCCXI./ (Price 3 d.) /

Collation: A-C4. Pp. [1-24] P. [1] half-title, signed "A"; p. [2] blank; p. [3] title, as above;
p. [4] blank; pp. 5-22 text; p. [23] Postscript; p. [24] blank.

This appears to be the only contemporary edition.

Colton Storm

THE



Page 10

English Theophrastus:

OR, THE

Manners of the Age.

Being the

MODERN CHARACTERS

OF THE

COURT, the TOWN,

and the CITY.

* * * * *

Quicquid agunt Homines, Votum, Timor, Ira, Voluptas, Gaudia, Discursus, nostri est Farrago, Libelli.

Juven.

—*Quis enim Virtutem amplectitur ipsam?*

Id.

* * * * *

LONDON,

Printed for *W. Turner*, at *Lincolns-Inn Back-Gate*; *R. Basset* in *Fleetstreet*; and *J. Chantry*, without *Temple Bar*, 1702

INTRODUCTION

Abel Boyer, a Huguenot who settled in London in 1689, devoted himself to language, history, and literature. As a linguist, he tutored Allen Bathurst and the Duke of Gloucester in French, prepared a textbook for English students of French, compiled a French and English dictionary, and endeavored to promote a better understanding between France and England by translating works of each nation into the language of the other. As a historian, he recorded the principal events of English national life from



1688 to 1729. As a literary figure, he wrote a play that was approved by Dryden and published two collections of characters.

Coming in on the great flood of character books which reached its crest in the seventeenth century, Boyer's collections were part of the final surge before the character was taken over by Steele and handed on to the novelists. The first was *Characters of the Virtues and Vices of the Age; or, Moral reflections, maxima, and thoughts upon men and manners. Translated from the most refined French wits ... and extracted from the most celebrated English writers.... Digested alphabetically under proper titles* (1695). The second, resembling the first in design but considerably enlarged, was published in 1702 under the title *The English Theophrastus: Or The Manners of the Age. Being the Modern Characters Of The Court, the Town, and the City*. No author is given on the title page, but the work is usually ascribed to Boyer because his name appears beneath the dedication.

That Boyer's purpose in preparing *The English Theophrastus* was moral is evident in the preface, where he describes the subject of his book as the "Grand-Lesson, *deliver'd by the Delphian Oracle, Know thy Self: Which certainly is the most important of a Man's Life.*" Distempers of the mind, he continues, like those of the body, are half cured when well known. Although philosophers of all ages have agreed in their aim to expose human imperfections in order to rectify them,

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their methods have differed. Those moralists who have inveighed magisterially against man's vices generally have been "*abandon'd to the ill-bred Teachers of Musty Morals in Schools, or to the sower Pulpit-Orators.*" Those who, by "*nipping Strokes of a Side-wind Satyr, have endeavour'd to tickle Men out of their Follies,*" have been welcomed and caressed by the very people who were most abused. Since self-love waves the application, satire, unless bluntly direct, can fail as completely as reprehension.

Modern moralists, according to Boyer, have pursued a third course and cast their observations on men and manners into the entertaining form employed by Theophrastus, Lucian, Plutarch, and Diogenes Laertius. Among the moderns, La Rochefoucauld, Saint-Evremond, and La Bruyere are admired by all judicious readers. From these French writers Boyer has selected materials for the groundwork of his collection. He has added passages from Antoninus, Pascal, and Gratian; from the English authors Bacon, Cowley, L'Estrange, Raleigh, Temple, Dryden, Wycherley, Brown and others; and from his own pen. They range from a single line to a passage of several pages. Those of English origin are distinguished by "*an Asterism,*" his own remarks by inverted commas. Other matter is unmarked.

Although Boyer has used as his title *The English Theophrastus*, examination of the sections here reprinted will show that he has departed from the way of the Greek master. Instead of sharply defined portraits, Boyer offers maxims, reflections, and manners, after the French pattern. Gathered from a variety of sources, these observations are sometimes related to one another only by their common subject matter, but often they have been altered and rearranged by Boyer for sharper focus and unity. A few examples will make his method clear.

Of the paragraphs that begin on page eight of the first selection, the second and fourth are taken from *An Essay in Defence of the Female Sex* (1696), perhaps the work of Mrs. Judith Drake. The first of these is the last half of a paragraph from Drake, but minus her concluding figure, "as Fleas are said to molest those most, who have the tenderest *Skins*, and the sweetest *Blood*" (p. 78). Into the first line of the second paragraph from Drake, "Of these the most voluminous Fool is the Fop Poet," Boyer inserts a reference to Will's. Thereafter, he follows Drake rather closely, but replaces the final portion of the paragraph with two or three sentences from other parts of her essay. The Drake material ends at the paragraph break on page nine. Between these two paragraphs Boyer places the single statement, "There's somewhat that borders upon *Madness* in every exalted *Wit*," which may be his own version of Dryden's line, "Great Wits are sure to *Madness* near allied" (*Absalom and Achitophel*, l. 248). By means of these alterations in his sources, Boyer has compiled a passage that has focus and direction, and gives little evidence of its patchwork origin.



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In other instances Boyer adheres more closely to the original form of the material he borrows. The long passage from the middle of page twenty to the middle of twenty-five is taken from “Des Ouvrages de L’Esprit” of La Bruyere’s *Les Caracteres*. Though retaining the sequence of these observations, he has deleted certain paragraphs. In most cases he has translated the French faithfully, but here and there he has paraphrased a passage or added a brief remark of his own. There was little he could do, of course, with La Rochefoucauld, from whose *Maximes* all of page 282 and about half of 283 of the second selection are taken. Boyer was content to translate almost literally these remarks upon wit and judgment which he collected from widely scattered sections of the *Maximes*.

Boyer’s own contribution to his collection was slight, covering, all told, little more than fifteen of the 383 pages. Distinguished neither by originality of conception nor individuality of style, it is, nevertheless, marked by good sense. A moderate man in his pronouncements, Boyer was less clever than reasonable.

Boyer’s remarks on wit are in keeping with his character. Like many of his contemporaries, he has something to say on the subject, but uses the term rather loosely. He would seem, though, to identify wit with genius, which gives evidence of itself in literary utterance. But judgment is a necessary concomitant of good wit. Conversely, the would-be wit lacks genius, expression, and judgment, and therefore turns critic, that he may denounce in others what is not to be found in himself. Hence the word critic has come to mean a fault finder rather than a man of sound judgment.

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W. Earl Britton

University of Michigan

THE

MANNERS

Of the AGE.

Authors, Wits, Poets, Criticks, Will’s Coffee-House, Play-House, &c.

“Eubulus fancying himself Inspir’d, stands up for the Honour of Poetry, and is mightily provok’d to hear the Sacred Name of *Poet*, turn’d into Scandal and Ridicule; He tells you what a profound Veneration the *Athenians* had for their Dramatick Writers; how greatly *Terence* and *Virgil* were Honour’d in *Rome*; the first, by *Scipio* and *Laelius*, the other by *Augustus* and *Mecaenas*; how much *Francis* the First, and Cardinal *Richelieu*,



encourag'd the Wits of *France*; and drawing his Argument more home, he relates to you, how in this Island the *Buckinghams*, the *Orrerys*, the *Roscommons*, the *Normanbys*, the *Dorsets*, the *Hallifaxes*, and several other Illustrious Persons have not only encouraged Poetry, but ennobled the Art itself by their Performances.



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“True *Eubulus*; we allow Poetry to be a Divine Art, and the name of *Poet* to be *Sacred* and Honourable, when a *Sophocles*, a *Terence*, a *Virgil*, a *Corneille*, a *Boileau*, a *Shakespear*, a *Waller*, a *Dryden*, a *Wycherly*, a *Congreve*, or a *Garth* bears it: But then we intend it as a Scandal, when we give it to *Maevius*, *Chapelain*, *Ogilby*, *W—— D——*, *D——*, *S——*, and *your self*.

“I question whether some Poets allow any other Poets to have Perform’d better, than themselves, in that kind of Poetry which they profess. Sir *R—— B——*, I suppose, tho’ he has declaim’d against Wit, yet is not so conceited, as to Vie with *Horace* and *Juvenal* for *Satyr*; but as to *Heroick Poetry*, methinks he Reasons thus with himself; *Homer* has writ the *Ilias* and the *Odysseis*, and *Virgil* only the *Aeneid*; I have writ *Prince Arthur*, and *King Arthur*; am I not then equal to *Homer*, and Superior to *Virgil*? No, *B——re*, we judge of *Poetry* as we do of *Metals*, nor by the *Lump*, but the intrinsick Value. New cast your Poems; purge ’em of their Dross; reduce ’em to the Bulk of the *Dispensary*, and if then they weigh in the Balance with *that*, we will allow you a Place among the First-Rate *Heroick Poets*.

“The *Wits* of mean Descent and scanty Fortune, are generally apt to reflect on Persons of Quality and Estates, whom they rashly tax with Dullness and Ignorance, a *Normanby*, a *Dorset*, a *Spencer*, a *Hallifax*, a *Boyle*, a *Stanhope*, and a *Codrington*, (to pass over abundance more) are sufficient to convince the World, that either an Illustrious Birth, or vast Riches, are not incompatible with *deep Learning*, and *Sterling-Wit*.

“*Rapin*, *St. Evremont*, and some other *French Criticks*, do the *English* wrong, in the Judgments they pass upon their Plays: The *English Criticks* are even with them, for generally they judge as *ill* of *French Poetry*.

“There is a great reach of Discernment, a deep Knowledge, and abundance of Candor requir’d to qualifie a Man for an *equal Judge* of the Poetry and ingenious Compositions of two Nations, whose *Tempers*, *Humours*, *Manners*, *Customs*, and *Tastes*, are so vastly different as the *French* are from the *English*: *Rapin*, *St. Evremont*, and *Rymer*, are *candid*, *judicious*, and *learned Criticks*, I own it; but yet neither the two first are sufficiently acquainted with *England*, nor the latter with *France*, to enter equally into the Genius of both Nations; and consequently they cannot pass a just Sentence upon the Performances of their respective Writers.

“Tis a great piece of Injustice in us, to charge the *French* with Fickleness; for, to give them their due, They are ten times more constant in their Judgments, than we; Their *Cid* and *Iphigenia* in *Aulis*, are Acted at this very day, with as much Applause as they were thirty Years ago: All *London* has admir’d the *Mourning Bride* one Winter, and endeavoured to find fault with it the next.



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"*Philo* comes *piping hot* out of the College, and having his Head full of Poetical Gingles, writes an *Elegy*, a *Panegyrick* or a *Satyr* upon the least frivolous Occasion: This brings him acquainted with all the *Second-Rate Wits*; One of these introduces him at *Will's*, and having a Play upon the Stocks, and ready to be Launch'd, he prevails with *Philo* to write him a *Song*, a *Dialogue*, a *Prologue* and *Epilogue*, in short, the Trimming of his Comedy. By this time, *Philo* begins to think himself a great Man, and nothing less than the writing of a Play, can satisfie his towring Ambition; well, the Play is writ, the Players, upon the Recommendation of those that lick'd it over, like their Parts to a Fondness, and the *Comedy*, or *Tragedy*, being supported partly by its real Merit, but most powerfully by a *Toasting*, or *Kit-cat-Club*, comes off with universal Applause. How *slippery* is *Greatness*! *Philo* puff'd up with his Success, writes a second Play, scorns to improve it by the Corrections of better Wits, brings it upon the Stage, without securing a Party to protect it, and has the Mortification to hear it *Hist* to death. Pray how many *Philos* do we reckon in Town since the Revolution?

"The reason we have had so many *ill Plays* of late, is this; The extraordinary *Success* of the worst Performances encourages every Pretender to Poetry to Write; Whereas the indifferent Reception some excellent Pieces have met with, discourages our best Poets from Writing.

"After all, one of the boldest Attempts of Human Wit, is to write a taking *Comedy*: For, how many different sorts of People, how many various Palates must a Poet please, to gain a general Applause? He must have a *Plot* and *Design*, *Coherence* and *Unity* of *Action*, *Time* and *Place*, for the Criticks, *Polite Language* for the Boxes, *Repartee*, *Humor*, and *Double Entendres* for the Pit; and to the shame of our Theatres, a mixture of Farce for the Galleries, What Man of Sense now will venture his Reputation upon these hard Terms.

"The Poet often arrogates to himself the Applause, which we only give to Mrs. *Barry* or *Bracegirdle's* inimitable Performances: But then he must take as often upon his Account the Hisses, which are only intended for *Caesonia*, and *Corinna's* *abominable Acting*. One makes amends for 'tother.

"Many a pert Coxcomb might have past for a *Wit*, if his Vanity had not brought him to *Will's*.

"The same thing that makes a Man appear with Assurance at *Court*; qualifies him also to appear unconcern'd among Men of Sense at *Will's*: I mean *Impertinence*.

"As some People *Write*, so others *talk themselves* out of their *Reputation*."



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* The name of a *Wit* is little better than a Slander, since it is generally given by those that have *none*, to those that have *little*.

“How strangely some words lose their Primitive Sense! By a *Critick*, was originally understood a *good Judge*; with us now-a-days, it signifies no more than a *Fault-finder*.”

* A *Critick* in the Modern Acceptation, seldom rises, either in *Merit*, or *Reputation*; for it argues a mean grov'ling Genius, to be always finding Fault; whereas, a candid Judge of Things, not only improves his Parts, but gains every Body's Esteem.

* None keep generally worse Company than your Establish'd *Wits*, for there are a sort of Coxcombs, that stick continually to them like Burrs, to make the Town think from their Company, that they are Men of Parts.

* *Criticks* are useful, that's most certain, so are Executioners and Informers: But what Man did ever envy the condition of *Jack Ketch*, or *Jack P——r*.

* How can we love the Man, whose Office is to torture and execute other Men's Reputation.

* After all, a *Critick* is the last Refuge of a pretender to *Wit*.

“Tis a great piece of Assurance in a profest *Critick* to write *Plays*, for if he does, he must expect to have the whole Club of *Wits*, scanning his Performances with utmost Severity, and magnifying his *Slips* into *prodigious Faults*.”

* I don't wonder Men of Quality and Estate resort to *Will's*, for really they make the best Figure there; an indifferent thing from 'em, passes for a Witty Jest, and sets presently the whole Company a Laughing. Thus we admire the pert Talk of Children, because we expected nothing from 'em.

“There are many unpertinent *Witlings* at *Will's*, that's certain; but then your Retailers of *Politicks*, or of second-hand Wit at *Tom's*, are ten times more intolerable.”

* *Wits* are generally the most dangerous Company a Woman can keep, for their Vanity makes 'em brag of more Favours than they obtain.

“Some Women care not what becomes of their Honour, so they may secure the *Reputation* of their *Wit*.”

“Those People generally talk *most*, who have the least to say; go to *Will's*, and you'll hardly hear the Great *Wycherley* speak two Sentences in a quarter of an Hour, whilst *Blatero*, *Hamilus*, *Turpinus*; and twenty more egregious Coxcombs, deafen the Company with their Political *Nonsense*.”



“There are at *Will's* some *Wit-carriers*, whose business is, to export the fine Things they hear, from one Room to another, next to a Reciting-Poet; these Fellows are the most exquisite Plague to a Man of Sense.



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“In spite of the intrinsic Merit of *Wit*, we find it seldom brings a Man into the *Favour*, or even *Company* of the *Great*, and the *Fair*, unless it be for a Laugh and away; never thought on, but when present; nor then neither, for the sake of the Man of *Wit*, but their own Diversion. The infallible way to ingratiate ones self with Quality, is that dull and empty Entertainment, called *Gaming*, for *Picket*, *Ombre*, and *Basset*, keep always Places even for a *quondam Foot-man*, or a *Drawer* at the *Assemblies*, *Apartments*, and *Visiting-days*. If you lose, you oblige with your Money; if you Win, you command with your Fortune; the *Lord* is your *Bubble*, and the Lady what you please to make her.”

* *Flattery* of our *Wit*, has the same Power over Us, which *Flattery* of *Beauty* has over a Woman; it keeps up that good Opinion of our selves which is necessary to beget *Assurance*; and *Assurance* produces success both in *Fortune* and *Love*.

* Some Men take as much Pains to persuade the World that they have *Wit*, as *Bullies* do that they have *Courage*, and generally with the same Success, for they seldom deceive any one but themselves.

* Some *pert Coxcombs*, so violently affect the Reputation of *Wits*, that not a *French Journal*, *Mercury*, *Farce*, or *Opera*, can escape their Pillaging: yet the utmost they arrive at, is but a sort of *Jack-a-lantern Wit*, that like the Sun-shine which wanton Boys with fragments of Looking-glass reflect in Men's Eyes, dazzles the Weak-sighted, and troubles the strong. These are the Muses *Black-Guard*, that like those of our Camp, tho' they have no share in the Danger or Honour, yet have the greatest in the Plunder; that indifferently strip all that lie before 'em, dead or alive, Friends or Enemies: Whatever they light on, is *Terra incognita*, and they claim the right of Discoverers, that is, of giving their Names to it.

* I think the *Learned*, and *Unlearned Blockhead* pretty Equal: For 'tis all one to me, whether a Man talk *Nonsense*, or *Unintelligible Sense*.

* There is nothing of which we assent to speak with more Humility and Indifference than our own *Sense*, yet nothing of which we think with more Partiality and Presumption. There have been some so bold, as to assume the Title of the *Oracles* of Reason to themselves, and their own Writings; and we meet with others daily, that think themselves *Oracles of Wit*. These are the most vexatious Animals in the World, that think they have a privilege to torment and plague every Body; but those most who have the best Reputation for their Wit and Judgment.

* There's somewhat that borders upon *Madness* in every exalted *Wit*.



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* One of the most remarkable Fools that resort to *Will's*, is the *Fop-Poet*, who is one that has always more Wit in his Pockets than any where else, yet seldom or never any of his own there. *AEsop's* Daw was a Type of him, for he makes himself fine with the Plunder of all Parties; He is a smuggler of Wit, and steals *French Fancies*, without paying the customary Duties; Verse is his *Manufacture*; for it is more the Labour of his *Fingers*, than his *Brain*: He spends much time in *writing*, but ten times more in *reading* what he has written: He asks your Opinion, yet for fear you should not jump with him, tells you his own first: He desires no Favour, yet is disappointed if he is not Flatter'd, and is always offended at the Truth. He is a *Poetical Haberdasher of small Wares*, and deals very much in *Novels, Madrigals, Funeral and Love Odes, Panegyrics, Elegies*, and other Toys of *Parnassus*, which he has a Shop so well furnish'd with, that he can fit you with all sorts in the twinkling of an Eye. He talks much of *Wycherley, Garth, and Congreve*, and protests, he can't help having some Respect for them, because they have so much for him and his Writings, otherwise he could make it appear that they understand little of Poetry in comparison of himself, but he forbears 'em meerly out of Gratitude and Compassion. He is the *Oracle* of those that want *Wit*, and the *Plague* of those that have it; for he haunts their Lodgings, and is more terrible to them than their Duns.

* *Brutus* for want of *Wit*, sets up for *Criticism*; yet has so much ambition to be thought a *Wit*, that he lets his Spleen prevail against Nature, and turns Poet. In this Capacity he is as just to the World as in the other injurious. For, as the *Critick* wrong'd every Body in his Censure, and snarl'd and grin'd at their Writings, the *Poet* gives 'em opportunity to do themselves Justice, to return the Compliment, and laugh at, or despise his. He takes his *Malice* for a *Muse*, and thinks himself *Inspir'd*, when he is only *Possess'd*, and blown up with a Flatus of *Envy* and *Vanity*. His Works are *Libels* upon others, but *Satyrs* upon himself; and while they bark at Men of *Sense*, call him Fool that writ 'em. He has a very great Antipathy to his own Species, and hates to see a Fool any where but in his Glass; for, as he says, *they provoke him, and offend his Eyes*. His Fund of Criticism, is a set of Terms of Art, pick'd out of the *French Criticks*, or their Translators; and his *Poetical Stock*, is a common Place of certain *Forms* and manners of Expression. He writes better in *Verse* than *Prose*; for in that there is *Rhime*, in this, neither *Rhime* nor *Reason*. He rails both at the *French Writers*, "whom he does not



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understand, and at those *English* Authors, whose Excellencies he cannot reach; with him *Voiture* is flat and dull, *Corneille* a stranger to the Passions, *Racine*, Starch'd and Affected, *Moliere*, Jejune, *la Fontaine* a poor Teller of Tales; and even the Divine *Boileau*, little better than a Plagiary. As for the *English* Poets, he treats almost with the same Freedom; *Shakespear* with him has neither Language nor Manners; *Ben. Johnson* is a Pedant; *Dryden* little more than a tolerable Versifier; *Congreve* a laborious Writer; *Garth*, an indifferent imitator of *Boileau*. He traduces *Oldham*, for want of Breeding and good Manners, without a grain of either, and steals his own Wit to bespatter him with; but like an ill Chymist, he lets the *Spirit* fly off in the drawing over and retains only the *Phlegm*. He Censures *Cowley* for too much Wit, and corrects him with none. He is a great Admirer of the incomparable *Milton*, but while he fondly endeavours to imitate his *Sublime*, he is blown up with *Bombast* and *puffy Expressions*. He is a great stickler for *Euripides*, *Sophocles*, *Horace*, *Virgil*, *Ovid*, and the rest of the Ancients; but his ill and lame Translations of 'em, ridicule those he would commend. He ventures to write for the Play-Houses, but having his stol'n, ill-patch'd fustian Plays Damn'd upon the Stage, he ransacks *Bossu*, *Rapin*, and *Dacier*, to arraign the ill-taste of the Town. To compleat himself in the Formalities of *Parnassus*, he falls in Love, and tells his Mistress in a very pathetick Letter, he is oblig'd to her bright *Beauty* for his Poetry; but if this Damsel prove no more indulgent than his Muse, his Amour is like to conclude but unluckily."

Demetrius before the Curse of Poetry had seiz'd him, was in a pretty way of *Thriving Business*, but having lately sold his Chambers in one of the Inns of Court, and taken a Lodging near the Play-house, is now in a fair way of *Starving*. This Gentleman is frequently possess'd with Poetick Raptures; and all the Family complains, that he disturbs 'em at Midnight, by reciting some incomparable sublime Fustian of his own Composing. When he is in Bed, one wou'd imagine he might be quiet for that Night, but 'tis quite otherwise with him; for when a new Thought, as he calls it, comes into his Head, up he gets, sets it down in Writing, and so gradually encreases the detested Bulk of his Poetick Fooleries, which, Heaven avert it! he threatens to Print. *Demetrius* having had the misfortune of miscarrying upon the Stage, endeavours to preserve his unlawful Title to Wit, by bringing all the Dramatick Poets down to his own Level. And wanting Spirit to set up for a Critick, turns *Spy* and *Informer* of *Parnassus*. He frequents *Apollo's* Court at *Will's*, and picks up the freshest Intelligence, what Plays are upon the Stocks, what ready to be Launch'd; and if he can be inform'd, from the *Establish'd Wits*, of any remarkable Fault in the new Play upon the Bills, he is indefatigably industrious in whispering it about, to bespeak its Damnation before its Representation.



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* *Curculio* is a Semi-Wit, that has a great *Veneration* for the *Moderns*, and no less a *Contempt* for the *Ancients*: But his own ill *Composures* destroy the force of his *Arguments*, and do the *Ancients* full *Justice*. This Gentleman having had the good *Fortune* to write a very taking, *undigested medly of Comedy and Farce*, is so puff'd up with his *Success*, that nothing will serve him, but he must bring this new *fantastick way of writing*, into *Esteem*. To compass this *Noble Design*, he tells you what a *Coxcomb Aristotle* was with his *Rules of the three Unities*; and what a *Company of Senseless Pedants the Scaligers, Rapins, Bossu's, and Daciers* are. He proves that *Aristotle* and *Horace*, knew nothing of *Poetry*; that *Common Sense* and *Nature* were not the same in *Athens*, and *Rome*, as they are in *London*; that *Incoherence, Irregularity* and *Nonsense* are the *Chief Perfections* of the *Drama*, and, by a necessary *Consequence* that the *Silent woman*, is below his own *Performance*.

"No new *Doctrine in Religion*, ever got any considerable *Footing* except it was grounded on *Miracles*; Nor any new *Hypothesis* was ever established in natural *Philolqphy*, unless it was confirm'd by *Experience*. The same *Rule* holds, in some measure, in all *Arts and Sciences*, particularly in *Dramatick Poetry*. It will be a hard matter for any *Man* to trump up any new set of *Precepts*, in opposition to those of *Aristotle* and *Horace*, except by following them, he writes several approved *Plays*. The great success of the *first Part* of the *T—p* was sufficient I must confess, to justify the *Authors Conceit*; But then the *Explosion* of the *Second* ought to have cur'd him of it.

"*Writers like Women* seldom give one another a good *Word*; that's most certain. Now if the *Poets* and *Criticks* of all *Ages* have allowed *Sophocles, Euripides, and Terence* to have been good *Dramatick Writers*, and *Aristotle* and *Horace* to have been *judicious Criticks*, ought not their *Censure* to weigh more with *Men of Sense*, than the *Fancies*, of a *Modern Pretender*. To be plain, whoever *Disputes Aristotle* and *Horace*, *Rules* does as good as call the *Scaligers, Vossii, Rapins, Bossu's, Daciers, Corneilles, Roscommons, Normanby's* and *Rymers, Blockheads*: A man must have a great deal of *Assurance*, to be so free with such illustrious *Judges*.



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“Of all the modern Dramatick Poets the Author of *the Trip to the Jubilee* has the least Reason to turn into Ridicule *Aristotle* and *Horace*, since 'tis to their *Rules* which he has, in some measure followed, that he owed the great success of that Play. Those *Rules* are no thing but a strict imitation of Nature, which is still the same in all Ages and Nations: And because the Characters of *Wildair*, *Angelica*, *Standard* and *Smuggler* are *natural*, and well pursued, They have justly met *with Applause*; but then the Characters of *Lurewell* and *Clincher* Sen. being *out of Nature* they have as justly been condemned by all the Good Judges.”

* Some *Scholars*, tho' by their constant Conversation with Antiquity, they may know perfectly the sense of the Learned dead, and be perfect masters of the Wisdom, be thoroughly informed of the State, and nicely skill'd in the Policies of Ages long since past, yet by their retired and unactive Life, and their neglect of Business, they are such strangers to the Domestick Affairs and manners of their own Country and Times, that they appear like the Ghosts of old *Romans* rais'd by Magick. Talk to them of the *Assyrian* or *Persian* Monarchies of the *Grecian* or *Roman* Commonwealths, they answer like Oracles; They are such finished States-men that we should scarce take 'em to have been less than Privy-Councillors to *Semiramis*, Tutors to *Cyrus* the Great, and old Cronies of *Solon*, *Licurgus*, and *Numa Pompilius*. But ingage them in a discourse that concerns the present Times, and their Native Country, and they hardly speak the language of it; Ask them how many Kings there have been in *England* since the Conquest, or in what Reign the *Reformation* happened, and they'll be puzzled with the Question; They know all the minutest Circumstances of *Catiline's* Conspiracy, but are hardly acquainted with the late Plot. They'll tell you the Names of such *Romans* as were called to an Account by the Senate for their *Briberies*, *Extortions* and *Depredations*, but know nothing of the four impeached Lords; They talk of the ancient way of Fighting, and warlike Engines, as if they had been Lieutenant Generals under *Alexander*, *Scipio*, *Annibal* or *Julius Caesar*; but are perfectly ignorant of the modern military Discipline, Fortification and Artillery; and of the very names of *Nassau*, *Conde*, *Turenne*, *Luxembourg*, *Eugene*, *Villeroy* and *Catinat*. They are excellent Guides, and can direct you to every Alley, and Turning in old *Rome* yet lose their way home in their own Parish. They are mighty Admirers of the Wit and Eloquence of the Ancients; Yet had they lived in the Time of *Demosthenes*, and *Cicero*, would have treated them with as much supercilious



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Pride, and disrespect as they do now the Moderns. They are great Hunters of Ancient Manuscripts, and have in great Veneration any thing that has escaped the Teeth of Time; and if Age has obliterated the Characters, 'tis the more valuable for not being legible. These Superstitious bigotted idolaters of time past, are children in their Understanding all their lives, for they hang so incessantly upon the leading-strings of Authority, that their Judgments like the Limbs of some *Indian* Penitents, become altogether cramped and motionless for want of use. In fine, they think it a disparagement of their Learning to talk what other Men understand, and will scarce believe that two and two make four, under a Demonstration from *Euclid*, or a *Quotation from Aristotle*.

The World shall allow a Man to be a wise Man, a good Naturalist, a good Mathematician, Politician or Poet, but not a *Scholar*, or Learned Man, unless he be a Philologer and understands Greek and Latin. But for my part I take these Gentlemen have just inverted the life of the Term, and given that to the Knowledge of Words, which belongs more properly to Things. I take Nature to be the Book of Universal Learning, which he that reads best in all or any of its Parts, is the greatest Scholar, the most Learned Man; and 'tis as ridiculous for a Man to count himself more learned than another, if he have no greater Extent of Knowledge of things, because he is more vers'd in Languages, as it would be for an old fellow to tell a young One, his own Eyes were better than the other's because he reads with spectacles, the other without.

* *Impertinence* is a Failing that has its Root in Nature, but is not worth laughing at, till it has received the finishing strokes of *Art*. A man thro' natural Defects may do abundance of incoherent foolish Actions, yet deserves compassion and Advice rather than derision. But to see Men spending their Fortunes, as well as lives, in a Course of regular Folly, and with an industrious as well as expensive idleness running thro' tedious systems of impertinence, would have split the sides of *Heraclitus*, had it been his Fortune to have been a Spectator. It's very easie to decide which of these impertinents is the most signal: the Virtuoso is manifestly without a Competitor. For our follies are not to be measured by the Degree of Ignorance that appears in 'em, but by the study, labour and expence they cost us to finish and compleat 'em.

So that the more Regularity and Artifice there appears in any of our Extravagancies, the greater is the Folly of 'em. Upon this score it is that the last mentioned deservedly claim the Preference to all others. They have improved so well their Amusements into an Art, that the credulous and ignorant are induced to believe there is some secret Vertue, some hidden Mystery in those darling Toys of theirs: when all their Bustling amounts to no more than a learned impertinence and all they teach men is but a specious method of throwing away both Time and Money.



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“The *Illusions of Poetry* are fatal to none but the *Poets* themselves: *Sidonius* having lately miscarried upon the Stage, gathers fresh Courage and is now big with the Hopes of a Play, writ by an ancient celebrated Author, new-vampt and furbisht up after the laudable Custom of our modern Witlings. He reckons how much he shall get by his third day, nay, by his sixth; how much by the Printing, how much by the Dedication, and by a modest Computation concludes the whole sum, will amount to two hundred Pounds, which are to be distributed among his trusty Duns. But mark the fallacy of *Vanity* and *Self-conceit*: The Play is acted, and casts the Audience into such a Lethargy, that They are fain to damn it with *Yawning*, being in a manner deprived of the Use of their *hissing* Faculty. Well says, *Sidonius*, (after having recover’d from a profound Consternation) *Now must the important Person stand upon his own Leggs*. Right, *Sidonius*, but when do you come on again, that *Covent-Garden* Doctors may prescribe your Play instead of Opium?

“The Town is not one jot more diverted by the Division of the Play-houses: the *Players* perform better ’tis true? but then the *Poets* write worse; Will the uniting of *Drury-Lane* and *Lincoln’s-Inn-Fields* mend Matters? No,—for then What the Town should get in writing, they would lose it in Acting.”

* A *Dramatick Poet* has as hard a Task on’t to manage, as a *passive obedience Divine* that preaches before the Commons on the 30th. of *January*.

To please the *Pit* and *Galleries* he must take care to lard the Dialogue with store of luscious stuff, which the righteous call Baudy; to please the new Reformers he must have none, otherwise gruff *Jeremy* will Lash him in a third *View*.

* I very much Question, after all, whether *Collier* would have been at the Pains to lash the immoralities of the stage, if the *Dramatick Poets* had not been guilty of the *abominable Sin* of making familiar now and then with the Backslidings of the Cassock.

* *The Griping Usurer*, whose daily labour and nightly Care and Study is to oppress the Poor, or over-reach his Neighbour, to betray the Trusts his Hypocrisy procured; in short to break all the Positive Laws of Morality, crys out, Oh! Diabolical, at a poor harmless *Double Entendre* in a Play.

“’Tis preposterous to pretend to reform the *Stage* before the Nation, and particularly the Town, is *reform’d*. The Business of a *Dramatick Poet* is to *copy Nature*, and represent things as they are; Let our Peers give over *whoring* and *drinking*; the Citizens, *Cheating*; the Clergy, their *Quarrels*, *Covetousness* and *Ambition*; the Lawyers, their *ambidextrous dealings*; and the Women *intriguing*, and the stage will reform of Course.



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“Formerly *Poets* made *Players*, but now adays 'tis generally the *Player* that makes the *Poet*. How many Plays would have expired the very first Night of their appearing upon the Stage, but for *Betterton*, *Barry*, *Bracegirdle*, or *Wilks's* inimitable Performance.

“Who ever goes about to expose the Follies of others upon the Stage, runs great hazard of exposing himself first; and of being made Ridiculous to those very People he endeavours to make so.

“I doubt whether a Man of Sense would ever give himself the trouble of writing for the Stage, if he had before his Eyes the fatigue of Rehearsals, the Pangs and Agonies of the first day his Play is Acted, the Disappointments of the third, and the Scandal of a Damn'd Poet.

“The reason why in *Shakespear* and *Ben. Johnson's* Time Plays had so good Success, and that we see now so many of 'em miscarry, is because then the Poets *wrote better* than the Audience *Judg'd*; whereas now-a-days the Audience judge *better than the Poets write*.”

* He that pretends to confine a Damsel of the Theatre to his own Use, who by her Character is a Person of an extended Qualification, acts as unrighteous, at least as unnatural, a Part, as he that would Debauch a Nun. But after all, such a Spark rather consults his *Vanity*, than his *Love*, and would be thought to ingross what all the young Coxcombs of the Town admire and covet.

“Is it not a kind of Prodigy, that in this wicked and censorious Age, the shining *Daphne* should preserve her Reputation in a Play-House?”

The Character of a Player was Infamous amongst the *Romans*, but with the *Greeks* Honourable: What is our Opinion? We think of them like the *Romans*, and live with them like the *Greeks*.

“Nothing so powerfully excites Love in us Men, as the view of those Limbs of Women's Bodies, which the Establish'd Rules of Modesty bid 'em keep from our Sight. No wonder then if *Aglaura*, *Caesonia*, *Floria*, and in general all the Women on our Stages, are so fond of acting in Men's Cloaths.

“*Caesonia* is Young, I own it: But then *Caesonia* has an *African* Nose, hollow Eyes, and a *French* Complexion; so that all the time she acted in her Sex's Habit, her Conquests never extended further than one of her Fellow-Players, or a Cast-Poet. Mark the Miracles of Fancy: *Caesonia* acts a *Boy's* Part, and *Tallus*, one of the first *Patricians*, falls desperately in Love with her, and presents her with two Hundred great *Sesterces* (a Gentlewoman's Portion) for a Night's Lodging.



“One would imagine our Matrons should be mighty Jealous of their Husbands Intriguing with Players: But no, they bear it with a Christian Patience. How is that possible? Why, they Intrigue themselves, either with *Roscius* the Tragedian, *Flagillus*, the Comedian, or *Bathillus*, the Dancer.”



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Nothing Surprizes me more, than to see Men Laugh so freely at a Comedy, and yet account it a silly weakness to Weep at a Tragedy. For is it less natural for a Man's Heart to relent upon a Scene of Pity, than to be transported with Joy upon one of Mirth and Humour? Or is it only the alteration of the Features of one's Face that makes us forbear Crying? But this alteration is undoubtedly as great in an immoderate Laughter, as in a most desperate Grief; and good Breeding teaches us to avoid the one as well as the other, before those for whom we have a Respect. Or is it painful to us to appear tender-hearted and express grief upon a Fiction? But without quoting great Wits who account it an equal Weakness, either to weep or laugh out of Measure, can we expect to be tickled by a Tragical Adventure? And besides, is not Truth as naturally represented in that as in a Comical one? Therefore as we do not think it ridiculous to see a whole Audience laugh at a merry jest or humour acted to the life, but on the contrary we commend the skill both of the Poet and the Actor; so the great Violence we use upon our selves to contain our tears, together with the forc'd a-wry smiles with which we strive to conceal our Concern, do forcibly evince that the natural effect of a good *Tragedy* is to make us all weep by consent, without any more ado than to pull out our Handkerchiefs to wipe off our Tears. And if it were once agreed amongst us not to resist those tender impressions of *Pity*, I dare engage that we would soon be convinc'd that by frequenting the Play-house we run less danger of being put to the expence of Tears, than of being almost frozen to death by many a cold, dull insipid jest.

We must make it our main Business and Study to *think* and *write well*, and not labour to submit other People's Palates and Opinions to our own; which is the greater difficulty of the two.

One should serve his time to learn how to make a *Book*, just as some men do to learn how to make a watch, for there goes something more than either Wit or Learning to the setting up for an *Author*. A *Lawyer* of this Town was an able, subtle and experienc'd Man in the way of his Business, and might for ought I know, have come to be *Lord Chief Justice*, but he has lately miscarried in the Good Opinion of the World, only by Printing some Essays which are a Master-piece—in *Nonsense*.

It is a more difficult matter to get a Name by a *Perfect Composure*, than to make an *indifferent* one valued by that Reputation a Man has already got in the World.

There are some things which admit of no *mediocrity*; such as *Poetry*, *Painting*, *Musick* and *Oratory*—What Torture can be greater than to hear Doctor F—— declaim a flat Oration with formality and Pomp, or D—— read his Pyndaricks with all the Emphasis of a *Dull Poet*.

We have not as yet seen any excellent Piece, but what is owing to the Labour of one single Man: *Homer*, for the purpose, has writ the *Iliad*; *Virgil*, the *AEneid*; *Livy* his *Decads*; and the *Roman Orator* his *Orations*; but our *modern several Hands* present us often with nothing but a *Variety of Errors*.

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There is in the Arts and Sciences such a *Point of Perfection*, as there is one of *Goodness* or *maturity* in Fruits; and he that can find and relish it must be allowed to have a *True Taste*; but on the contrary, he that neither perceives it, nor likes any thing on this side, or beyond it, has but a defective Palate. Hence I conclude that there is a bad *Taste* and a *good* one, and that the disputing about *Tastes* is not altogether unreasonable.

The Lives of *Heroes* have enrich *History* and History in requital has embellished and heightened the Lives of *Heroes*, so that it is no easie matter to determine which of the two is more beholden to the other: either *Historians*, to those who have furnished them with so great and noble a matter to work upon; or those great Men, to those Writers that have convey'd their names and Atchievements down to the *Admiration of after-Ages*.

There are many of our *Wits* that feed for a while upon the *Ancients*, and the best of our Modern Authors: and when they have *squeez'd* out and *extracted* matter enough to appear in Print and set up for themselves, most ungratefully abuse them, like children grown strong and lusty by the good milk they have sucked, who generally beat their Nurses.

A *Modern Author* proves both by Reasons and Examples that the *Ancients* are inferior to us; and fetches his Arguments from his own particular Taste, and his Examples from his own *Writings*. He owns, That the *Ancients* tho' generally uneven and uncorrect, have yet here and there some fine Touches, and indeed these are so fine, that the quoting of them is the only thing that makes his *Criticisms* worth a Mans reading 'em.

Some great Men pronounce for the *Ancients* against the *Moderns*: But their own Composures are so agreeable to the Taste of Antiquity, and bear so great a resemblance with the Patterns they have left us, that they seem to be judges in their own Case and being suspected of Partiality, are therefore *ceptionable*.

It is the Character of a *Pedant* to be unwilling either to ask a Friend's advice about his Work or to alter what he has been made sensible to be a fault.

We ought to read our *Writings* to those only, who have Judgment enough to correct what is amiss, and esteem what deserves to be commended.

An *Author*, ought to receive with an equal Modesty both the Praise and Censure of other People upon his own Works.

A great facility in submitting to other People's Censure is sometimes as faulty as a great roughness in rejecting it: for there is no Composure so every way accomplisht, but what would be pared and clipped to nothing if a man would follow the advice of every finical scrupulous Critick, who often would have the best Things left out because forsooth, they are not agreeable to his dull Palate.



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The great Pleasure some People take in *criticizing* upon the *small Faults* of a Book so vitiates their Taste, that it renders them unfit to be *affected* with it's *Beauties*.

The same Niceness of Judgment which makes some Men write sence, makes them very often shy and unwilling to appear in Print.

Among the several *Expressions* We may use for the same Thought, there is but an individual one which is good and proper; any other but that is flat and imperfect, and cannot please an ingenious Man that has a mind to explain what he thinks: And it is no small wonder to me to consider, what Pains, even the best of Writers are sometimes at, to seek out that Expression, which being the most simple and natural, ought consequently to have presented it self without Study.

'Tis to no great purpose that a Man seeks to make himself admir'd by his Composures: Blockheads, indeed, may oftentimes admire him but then they are but Blockheads; and as for *Wits* they have in themselves the seeds or hints of all the good and fine things that can possibly be thought of or said; and therefore they seldom admire any thing, but only approve of what hits their Palate.

The being a *Critick* is not so much a Science as a sort of laborious, and painful Employment, which requires more strength of Body, than delicacy of Wit, and more assiduity than natural Parts.

As some merit Praise for writing well, so do others for not writing at all.

That *Author* who chiefly endeavours to please the Taste of the Age he lives in, rather consults his private interest, than that of his *Writings*. We ought always to have perfection in Prospect as the chief thing we aim at, and that Point once gain'd, we may rest assured that unbyassed *Posterity* will do us Justice, which is often deny'd us by our *Contemporaries*.

'Tis matter of discretion in an Author to be extreamly reserv'd and modest when he speaks of the Work he is upon, for fear he should raise the World's Expectation too high: For it is most certain, that our Opinion of an extraordinary Promise, goes always further than the Performance, and a Man's Reputation cannot but be much lessen'd by such a Disparity.

The Name of the *Author* ought to be the last thing we inquire into, when we Judge of the merit of an ingenious Composure, but contrary to this maxim we generally judge of the *Book* by the *Author*, instead of judging of the *Author* by the *Book*.

As we see Women that without the knowledge of Men do sometimes bring forth inanimate and formless lumps of Flesh, but to cause a natural and perfect Generation, they are to be husbanded by another kind of seed, even so it is with Wit which if not

applied to some certain study that may fix and restrain it, runs into a thousand Extravagancies, and is eternally roving here and there in the inextricable labyrinth of restless Imagination.



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If every one who hears or reads a good Sentence or maxim, would immediately consider how it does any way touch his own private concern, he would soon find, that it was not so much a good saying, as a severe lash to the ordinary Bestiality of his judgment: but Men receive the Precepts and admonitions of Truth as generally directed to the common sort and never particularly to themselves, and instead of applying them to their own manners, do only very ignorantly and unprofitably commit them to Memory, without suffering themselves to be at all instructed, or converted by them.

We say of some compositions that they stink of Oil and smell of the Lamp, by reason of a certain rough harshness that the laborious handling imprints upon those, where great force has been employed: but besides this, the solicitude of doing well, and a certain striving and contending of a mind too far strain'd, and over-bent upon its undertaking, breaks and hinders it self, like Water that by force of its own pressing Violence and Abundance cannot find a ready issue through the neck of a Bottle, or a narrow sluice.

Humour, Temper, Education and a thousand other Circumstances create so great a difference betwixt the several Palates of Men, and their Judgments upon ingenious Composures, that nothing can be more chimerical and foolish in an Author than the Ambition of a general Reputation.

As Plants are suffocated and drown'd with too much nourishment, and Lamps with too much Oyl, so is the active part of the understanding with too much study and matter, which being embarass'd and confounded with the Diversity of things is deprived of the force and power to disengage it self; and by the Pressure of this weight, it is bow'd, subjected and rendred of no use.

* Studious and inquisitive Men commonly at forty or fifty at the most, have fixed and settled their judgments in most Points, and as it were made their last understanding, supposing they have thought, or read, or heard what can be said on all sides of things, and after that they grow positive and impatient of Contradiction, thinking it a disparagement to them to alter their Judgment.

All Skillful Masters ought to have a care not to let their Works be seen in *Embryo*, for all beginnings are defective, and the imagination is always prejudiced. The remembering to have seen a thing imperfect takes from one the Liberty of thinking it pretty when it is finished.

Many fetch a tedious Compass of Words, without ever coming to the Knot of the business: they make a thousand turnings and windings, that tire themselves and others, without ever arriving at the Point of importance. That proceeds from the Confusion of their Understanding, which cannot clear it self. They lose Time and Patience in what ought to be let alone, and then they have no more to bestow upon what they have omitted.

It is the Knack of Men of Wit to find out Evasions; With a touch of Gallantry they extricate themselves out of the greatest Labyrinth. A graceful smile will make them avoid the most dangerous Quarrel.



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Mind, Understanding, Wit, Memory, Heart.

The Strength and Weakness of a Man's Mind, are improper Terms, since they are really nothing else but the *Organs* of our *Bodies*, being well or ill dispos'd.

'Tis a great Errour, the making a difference between the *Wit* and the *Judgment*: For, in truth, the *Judgment* is nothing else but the *Brightness of Wit*, which penetrates into the very bottom of Things, observes all that ought to be observ'd there, and describes what seem'd to be imperceptible. From whence we must conclude, That 'tis the *Extention* and *Energy* of this *Light of Wit*, that produces all those Effects, usually ascrib'd to *Judgment*.

All Men may be allowed to give a good Character of their *Hearts* (or *Inclinations*) but no body dares to speak well of his own *Wit*.

Polite Wit consists in nice, curious, and honest *Thoughts*.

The *Gallantry* of *Wit* consists in *Flattery* well couch'd.

It often happens, that some things offer themselves to our *Wit*, which are naturally finer and better, than is possible for a Man to make them by the Additions of *Art* and *Study*.

Wit is always made a *Cully* to the *Heart*.

Many People are acquainted with their own *Wit*, that are not acquainted with their own *Heart*.

It is not in the power of *Wit*, to act a long while the *Part* of the *Heart*.

A Man of *Wit* would be sometimes miserably at a loss, but for the Company of *Fools*.

A Man of *Wit* may sometimes be a *Coxcomb*; but a Man of *Judgment* never can.

The different Ways or Methods for compassing a Design, come not so much from the Quickness and Fertility of an industrious *Wit*, as a dim-sighted *Understanding*, which makes us pitch upon every fresh Matter that presents itself to our groping *Fancy*, and does not furnish us with Judgment sufficient to discern at first sight, which or them is best for our Purpose.

The *Twang* of a Man's *Native Country*, sticks by him as much in his *Mind* and *Disposition*, as it does in his *Tone of Speaking*.

Wit serves sometimes to make us play the *Fool* with greater Confidence.

Shallow *Wits* are apt to censure everything above their own *Capacity*.



'Tis past the Power of *Imagination* it self, to invent so many distant *Contrarities*, as there are naturally in the *Heart* of every Man.

No body is so well acquainted with himself, as to know his own *Mind* at all times.

Every body complains of his *Memory*, but no body of his *Judgment*.

There is a kind of general *Revolution*, not more visible in the turn it gives to the Fortunes of the *World*, than it is in the Change of Men's *Understandings*, and the different Relish or *Wit*.



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Men often think to conduct and govern themselves, when all the while they are led and manag'd; and while their *Understanding* aims at one thing, their *Heart* insensibly draws them into another.

Great *Souls* are not distinguish'd by having less *Passion*, and more *Virtue*; but by having nobler and greater *Designs* than the *Vulgar*.

We allow few Men to be either *Witty* or Reasonable, besides those who are of our own Opinion.

We are as much pleas'd to discover another Man's *Mind*, as we are discontented to have our own found out.

A straight and well-contriv'd *Mind*, finds it easier to yield to a perverse one, than to direct and manage it.

Coxcombs are never so troublesome, as when they pretend to *Wit*.

A little *Wit* with *Discretion*, tires less at long-run, than much *Wit* without *Judgment*.

Nothing comes amiss to a great *Soul*; and there is as much *Wisdom* in bearing other People's *Defects*, as in relishing their good *Qualities*.

It argues a great height of *Judgment* in a Man, to discover what is in another's Breast, and to conceal what is in his own.

If Poverty be the Mother of Wickedness, want of *Wit* must be the Father.

* A *Mind* that has no Ballance in it self, turns insolent, or abject, out of measure, with the various Change of Fortune.

* Our *Memories* are frail and treacherous; and we think many excellent things, which for want of making a deep impression, we can never recover afterwards. In vain we hunt for the stragling *Idea*, and rummage all the Solitudes and Retirements of our Soul, for a lost Thought, which has left no Track or Foot-steps behind it: The swift Off-spring of the Mind is gone; 'tis dead as soon as born; nay, often proves abortive in the moment it was conceiv'd: The only way therefore to retain our Thoughts, is to fasten them in Words, and chain them in Writing.

* A Man is never so great a *Dunce* by *Nature*, but *Love*, *Malice*, or *Necessity*, will supply him with some *Wit*.

* There is a *Defect* which is almost unavoidable in great *Inventors*; it is the Custom of such earnest and powerful Minds, to do wonderful Things in the beginning; but shortly after, to be over-born by the Multitude and Weight of their own Thoughts; then to yield



and cool by little and little, and at last grow weary, and even to loath that, upon which they were at first the most eager. This is the wonted Constitution of *great Wits*; such tender things are those exalted Actions of the Mind; and so hard it is for those Imaginations, that can run swift and mighty Races, to be able to travel a long and constant Journey. The Effects of this Infirmary have been so remarkable, that we have certainly lost very many Inventions, after they have been in part fashion'd, by the meer *Languishing* and *Negligence* of their *Authors*.