

A Critical Essay on Characteristic-Writings eBook

A Critical Essay on Characteristic-Writings by Henry Gally Knight

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INTRODUCTION

Henry Gally's *A Critical Essay on Characteristic-Writings*, here reprinted, is the introductory essay to his translation of *The Moral Characters of Theophrastus* (1725). Of Gally's life (1696-1769) little is known. Apparently his was a moderately successful ecclesiastical career: he was appointed in 1735 chaplain-in-ordinary to George II. His other published works consist of sermons, religious tracts, and an undistinguished treatise on the pronunciation of Greek.

His essay on the character, however, deserves attention because it is the first detailed and serious discussion by an Englishman of a literary kind immensely popular in its day. English writers before Gally had, of course, commented on the character. Overbury, for example, in "What A Character Is" (*Sir Thomas Overbury His Wife...* 1616) had defined the character as "wit's descant on any plain-song," and Brathwaite in his Dedication to *Whimzies* (1631) had written that character-writers must shun affectation and prefer the "pith before the rind." Wye Saltonstall in the same year in his Dedicatory Epistle to *Picturae Loquentes* had required of a character "lively and exact Lineaments" and "fast and loose knots which the ingenious Reader may easily untie." These remarks, however, as also Flecknoe's "Of the Author's Idea of a Character" (*Enigmaticall Characters*, 1658) and Ralph Johnson's "rules" for character-writing in *A Scholar's Guide from the Accidence to the University* (1665), are fragmentary and oblique. Nor do either of the two English translations of Theophrastus before Gally—the one a rendering of La Bruyere's French version,^[1] and the other, Eustace Budgell's *The Moral Characters of Theophrastus* (1714)—touch more than in passing on the nature of the character. Gally's essay, in which he claims to deduce his critical principles from the practice of Theophrastus, is both historically and intrinsically the most important work of its kind.

Section I of Gally's essay, thoroughly conventional in nature, is omitted here. In it Gally, following Casaubon,^[2] theorizes that the character evolved out of Greek Old Comedy. The Augustans saw a close connection between drama and character-writing. Congreve (Dedication to *The Way of the World*, 1700) thought that the comic dramatist Menander formed his characters on "the observations of Theophrastus, of whom he was a disciple," and Budgell, who termed Theophrastus the father of modern comedy, believed that if some of Theophrastus's characters "were well worked up, and brought upon the British theatre, they could not fail of Success."^[3] Gally similarly held that a dramatic character and Theophrastan character differ only in



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the different Manner of representing the same Image. The *Drama* presents to the Eyes of a Spectator an Actor, who speaks and acts as the Person, whom he represents, is suppos'd to speak and act in real Life. The *Characteristic* Writer introduces, in a descriptive manner, before a Reader, the same Person, as speaking and acting in the same manner.

Section III of Gally's essay, like Section I thoroughly conventional, is also omitted here. Gally attributes to Theophrastus the spurious "Proem," in which Theophrastus, emphasizing his ethical purpose, announces his intention of following up his characters of vice with characters of virtue. At one point Gally asserts that Theophrastus taught the same doctrine as Aristotle and Plato, but

accommodated Morality to the Taste of the *Beau Monde*, with all the Embellishments that can please the nice Ears of an intelligent Reader, and with that inoffensive Satir, which corrects the Vices of Men, without making them conceive any Aversion for the Satirist.

It is Gally's concept of the character as an art-form, however, which is most interesting to the modern scholar. Gally breaks sharply with earlier character-writers like Overbury who, he thinks, have departed from the Theophrastan method. Their work for the most part reflects corrupted taste:

A continued Affectation of far-fetched and quaint Simile's, which runs thro' almost all these Characters, makes 'em appear like so many Pieces of mere Grotesque; and the Reader must not expect to find Persons describ'd as they really are, but rather according to what they are thought to be like.

And Gally attacks one of the favorite devices of the seventeenth-century character:

An Author, in this Kind, must not dwell too long upon one Idea; As soon as the masterly Stroke is given, he must immediately pass on to another Idea.... For if, after the masterly Stroke is given, the Author shou'd, in a paraphractical Manner, still insist upon the same Idea, the Work will immediately flag, the Character grow languid, and the Person characteris'd will insensibly vanish from the Eyes of the Reader.

One has only to read a character like Butler's "A Flatterer" to appreciate Gally's point. The Theophrastan method had been to describe a character operatively—that is, through the use of concrete dramatic incident illustrating the particular vice. The seventeenth-century character is too often merely a showcase for the writer's wit. One frequently finds a succession of ingenious metaphors, each redefining from a slightly different angle a type's master-passion, but blurring rather than sharpening the likeness.

Gally insists that the style of the character be plain and easy, "without any of those Points and Turns, which convey to the Mind nothing but a low and false Wit." The piece



should not be tediously rambling, but compact. It must have perfect unity of structure: each sentence should add a significant detail to the portrait. The manner ought to be lively, the language pure and unaffected.



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As for the character-writer's materials, they are "Human Nature, in its various Forms and Affections." Each character should focus on a single vice or virtue, yet since "the Heart of Man is frequently actuated by more Passions than one," subsidiary traits ought to be included to round out the portrait (e.g., the covetous man may also be impudent, the impudent man generous). Budgell had expressed a similar conception. A character, he wrote, "may be compared to a Looking-glass that is placed to catch a particular Object; but cannot represent that Object in its full Light, without giving us a little Landskip of every thing else that lies about it." [4] By Gally's time writers like Pascal, La Rochefoucauld, and La Bruyere had done much to show the complex and paradoxical nature of human behaviour. Gally, who praises La Rochefoucauld as the one modern as well equipped as Theophrastus to compose characters, reacts with his age against the stale types which both comedy and the character had been retailing *ad nauseam*. Human nature, says Gally, is full of subtle shadings and agreeable variations which the character ought to exploit. He quotes Temple to the effect that England is richer than any other nation in "original Humours" and wonders that no one has yet attempted a comprehensive portrait-gallery of English personality. Those writers who have come closest to Gally's idea of how "humour" ought to be handled are the "great Authors" of the *Tatlers* and *Spectators*, with their "interspers'd Characters of Men and Manners compleatly drawn to the Life."

In admiring the Roger de Coverley sketches, Gally typifies the increasingly tolerant attitude of the Augustans toward eccentric behavior. [5] Like Sterne and Fielding he is delighted by people whose idiosyncracies are harmless and appealing. As for the harsh satiric animus of a character-writer like Butler, it is totally alien to Gally, who would chide good-naturedly, so as "not to seem to make any Attacks upon the Province of Self-Love" in the reader. "Each Man," he writes, "contains a little World within himself, and every Heart is a new World." The writer should understand and appreciate, not ridicule, an individual's uniqueness.

Of course, the character as Theophrastus wrote it described the type, not the particular person. Gally, who sets up Theophrastus as his model, apparently fails to realize that a "humourist" like Sir Roger verges on individuality. Indeed, while discussing the need for writers to study their own and other men's passions, he emphasizes that "without a Knowledge of these Things, 'twill be impossible ever to draw a Character so to the Life, as that it shall hit one Person, and him only." Here Gally might well be talking of the Clarendon kind of portrait. If a character is "one Person, and him only," he is no longer a type, but somebody peculiarly himself.



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Gally, then, is not as Theophrastus as he professes to be. True, he harks back to Theophrastus in matters of style and technique. And he does not criticize him, as does La Bruyere,[6] for paying too much attention to a man's external actions, and not enough to his "Thoughts, Sentiments, and Inclinations." Nevertheless his mind is receptive to the kind of individuated characterization soon to distinguish the mid-eighteenth century novel. The type is still his measuring-stick, but he calibrates it far less rigidly than a Rymer analyzing Iago or Evadne. A man can be A Flatterer or A Blunt Man and still retain a private identity: this private identity Gally recognizes as important. Gally's essay thus reflects fundamental changes in the English attitude toward human nature and its literary representation.

Alexander H. Chorney
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Notes to the Introduction

1. *The Characters, Or The Manners of the Age. By Monsieur De La Bruyere of the French Academy. Made English by several hands. With the Characters of Theophrastus...* 1699. 2 vols.
2. Isaac Casaubon's Latin edition of Theophrastus appeared in 1592 and was reprinted frequently during the seventeenth century.
3. Eustace Budgell, *The Moral Characters of Theophrastus* (1714), Preface, sig. a5.
4. *Ibid.*, sig. a6 verso.
5. For a full account of the shift in attitude see Edward Miles Hooker, "Humour in the Age of Pope," *Huntington Library Quarterly*, XL (1948), 361-385.
6. "A Prefatory Discourse concerning Theophrastus," in *The Characters, Or The Manners of the Age*, II, xxii.

* * * * *

The
Moral Characters
of
THEOPHRASTUS.



Translated from
The Greek, with Notes.
To which is prefix'd

A
CRITICAL ESSAY
on
Characteristic-Writings.

By Henry Gally, M.A. Lecturer of
St. Paul's Covent-Garden, and
Rector of Wanden in Buckinghamshire.

Respicere exemplar vitae morumque jubebo
Doctum imitatore, & vivas hinc ducere voces.
Hor. in Art. Poet.

LONDON:
Printed for John Hooke, at the *Flower-
de-luce* over-against St. *Dunstan's* Church in
Fleet-street. MDCCXXV.

* * * * *

THE

PREFACE.

The following Papers, which I now commit to the Public, have lain by me unregarded these many Years. They were first undertaken at the Request of a Person, who at present shall be nameless. Since that Time I have been wholly diverted from Studies of this Nature, and my Thoughts have been employed about Subjects of a much greater Consequence, and more agreeable to my Profession: Insomuch, that I had nothing in my Mind less than the Publication of these Papers; but some Friends, who had perus'd them, were of Opinion, that they deserv'd to be publish'd, and that they might afford an agreeable Entertainment not without some Profit to the Reader. *These* Motives prevailed upon me to give *them* a second Care, and to bestow upon them so much Pains, as was necessary to put them in that State, in which they now appear.

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The first Piece that the Reader will meet with is, *A Critical ESSAY on Characteristic-Writings*: It treats of the Origin of those Writings: It points out the general Laws to be observ'd in such Compositions, and it contains some Reflexions on *Theophrastus's* and *Mr. de la Bruyere's* Performances in this Way. The Design of this at least is, I think, new. *Mr. Fabricius* mentions a [A]Book, which, by its Title, shou'd bear some Relation to this Essay, but tho' I have enquir'd after it pretty strictly, yet I never cou'd get a Sight of it, nor have I conversed with any Person that had perus'd it.

[A: Georgii Paschii Professoris Kiloniensis Diatriba de philosophia Characteristica & Paraenetica. 4to. *Kilonie*. 1705. Vid. Fabric. Bib. Graec. L. 3. p. 241.]

The next Piece is a Translation of the *Moral Characters of Theophrastus* from the *Greek*. This is not the first Time that *Theophrastus* has appeared in a modern Dress. *Mr. de la Bruyere* translated him into *French*: And this was the Foundation of those Characters, which he himself compos'd, and which gave Rise to those many Performances, that were afterwards attempted in the same Way. [B]*Mr. Menage* has highly extoll'd this Translation. *Elle est*, says he, *bien belle, & bien francoise, & montre que son Auteur entend parfaitement le Grec. Je puis dire que j'y ay vu des Choses, que, peut etre, Faute d'Attention, je n'avois pas vues dans le Grec*. This is great; and it must be own'd that *Mr. Menage* was a Man of very extensive Learning, and a great Master of the *Greek Tongue*; but that his Judgment was always equal to his Knowledge of Words, will not be so readily allow'd. Besides, the Credit of the Books ending in *ana* runs very low, and in particular the *Menagiana* have been disown'd by *Mr. Menage's* own [C]Relations, as being injurious to the Merit and Memory of that great Man. And therefore it must still be left to the inquisitive and judicious Reader to determine, whether those Faults, which I have observ'd in *Mr. de la Bruyere's* Translation are justly censur'd or not.

[B: *Menagiana*. Ed. *Paris*. 1715. T. 4. p. 219.]

[C: *Mr. du Tremblay*. *Traite des Langues*. ad fin.]

The *Characters of Theophrastus* have been twice translated into *English*. The former Translation is *anonymous*, and the latter was done by the ingenious *Mr. Eustace Budgell*. It will be expected that I shou'd say something of these two Translations. And I shall be the more ready to do this, because I shall hereby insensibly lead the Reader to the Reasons which induc'd me to undertake a third.



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The anonymous *English* Translation is said to have been done upon the *Greek*. But this is only a Pretence, and a low Artifice of the ignorant Translator: For in reality 'tis no more than a mean and insipid Translation of the *French* of Mr. *de la Bruyere*, revis'd upon the *Latin* of *Casaubon*, which answers almost verbally to the Original *Greek*. If this were a Matter of Importance, I wou'd here fully demonstrate it: For the Fact is so glaring, that tho' the Translator is wholly unknown to me, yet I can aver what I have asserted to be Truth, almost as certainly, as if I had been an Eye Witness to the doing of it_.

Mr. *Budgell's* Translation must be own'd to be polite: But politeness is not the only Qualification that is required in such a Translation. The learn'd Reader, who understands the Original, will consider it in a different View. And to judg of it according to those Rules which Translators ought to observe, it must be condemned. In general, it is not exact and accurate enough; but what is far worse, Mr. *Budgell* gives, in too many Instances, his own Thoughts instead of representing the true Sense of *Theophrastus*. This is perverting the *Humour* of the Original, and, in Effect, making a new Work, instead of giving only a Translation. Mr. *Budgell* ingenuously confesses, that he has taken a great deal of Liberty; but when a Translator confesses thus much, it does but give the Reader good Reason to suspect that instead of taking a great deal, he has in reality taken too much.

Antient Authors (when they are translated) suffer in nothing more, than in having the Manners and Customs, to which they allude, transformed into the Manners and Customs of the present Age. By this Liberty, or rather Licenciousness of Translators, Authors not only appear in a different Dress, but they become unlike themselves, by losing that peculiar and distinctive Character in which they excel. This is most palpable in those Authors, whose Character consists in *Humour*. Let any one read *Terence*, as he is translated by Mr. *Echard*, and he will take him to have been a Buffoon: Whereas *Terence* never dealt in such a Kind of low Mirth. His true Character is, to have afforded to his Spectators and Readers the gravest, and, at the same Time, the most agreeable, most polite Entertainment of any antient Author now extant. This is, in some Measure, the Case of *Theophrastus*: He has been transformed; and he has suffer'd in the Transformation. What I have endeavoured is, to do him that Justice which, I think, he has not hitherto met with, by preserving the native Simplicity of his Characters, by retaining those antient Manners and Customs which he alludes to, and keeping up the peculiar *Humour* of the Original as nearly, as the Difference of Language wou'd allow. This is the Attempt; how far I have succeeded, must be let to the judicious and curious Reader to determine. Thus much I thought necessary to say concerning former Translations, in order to justify my own Undertaking, which will not acquire an intrinsic Merit from the Censures, that I have pass'd upon others. No: The Faults of others cannot extenuate our own; and that Stamp, which every Work carries along with it, can only determine of what Kind it really is.

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The Reader will expect that I shou'd here say a Word or two concerning the *Notes* which follow the *Characters*. Some Authors or Commentators (call them which you will) out of a vain Ostentation of Literature, lay hold of the slightest of Opportunities to expose all their Learning to the World, without ever knowing when they have said enough: Insomuch, that in most Commentaries upon antient Authors, one may sooner meet with a System of Antiquities, than with Solutions of the real Difficulties of the Text. Consider'd barely as a Translator, I lay under no immediate Necessity of writing *Notes*, but then as I was highly concern'd, even in that Capacity, to lay before the *English* Reader, what I took to be the true Sense of the *Greek*, and as I farther propos'd to preserve that particular *Humour* of the Original, which depends on those Manners and Customs which are alluded to, I found, my self necessitated to add some *Notes*; but yet I have endeavoured to shun that Fault, which I have already censur'd, by saying no more, but what was immediately necessary, to illustrate the Text, to vindicate a received Sense, or to propose a new one.

I am not conscious of having made any great Excursions beyond the Bounds which these Rules prescrib'd to me, unless it is in the Chapter concerning *Superstition*. And even here, unless the Commentary had been somewhat copious, the Text it self wou'd have appear'd like a motly Piece of mysterious Nonsense. Thus much I thought my self oblig'd to do in Justice to *Theophrastus*; and as for the Enlargements which I have made, over and above what wou'd have satisfy'd this Demand, they will not, 'tis hop'd, be unacceptable to the curious Reader. They are Digressions I own; but I shall not here offer to make one Digression to execute another, or, according to the Custom and Practice of modern Authors, beg a thousand Pardons of the Reader, before I am certain of having committed one Offence. Such a Procedure seems preposterous. For when an Author happens to digress, and take a Trip +huper ta eskammena+, beyond the Bounds prescrib'd; the best, the only consistent thing he can do, is to take his Chance for the Event. If what he has said does not immediately relate to the Matter in Hand, it may nevertheless be a *propos*, and good in its Kind; and then instead of Censure, he will probably meet with Thanks; but if it be not good, no prefatory Excuses will make it so: And besides, it will ever be insisted on, that 'tis an easier Matter to strike out bad Digressions, than it is to write good Apologies.

One Word more, and then I have done. Since Mr. *Budgell* has thought fit to censure Mr. *de la Bruyere*, for troubling his Reader with *Notes*, I think my self oblig'd, in order to justify both Mr. *de la Bruyere* and my self, to shew that this Censure is very unreasonable, and very unjust.[D] Mr. *Budgell's* Words are as follow.



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Theophrastus, at the Time he writ, referr'd to nothing but what was well known to the meanest Person in *Athens*; but as Mr. *Bruyere* has manag'd it, by hinting at too many *Grecian* Customs, a modern Reader is oblig'd to peruse one or two *Notes*, which are frequently longer than the Sentence it self he wou'd know the meaning of. But if those Manners and Customs, which *Theophrastus* alludes to, were, in his Time, well known to the meanest *Athenian*, it does not follow that they are now so well known to a modern Reader.

[D: Preface to his Translation of *Theophrastus*.]

Mr. de la Bruyere's_ Fault does not consist in having put *Notes* to his Translation, but rather in not having put enough. When a Translator of an antient Author intends to preserve the peculiar Character of the Original, *Notes* become absolutely necessary to render the Translation intelligible to a modern Reader. The Learn'd may pass them over; and those, for whom *Explanatory Notes* are chiefly designed, must not think it too much Trouble, to bestow a second Reading on the Text, after they have given a First to the Whole. This Trouble (if any thing ought to be call'd so that conveys Instruction) is no more than what many persons, who have attained to no small share of Knowledg in the learn'd Languages, must submit to, at the first Perusal of an Original Author. If in a translated Author any Difficulties occur, on this Head, to a modern Reader, and the Translator has taken Care to clear up those difficulties by adding *Notes*, the modern Reader ought to thank him for his Pains, and not think his Labour superfluous.

'Tis hop'd then that the *Notes*, that I have added, will be kindly receiv'd. The Reader will nevertheless be at full Liberty to peruse them, or to pass them over. If he if but so favourable as to approve of the Translation it self, this will be a sufficient Satisfaction to the Translator, and be looked upon as no finall Commendation of the Performance. For a Translation, if it be well performed, ought in Justice to be receiv'd as a good Commentary_.

SECT. II.

There is no Kind of polite Writing that seems to require a deeper Knowledge, a livelier Imagination, and a happier Turn of Expression than the Characteristic. Human Nature, in its various Forms and Affections, is the Subject; and he who wou'd attempt a Work of this Kind, with some assurance of Success, must not only study other Men; he has a more difficult Task to perform; he must study himself. The deep and dark Recesses of the Heart must be penetrated, to discover how Nature is disguis'd into Art, and how Art puts on the Appearance of Nature.—This Knowledge is great; 'tis the Perfection of Moral Philosophy; 'tis an inestimable Treasure: But yet if it shou'd fall into the Hands of one, who wants proper Abilities to communicate his Knowledge to the World, it wou'd be of no Service but to the Owner: It wou'd make him, indeed, an able Philosopher, but not an able Writer of Characters.



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The Mind has its peculiar Features as well as the Body; and these must be represented in their genuine and native Colours, that so the Picture may strike, and every Reader, who is concern'd in the Work, may presently discover himself; and those, who are unconcern'd may, nevertheless, immediately perceive a just Correspondence between that Piece and Nature.

Every Action has its proper Thought, and every Thought its proper Expression. And these Correspondences are not imaginary, but have a real Foundation in Nature: For when any one of these is wanting, the whole is lame and defective, but when they all meet and conspire together, the Character is then genuine and compleat, the Thing or Person design'd is drawn to the Life, and the Reader is left uncertain, whether the Character, that lies before him, is an Effect of Art, or a real Appearance of Nature.—A Master-Piece of this Kind, requires the Hand of one who is a Critic in Men and Manners, a Critic in Thoughts, and a Critic in Language.

A superficial Knowledge of human Nature, will never qualify a Man to be a Writer of Characters. He must be a Master of the Science; and be able to lead a Reader, knowingly, thro' that Labyrinth of the Passions, which fill the Heart of Man, and make him either a noble or a despicable Creature. For tho' some, who have never attempted any thing of this kind, may think it an easy Matter to write two or three Pages of Morality with Spirit, to describe an Action, a Passion, a Manner; yet had they made the Experiment, the Event wou'd not have answer'd their Expectation, and they wou'd have found, that this easy Work was more difficult than they, at first, imagin'd.

The Features of every single Passion must be known; the Relation which that Passion bears to another, must be discover'd; and the Harmony and Discord which result from them must be felt. Many have studied these Things, but few have thoroughly understood them. The Labour is vast; 'tis almost infinite; and yet without a Knowledge of these Things, 'twill be impossible ever to draw a Character so to the Life, as that it shall hit one Person, and him only.

We have all of us different Souls, and our Souls have Affections as different from one another, as our outward Faces are in their Lineaments. Each Man contains a little World within himself, and every Heart is a new World. We cannot therefore attain to a perfect Knowledge of human Nature, by studying others or our selves alone, but by studying both. 'Tis this Knowledge which sets the Philosopher above the Peasant, and gives the Preference to one Author above another. This Knowledge has a Force, something like to that of Magic Charms: by the help of it one, who is Master of the Science, can turn Men inside outwards, and expose them to the Eyes of the World, as they really are, and not as they wou'd fain appear to be. By the help of this Knowledge an intelligent Writer can form to his Reader the most agreeable, most instructive Entertainment that can possibly be desir'd; transport him, with the greatest Ease imaginable, from the Solitude of his Chamber to Places of the greatest Concourse;

there to see and learn the Virtues of Men; there to see and shun their Vices, without any danger of being corrupted by the Contagion of a real Commerce.



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How absolutely necessary a thorough Insight into the Heart and Passions of Man is to a Writer of Characters, will be more evident by descending to some Particulars, and pointing out some of those nice Circumstances, which a Writer of Characters must accurately observe, and by which his Capacity in this Way may be easily judg'd of.

It must be observ'd then, that the Heart of Man is frequently actuated by more Passions than one: And as the same Object does, by its different Position, afford to the Spectator different Representations, so does the same Affection of the Mind, by exerting it self after a different manner, lay a real Foundation for so many distinct Characters. The under Passions may, by their various Operations, cause some Diversity in the Colour and Complexion of the Whole, but 'tis the Master-Passion which must determine the Character.

Since therefore the under Parts of a Character are not essential, they may or may not be reciprocal. A covetous Man may be impudent, or he may have some share of Modesty left: On the other Hand, an impudent Man may be generous, or his Character may be stain'd by Avarice. And therefore to make the Features of one Virtue or Vice enter, as under Parts, into the Character of another Virtue or Vice, is so far from being a Transgression of the Nature of Things, that, on the contrary, all the Beauty of *Characteristic-Writing*, and all the Beauty which arises from the Variety of an agreeable Mixture, entirely depends on *this*. The main Difficulty consists in making the Master-Passion operate so conspicuously throughout the Whole, as that the Reader may, in every step of the Performance, immediately discover it.

The Truth of it is, that there are some Affections of the Mind, which not only constitute of themselves a distinct Virtue or Vice, but are also the Foundation of many others. Avarice is of this extensive Nature; it constitutes, of it self, a distinct Character, and it enters into the Competition of several others. St. Paul says, that *the love of money is the root of all evil*; which Maxim the spurious *Phocylides* has express'd in the following Verse,

+He philochremosune meter kakotetos hapases.+

This Doctrine may be made yet more sensible by applying it to the Practice of *Theophrastus*, whose Conduct, in this Respect, ought to be look'd upon as an authentick Pattern. Rusticity, Avarice and Impudence, are in their own Nature distinct Vices, but yet there is a very near Relation between them, which has a real Foundation in the Actions of Men. And, as on the one Hand, *Theophrastus* has drawn distinct Characters of these Vices, so, on the other Hand, he has made the peculiar Features of one or more of these Vices enter into the Characters of the other. This is Matter of Fact; and if the Reader will be at the Pains to compare the *6th*, *9th*, and *11th*, Chapters, as he will be perswaded of the Truth of what is here asserted, so will he be convinc'd, at the same Time, that *Theophrastus* has not confounded by this Mixture the real Nature of Things, or transgress'd thereby, in any wise, the Rules of *Characteristic-Justice*.



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Again; Loquacity and an ill-tim'd Behaviour are two very different Vices in common Conversation; but yet *Theophrastus* has concluded his Character of Loquacity, with the same Stroke which begins that of an ill-tim'd Behaviour; because tho' these Vices are of a different Nature, yet do they not exclude each other; and the Actions of Men manifestly prove, that they are frequently to be found in the same Subject.

The nice Reader therefore, instead of being offended to find the peculiar Features of one Vice interspers'd in the Character of another, ought, on the contrary, to admire the Judgment and Accuracy of *Theophrastus* in this Respect: For this Mixture does not proceed from Inaccuracy, but is founded in Nature: And 'tis the Work of a sagacious Head, as well to discover the near Relations that are between different things, as to separate those Things, which by Nature are nearly related, but yet are really distinct.

The Beauty of every Kind of Writing arises from the Conformity which it bears to Nature; and therefore the Excellency of *Characteristic-Writings* must consist in exact Representations of human Nature.—This Harmony between Art and Nature may be call'd Justice: And tho' the Boundaries of it may be more extensive in those Works, in which a greater Range is allow'd to the Imagination, yet still, Invention and Fiction must be admitted in *Characteristic-Writings*, when the Characters design'd are of a general Nature; for then the Writer does not copy from an individual Original, and all the Extravagances of Nature are natural, when they are well represented.

It requires, I own, a great deal of Penetration to hit exactly this Point of Reality: But then it must be confess'd, that as the great difficulty of *Characteristic-Writing* consists in this, so does the main Beauty and Force of it too: For Objects are apt to affect and move us according to their Presence or Absence; and a Character will naturally strike us more forcibly, the more the Images, which it consists of, are lively and natural; because the Object is then most present to our Mind.

Since every Feature must be drawn exactly to the Life, great Care must be taken, that the Strokes be not too faint, nor yet too strong: For Characteristic-Justice is to be observ'd as strictly by the Writers of this Kind, as Poetic-Justice is to be by Poets. That Medium must be copied, which Nature it self has mark'd out; whatever falls short of it is poor and insipid, whatever is above it is Rant and Extravagance.

[E] *Quodcunque ostendis mihi sic, incredulus odi.*

And whatsoever contradicts my Sense,
I hate to see, and never can believe.
Ld. *Roscommon*.

[E: Horat. Art. Poet. v. 188.]

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A consummate Delicacy of Sentiments, and an exquisite Judgment are the very Soul of *Characteristic-Writing*; for every particular Stroke, as well as the whole Character, has a proper Degree of Perfection. To attain this Point, and to bring the several Parts, as well as the Whole, exactly to this Pitch, is the Work of a sagacious Head, and of a perfect Judgment.—An Author, in this Kind, must not dwell too long upon one Idea: As soon as the masterly Stroke is given, he must immediately pass on to another Idea. This will give Life to the Work, and serve to keep up the Spirit of the Writing, and of the Reader too: For if, after the masterly Stroke is given, the Author shou'd, in a paraphractical Manner, still insist upon the same Idea, the Work will immediately flag, the Character grow languid, and the Person characteris'd will insensibly vanish from the Eyes of the Reader.

An honest Writer, who has the Profit as well as the Pleasure of his Reader in View, ought always to tell the Truth. But as he is at Liberty to chuse his manner of telling it, so that Method of Instruction ought to be observ'd in *Characteristic-Writings*, which will keep up the good Humour of the Reader, altho' he is, at the same Time, made sensible of his Errors. And this Artifice ought industriously to be pursu'd, since the proper Management of it is so necessary to the Success of *Characteristic-Writings*. For those who love and admire Truth themselves, must yet be sensible that 'tis generally unwelcome, both to themselves and to others, when the Point of Self-Interest is concern'd. And the Reason of it is, not because Truth is really ugly and deform'd, but because it presents to our View certain Inconsistencies and Errors, which Self-Love will not allow us to condemn. And therefore the great Art and Difficulty, in making Truth pleasant and profitable, is so to expose Error, as not to seem to make any Attacks upon the Province of Self-Love.

[F] *Omne vafer vitium ridenti Flaccus amico
Tangit, & admissus circum praecordia ludit,
Callidus excusso Populum suspendere naso.*

[F: Persius Sat. I. V. 116, &c.]

——With conceal'd Design,
Did crafty *Horace* his low Numbers join:
And, with a sly insinuating Grace,
Laugh'd at his Friend, and look'd him in the Face:
Wou'd raise a Blush, where secret Vice he found;
And tickle, while he gently prob'd the Wound.
With seeming Innocence the Crowd beguil'd;
But made the desp'rate Passes, when he smil'd.
Mr. *Dryden*.



This was the Character of one of the greatest *Roman* Poets; and in this Art, amongst the Moderns, [G]_Benserade_ particularly excell'd, if we may believe his Successor and Panegyrist *Pavillon*.

[G: Dictionaire de *Bayle*. Artic. *Benserade*. Not. L.]



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What is the proper Style for *Characteristic-Writings* is briefly laid down by [H]_Libanius_ in the following Words. +Ergase ten ethopoiian charakteri saphei, suntomo, anthero, apoluto, apellagmeno pases plokete kai schematos+. “When you describe Manners you must use a plain, concise, florid, easy Style, free from all artificial Turns and Figures.” Every Thing must be even, smooth, easy and unaffected; without any of those Points and Turns, which convey to the Mind nothing but a low and false Wit, in which our Moderns so much abound, and in which they seem to place their greatest Beauties.

[H: Ap. *Is. Casaub.* Proleg. ad Theophrast.]

The primary Standard for Style is the Nature of the Subject: And therefore, as *Characteristic-Writings* are professed Representations of Nature, an Author in this Way is immediately concern'd to use a simple and natural Style: Nor has he any Reason to fear, that this will any ways prejudice his Performance, and make it appear low, flat and insipid; for in Reality there is nothing more noble than a true Simplicity, and nothing more beautiful than Nature, when it appears in the easy Charms of its own native Dress.

In *Characteristic-Writings* both the Way of Thinking and the Style must be Laconic: Much must be contained in a little Compass. Brevity of Diction adds new Life to a good Thought: And since every perfect Stroke ought to be a distinct Representation of a particular Feature, Matters shou'd be so order'd, that every perfect Sentence may contain a perfect Thought, and every perfect Thought may represent one Feature.

Many other Particulars might have been observ'd and recommended to those, who wou'd attempt a Performance in this Kind, with some Assurance of Success. The Laws of good Writing, in general, may and ought to be applied to *Characteristic-Writing*, in particular, as far as the Nature of it will bear. But to pursue these Things accurately, wou'd carry me beyond the Bounds which the Title of this Work prescribes to me. To shew the peculiar Nature; to point out the principal Beauties, and to lay down the general Laws of *Characteristic-Writing*, is all that was propos'd. Besides, I shall have Occasion, in the Sequel of this Essay, to make some further Observations relating to the Constitution of *Characteristic-Writings*; which, to prevent Repetitions, I forbear mentioning here; but if the Reader be religious in the Observance of a strict Method, he is at full Liberty to alter the Situation of them, and to refer them to this Section.

SECT. IV.

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Mr. *de la Bruyere* has given us a Translation of the Characters of *Theophrastus*; to which he has annex'd what he calls the Characters or Manners of the present Age. This Work was receiv'd with Applause, and the Author gain'd by it a great Reputation amongst Men of polite Literature. And if to make a great deal of Noise in the World, and to undergo several Editions, were infallible Proofs of the intrinsick Merit of a Book, Mr. *de la Bruyere*'s Performance would, upon both these Accounts, sufficiently recommend itself to our Approbation. —I confess, there are very considerable Beauties in this Piece: but yet if it should be examin'd by those Rules of Characteristic-Writing, which I have already mention'd, and which I take to be essential to Performances in this Kind, I am afraid it would not be able, in every Respect, to stand the Test of an impartial Examination.

I do not intend to enter upon an exact Critique of this Piece; the intended Brevity of this Essay will permit me to take Notice of but some few Particulars.—I have no Design or Desire to derogate from the Reputation of the deceas'd Author; but this I take to be a standing Rule in Critical Writings, as well as in judicious Reading, that we ought not to be so struck with the Beauties of an Author, as to be blind to his Failings; nor yet so prejudiced by his Failings, as to be blind to his Beauties.

The original Design of Characteristic-Writings is to give us real Images of Life. An exact Imitation of Nature is the chief Art which is to be us'd. The Imagination, I own, may be allow'd to work in Pieces of this Kind, provided it keeps within the Degrees of Probability; But Mr. *de la Bruyere* gives us Characters of Men, who are not to be found in Nature; and, out of a false Affectation of the Wonderful, he carries almost every thing to Excess; represents the Irregularities of Life as downright Madness, and by his false Colours converts Men into Monsters.

[I]_Troilus_ is a very supercilious Man: And 'tis no ways inconsistent with this Character to suppose, that he may entertain a natural Antipathy against an ugly Face, or a bad Voice; but our Author represents him as labouring under this Distemper to such a Degree of Excess, as, I believe, has never been observ'd in any Man. I do not know by what Name it may be call'd. *Troilus* conceives an immediate Aversion against a Person that enters the Room where he is; he shuns him, flies from him, and will throw himself out at the Window, rather than suffer himself to be accosted by one, whose Face and Voice he does not like.—Is this Humour, or, rather, are not these the genuine Symptoms of Madness and Phrenzy? And if *Troilus* does really act after this manner, is he not rather an Object of Pity, than a Subject for Humour and Ridicule?

[I: De la Societe & de la Conversation. Ad init.]



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The Character of *Cleanthes*, in the same [K]Chapter, is a Misrepresentation of Nature. —“*Cleanthes* is a very honest Man; he has chosen a Wife, who is the best and the most reasonable Woman in the World: They, each of them, in their respective Ways, make up all the Pleasure and Agreeableness of the Company they are in: 'Tis impossible to meet with more Probity or Politeness. They part to Morrow, and the Deed of their Separation is ready drawn up at the Notary's. There are, certainly, some Kinds of Merit that were never made to be together, and some Virtues that are incompatible.” But those who are endow'd with such good Qualities, as Mr. *de la Bruyere* ascribes to *Cleanthes* and his Wife, can never agree to a willful Separation. Nay, 'tis a Contradiction to their Character to suppose that either of 'em is faln into those Circumstances, which only can make a Separation become lawful and just. 'Tis true, some Virtues and Accomplishments, as well as some Vices, may be inconsistent with each other. But to apply this Maxim to the present Case must betray a great Want of Judgment and Knowledge in the Nature of Things: For where can one expect to meet with a more perfect Harmony of Virtues, than in the reciprocal Honesty, Reason and Good-breeding of *Cleanthes* and his Wife?

[K: Ibid. fere.]

An absent Man often acts out of the Way of common Life, when the Fit of Absence is upon him; but that this Fit should dwell upon a Man, so long as it does upon Mr. *de la Bruyere*'s[L] *Menalcas* I confess, passes my Belief.—*Menalcas* rises in the Morning; and from that Time till he goes to Bed again, he never recovers from his Fit of Absence: The Distractions of his Mind admit of no Cessation or Interruption: His whole Life is a continued Series of the greatest Follies. *Menalcas* is really never *Menalcas*; he has no lucid Intervals; he is always another Man.

[L: C. de l'Homme.]

If we consult the Operations of our Soul, to discover the proper Causes of what is call'd *Absence of Mind*, we shall perceive that the Powers of it are sometimes contracted within themselves by a Multiplicity of Thought: In these Cases the inward Exercise of the Soul makes it unable to attend to any outward Object. But at other Times the Soul wanders from itself; and in these Cases the Soul being conversant about remote Objects, cannot immediately recover itself, so as to reflect duly on those which are present. So that this Absence of the Mind must proceed, either from a Fulness and Intention of Thought, or from a Want of Reflexion. If it proceeds from a Fulness of Thought, I say 'tis impossible for the Mind to keep bent so long, as that of *Menalcas* does: It must necessarily have some Relaxations. If it proceeds from a Want of Reflexion, it must be confess'd, that he who can live so many Hours without reflecting, must be either wholly stupid, or some Degrees below the Species of Mankind.



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But what makes the Character of *Menalcas* still more ridiculous and unnatural is, that he is stupid and sensible at the same Time.—*Menalcas* is in the Drawing-Room at Court; and walking very majestically under a Branch of Candlesticks; his Wig is caught up by one of them, and hangs dangling in the Air. All the Courtiers fall a laughing.—*Menalcas* unluckily loses his Feeling, but still retains the Use of his Ears. He is insensible that his Wig is taken off his Head; but yet is so happy as to hear the loud Mirth of the Courtiers, and has still so much good Humour left as to join in Company with them.—*Menalcas* plays at Backgammon.—He calls for a Glass of Water; 'tis his Turn to throw; he has the Box in one Hand and the Glass in the other; and being extremely dry, and unwilling to lose Time, he swallows down both the Dice and almost the Box, and at the same Time throws the Glass of Water into the Tables.—If this is not to overstrain the Bow, to carry Things to an unnatural Excess and Extravagance, and to make no Distinction between Absence of Mind and Insensibility, or downright Folly, I confess, I know not what is. *Mr. de la Bruyere* should have consider'd, that a Man, who has lost his Feeling, is not, in that Respect, a proper Subject for Ridicule, and that 'tis no Jest to take away a Man's Senses. Extravagances of this Nature are no Beauties in any Kind of Writing, much less in Characteristics. In Performances of this Kind there must be Spirit and Strength, but especially there must be Justice. The real Images of Life must be represented, or the Probabilities of Nature must strictly be observ'd.

[M] *Respicere exemplar vitae morumque jubebo
Doctum imitatore, & vivas hinc ducere voces.*

These are the likeliest Copies, which are drawn
By the Original of human Life.
Ld. *Roscommon*.

[M: Horat. in Art. Poet. v. 317, &c.]

The Strokes which compose a Character must be bold, but not extravagant. Nature must not be distorted, to excite either Ridicule or Admiration. Reason must hold the Reins of the Imagination: Judgment must direct the Fancy; otherwise we shall be apt to miscarry, and connect inconsistent Ideas, at the very Time, when we think we hit the Point of Humour to the Life.

The only Thing that can be said to excuse *Mr. de la Bruyere* on this Head, is what the Abbot *Fleury* has alledg'd to his Praise; namely, [N]that his Characters are sometimes loaded, on purpose that they might not too nearly resemble the Persons design'd.

[N: On trouve dans ses Caracteres une severe Critique, des Expressions vives, des Tours ingenieux, des Peintures quelquefois chargees expres, pour ne les pas faire trop ressemblantes. *Discours prononce dans l'Academie Francaise*. 1696.]



'Tis very dangerous, I confess, to make free with the Characters of particular Persons;
for there are some Men in the World, who, tho' they are not asham'd of the Impropriety
of their own



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Manners, yet are they easily offended at the public Notice which is taken of 'em. But tho' Mr. *de la Bruyere* might have very good prudential Reasons for not making his Characters too particular, yet those Reasons cannot be urg'd, as a just Plea for his transgressing the Bounds of Characteristic-Justice, by making his Images unnatural.

In every Kind of Writing there is something of an establish'd Nature which is essential to it. To deviate from this, is to deviate from Nature it self. Mr. *de la Bruyere* is not the only *French* Man who is guilty in this Point. Others of his Country-Men have committed much the same Fault in Pastoral and Comedy. Out of a vain Affectation of saying something very extraordinary and remarkable, they have departed from the nature of Things: They have given to the Simplicity of the Country, the Airs of the Town and Court, introduced upon the Stage Buffoonry and Farce instead of Humour; and by misrepresenting the real Manners of Men, they have turn'd Nature into Grimace.

The main Beauty of *Characteristic-Writings* consists in a certain Life and Spirit, which the Writer ought to endeavour to keep up, by all the Arts which he is Master of. Nothing will contribute to this more, than the Observance of a strict Unity in the very Conception of a Character: For Characters are Descriptions of Persons and Things, as they are such: And, as [O]Mr. *Budgell* has very judiciously observ'd, "If the Reader is diverted in the midst of a Character, and his Attention call'd off to any thing foreign to it, the lively Impression it shou'd have made is quite broken, and it loses more than half its Force." But if this Doctrine be applied to the Practice of Mr. *de la Bruyere*, it will find him Guilty. He sometimes runs his Characters to so great a Length, and mixes in 'em so many Particulars and unnecessary Circumstances, that they justly deserve the Name, rather of Histories than Characters.—Such is the [P]Article concerning *Emira*. 'Tis an artful Description of a Woman's Vanity, in pretending to be insensible to the Power of Love, merely because she has never been exposed to the Charms of a lovely Person; and there is nothing in this Character, but what is agreeable to Nature, and carried on with a great deal of Humour. But the many Particulars which Mr. *de la Bruyere* has drawn into the Composition of it, and which, in Truth, are not essential to the main Design, have quite chang'd the Nature of the Character, and converted it into a History, or rather a little Romance.—'Tis true, Histories are Pictures as well as Characters; but yet there will ever be as wide a Difference between 'em, as there is between a Picture at full Length, and one in Miniature.

[O: Preface to *Theophrastus*.]

[P: C. des Femmes. ad fin.]



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The [Q]Characters of *Giton* and *Phebon* are humorous enough. And they are allow'd to be kept within the just Bounds of Probability. But Mr. *de la Bruyere* has heap'd up so many Particulars and unnecessary Circumstances, which do not convey any new Ideas, that the Characters grow languid and tedious.—*Giton* is respected; every thing that he says or does is approved of. *Phebon* is despis'd; no Notice is taken of what he says or does. The Reason of this Difference is not so mysterious, but that it may be told in less than two or three Pages. *Giton* is rich, and *Phebon* is poor.

[Q: C. id. ibid. fere.]

Sometimes there is such a Confusion in Mr. *de la Bruyere's* Designs, that one cannot easily discover whether he intended to draw the Character of a particular Person, or to make a Picture of some prevailing Vice, or only a moral Reflexion.—Such is the [R]Article of *Zenobia*. Was it design'd for the Character of *Zenobia*? But 'tis rather a Description of the Magnificence, and beautiful Situation of the Palace, which she was then building. Or was it design'd to censure and lash the Publicans of the Age, for the Extortions which they practis'd, and the immense Riches which they amass'd by Fraud and Oppression? But this Satir comes in only by the by, and in a very jejune Manner. Or lastly, was it intended only for a moral Reflexion on the sudden Revolutions and Vicissitudes of Fortune? But the Length of this Article is inconsistent with the nature of a Reflexion; and if any thing like this was intended, it must come in as the +epimuthion+, the Moral of the Fable; which will make the Contents of this Article, still more different from the nature of a Character, than any thing that has yet been mentioned.

[R: C. des Biers de Fortune. sub fin.]

'Tis not enough that a Character be drawn conformable to that Existence which it really has, or probably may have in Nature: It must further be cloath'd in proper Sentiments, and express'd in a simple and natural Style. But Mr. *de la Bruyere*, consider'd as a Writer of Characters, is too affected in his way of Thinking, and too artificial in the Turn of his Expressions.

The previous Apology which he made for himself in this Point, is so far from the Purpose, that nothing is more so.

Recollecting, [S]says he, that amongst the Writings ascrib'd to *Theophrastus* by *Diogenes Laertius*, there is one which bears the Title of *Proverbs*, i.e. of loose unconnected Observations, and that the most considerable Book of Morality, that ever was made, bears that Name in the sacred Writings; we have been excited by such great Examples to imitate, according to our Capacity, a like Way of Writing concerning Manners.



—'Tis true, that in the Catalogue of *Theophrastus* his Works, preserv'd by [T]_Diogenes Laertius_, there is one Book under



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the Title +peri paroimion+ concerning *Proverbs*: But that, probably, was nothing but a Collection of some of those short, remarkable, useful, pithy Sayings, which are of common Use in the World, and which every Nation has peculiar to it self. However, tho' we cannot exactly tell, what the Nature of that Performance was, because the Book is now lost, yet we are certain, on the other Hand, that the Design of *Solomon* was not to write Characters, but to deliver some Maxims of Morality by way of Advice and Instruction. So that for a profess'd Writer of Characters, to take a Book of *Proverbs* for a Model, is as inconsistent, as if any one, who intended to compose an Oration, shou'd form his Diction upon a Poem. *Proverbs* consist of short Sentences, which contain in themselves a full and compleat Sense; and therefore they do not essentially require a strict Relation and Correspondence; but *Characteristic-Writings* do require such a strict Relation and Correspondence. And Mr. *de la Bruyere* is so faulty in this Point, that almost every where he has no visible Connexion. —*Characteristic-Writings* ought, I own, to have a lively Turn, and a Laconic Air: but there is a wide Difference between using a concise Manner, and writing as many Aphorisms as Sentences.

[S: Discours sur *Theophraste*.]

[T: Lib. 5. Segm. 45.]

How far Mr. *de la Bruyere* is defective as to Propriety of Style and Justness of Expression, I chuse to set down in the Words of one of his [V]Countrymen, a very judicious Writer, and a better Judge in this Matter than I pretend to be.

[V: *Melanges de Vigneul Marville*. Edit. Rot. T. 1. p. 336.]

Mr. *de la Bruyere*, qui n'a point de Style forme, ecrivant au hazard, employe des Expressions outrees en des Choses tres communes; & quand il en veut dire de plus relevees, il les affoiblit par des Expressions basses, & fait ramper le fort avec le foible. Il tend sans relache a un sublime qu'il ne connoit pas, & qu'il met tantot dans les choses, tantot dans les Paroles, sans jamais attraper le Point d'Unite, qui concilie les Paroles avec les choses, en quoi consiste tout le Secret, & la Finesse de cette Art merveilleux.

—This is the Censure which an ingenious Author, under the feign'd Name of *Vigneul Marville*, has pass'd upon Mr. *de la Bruyere*'s Style. However, I think my self oblig'd in Justice to inform the Reader, that Mr. *Coste*, in his Defence of Mr. *de la Bruyere*, has endeavour'd to prove that this Censure is ill grounded. But I will not pretend to decide in a Case of this Nature. Matters relating to Style are the nicest Points in Learning: The greatest Men have grosly err'd on this Subject. I only declare my own Opinion on the Matter, that Mr. *de la Bruyere*'s Style appears to me forc'd, affected, and improper for *Characteristic Writings*. Several ingenious



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French Gentlemen, who have themselves writ with Applause in this Language, entertain the same Sentiments, and have ingenuously confess'd to me, that they could never read ten Pages together of Mr. *de la Bruyere*, without feeling such an Uneasiness and Pain, as arises from a continued Affectation and a perpetual Constraint. But the Reader is still left free. To form a right Judgment on Correctness is an easy Matter by the ordinary Rules of Grammar, but to do the same concerning the Turn and Air, and peculiar Beauties of Style, depends on a particular Taste: They are not capable of being prov'd to those who have not this Taste, but to those who have it, they are immediately made sensible by a bare pointing out.

The running Title which Mr. *de la Bruyere* has given to his Book does, by no Means, square with the several Parts of it. With Relation to my present Purpose I observe, that, strictly speaking, this Performance is, but in Part, of the Characteristic-Kind. The Characters, which are interspers'd in it, being reducible to a very narrow Compass, and the main Body of it consisting of miscellaneous Reflexions. And these are not confin'd, as is pretended, only to the present Age, but extend themselves both to past and present Times. So that if Mr. *de la Bruyere* had, with his View, chosen another Title for his Book, tho' it wou'd not have been so uncommon, yet wou'd it have been more proper than the present Title; and the Performance it self wou'd then, in some Measure, have less deserv'd Censure.

Tho' Mr. *de la Bruyere*'s Work is not perfect in that Kind, in which it is pretended to excel, it must nevertheless be confess'd, that it has many Beauties and Excellencies. To deny this, wou'd be an Affront to the Judgment of the Gentlemen of the *French* Academy: But yet our Complaisance ought not, cannot go so far, as to prejudice our own Judgment. We cannot think, as [X]some of 'em did, that Mr. *de la Bruyere* has excell'd *Theophrastus*, the great Original which he propos'd to himself. Mr. *de la Bruyere* had a more modest Opinion of himself: He wou'd have been proud of the Title of *little Theophrastus*. And in Truth, it deserves no small Share of Praise, to come up to *Theophrastus* in any Degree of Comparison.—If then Mr. *de la Bruyere* has committed some Faults, 'tis nothing but what others have done, both before and since him: But if he has, as I have already allow'd him to have, some considerable Beauties; 'tis more than a great many other Authors have, tho' of greater Bulk: And these Excellencies ought in Justice to be admitted as some Excuse for those Defects.

[X: Discours de l'Abbe Fleury deja cite.]

SECT. V.



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Theophrastus has not only prevented, but he has also out-done the Moderns in *Characteristic-Writings*. Yet Mr. *de la Rochefoucault* had an extraordinary Genius. He seems to be the only one, amongst all the Moderns, who was equal to so great a Work. He had studied Man in himself; and, in a small Collection of moral Reflexions, he has laid open the various Forms and Folds of that Heart, which by Nature is deceitful above all Things. He has given us, as it were, the Characters of all Mankind, by discovering those secret Springs of Self Love, which are the Source of all our *Actions*.—Self Love is born with us; and this great Author has shewn, that there is no Principle in human Nature so secret, so deceitful: 'Tis so Hypocritical, that it frequently imposes on it self, by taking the Appearances of Virtue for Virtue it self. It borrows all the Disguises of Art: It appears in a thousand Forms, and in a thousand Shapes; but yet the Principle of Error is still the same.

[Y] — *Velut Silvis ubi passim Palantes Error certo de Tramite pellit, Ille sinistrorsum, hic dextrorsum abit: unus utrique Error, sed variis illudit Partibus.*

As Men that lose their Ways in Woods, divide,
Some go on this, and some on t'other Side.
The Error is the same, all miss the Road,
Altho' in different Quarters of the Wood.

Mr. *Creech*.

[Y: Horat. Lib. 2. Sat. 3. v. 48, _&c_.]

'Tis true Mr. *de la Rochefoucault's* Design was too general, and his Piece cannot properly be reckoned among *Characteristic-Writings*. But tho' he did not professedly write Characters, yet this Work shews that he was very able to do it; and it may be of very great Service to those, who wou'd attempt any thing in this Kind.

I have often wonder'd that no *English* Writer has ever professedly attempted a Performance in the *Characteristic-Way*. I mean, such a profess'd Performance, as wou'd extend it self to the different Conditions of Men, and describe the various Ends which they propose to themselves in Life; as wou'd take in the chief Branches of Morality and Behaviour, and, in some Measure, make a compleat Work: For as to loose Attempts and Sketches in this Kind, there are many Years since we had some; the most considerable of which, I mean of those that bear the Title of Characters, are printed together with Sir *Thomas Overbury's* Wife. These are said to have been written, partly by that unfortunate Knight, and partly by some of his Friends. And if the Editor had not taken Care to give us this Notice, yet still that great Disparity which appears but too visibly in them, wou'd manifestly prove that they were compos'd by very different Hands. —There are, I confess, many good Things to be met with in these Characters, but they are very far from making a compleat Work: And really this was not intended. Besides, nothing



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can possibly be more contrary to the Nature of *Characteristic-Writings*, than the corrupted Taste which prevail'd in the Age. A continued Affectation of far-fetch'd and quaint Simile's, which runs thro' almost all these Characters, makes 'em appear like so many Pieces of mere Grotesque; and the Reader must not expect to find Persons describ'd as they really are, but rather according to what they are thought to be like.

This Censure may be thought hard; but yet it leaves Room for some Exceptions: And that I may do Justice to Merit, where it is really due, I shall here set down one of those Characters, which seem'd to me to be exquisite in its Kind. And this I shall the rather do, because the Book it self is not in every body's Hands. The Image is taken from low Life; 'tis a beautiful Description of Nature in its greatest Simplicity, and 'tis the more beautiful because 'tis natural.

A fayre and happy MILKE MAID.

Is a Country Wench, that is so farre from making herselfe beautifull by Art, that one Looke of hers is able to put all *Face-Physicke* out of Countenance. Shee knowes a fayre Looke is but a dumbe Orator to commend Vertue, therefore mindes it not. All her Excellencies stand in her so silently, as if they had stolne upon her without her Knowledge. The Lining of her Apparell (which is her selfe) is farre better than Outsides of Tissew: for tho' shee be not arraid in the Spoyle of the Silke Worme, shee is deckt in Innocency, a far better Wearing. Shee doth not, with lying long a Bed, spoile both her Complexion and Conditions; Nature hath taught her, *too immoderate Sleepe is rust to the Soul*: She rises therefore with *Chaunticleare* her Dames Cocke, and at Night makes the Lambe her *Corfew*. In milking a Cow, and straining the Teates through her Fingers, it seemes that so sweet a Milke-Presser makes the Milke the whiter, or sweeter; for never came Almond Glove or Aromatique Oyntment on her Palme to taint it. The golden Eares of Corn fall and kisse her Feete when shee reapes them, as if they wisht to be bound and led Prisoners by the same Hand that fell'd them. Her Breath is her owne, which sents all the Yeere long of *June*, like a new made Hay-cocke. Shee makes her Hand hard with Labour, and her Heart soft with Pitty: And when Winter Evenings fall early (sitting at her merry Wheele) she sings a Defiance to the giddy Wheele of Fortune. Shee doth all things with so sweet a Grace it seemes *Ignorance* will not suffer her to do Ill, being her Minde is to do Well. Shee bestowes her Yeeres Wages at next Faire; and in chusing her Garments, counts no Bravery i'th' World, like Decency. The Garden and Bee-hive are all her Physicke and Chyrurgerie, and shee lives the longer for't. Shee dares goe alone, and unfold Sheepe i'th' Night, and feares no manner of Ill, because shee meanes none: Yet to say Truth, shee is never alone, for shee is still accompanied with old Songs, honest Thoughts, and



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Prayers, but short ones; yet they have their Efficacy, in that they are not paue'd with insuing idle Cogitations. Lastly, her Dreames are so chaste, that shee dare tell them; onely a Fridaies Dreame is all her Superstition; *that* she conceales for feare of Anger. Thus lives shee, and all her Care is shee may die in the Spring-Time, to have Store of Flowers stucke upon her winding Sheet.

What makes me wonder that no *English* Writer has ever attempted a profess'd Performance in the *Characteristic-Way* is, that we are, certainly, more able to undertake a Work of this Nature than any other Nation; because our Countrymen afford a greater Variety of Subject Matter than any other People.—Human Nature, as I observ'd before, in its various Forms and Affections, is the Subject of *Characteristic-Writings*: And from this Diversity of Manners arises that, which is properly call'd *Humour*, and which, upon a double Account, seems to be peculiar to our Nation; not only because there is no Word in any other Language so expressive, but also because there is no Nation, in which we can find a greater Variety of original *Humour*, than amongst the *English*. Sir *William Temple*, speaking of the Dramatic Performances of the Stage, expresses himself after the following Manner.—[Z]

[Z: Essay on Poetry, p. 355, _&c_.]

In this the *Italian*, the *Spanish*, and the *French*, have all had their different Merit, and receiv'd their just Applauses. Yet I am deceiv'd, if our *English* has not in some Kind excell'd both the Modern and the Antient; which has been by Force of a Vein, natural perhaps to our Country, and which with us is call'd *Humour*, a Word peculiar to our Language too, and hard to be express'd in any other; nor is it (that I know of) found in any Foreign Writers, unless it be *Moliere*, and yet his it self has too much of the Farce, to pass for the same with ours. *Shakespear* was the first that opened this Vein upon our Stage, which has run so freely and so pleasantly ever since, that I have often wonder'd to find it appear so little upon any others; being a Subject so proper for them, since *Humour* is but a Picture of particular Life, as Comedy is of general; and tho' it represents Dispositions and Customs less common, yet they are not less natural than those that are more frequent among Men.

Humour is the only genuine Source of all that agreeable Variety of original Characters, which is so entertaining to a Spectator and Reader: And Sir *William Temple* proceeds to observe, that in this Point the Moderns in general, and the *English* in particular, have far excell'd the Antients. This Observation is very just, however partial it may seem to a Foreigner, and the Reason of it is very obvious. I shall represent 'em both in Sir *William's* own Words. The Passage is somewhat long, but the Goodness of it will amply pay the Reader for his Trouble in perusing it.



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It may seem a Defect (says he) in the antient Stage, that the Characters introduc'd were so few, and those so common, as a covetous old Man, an amorous young, a witty Wench, a crafty Slave, a bragging Soldier. The Spectators met nothing upon the Stage, but what they met in the Streets, and at every Turn. All the Variety is drawn only from different and uncommon Events; whereas if the Characters are so too, the Diversity and the Pleasure must needs be the more. But as of most general Customs in a Country, there is usually some Ground, from the Nature of the People or Climat, so there may be amongst us for this Vein of our Stage, and a greater Variety of *Humour* in the Picture, because there is a greater Variety in the Life. This may proceed from the native Plenty of our Soil, the Unequalness of our Climat, as well as the Ease of our Government, and the Liberty of professing Opinions and Factions, which perhaps our Neighbours may have about them, but are forc'd to disguise, and thereby they may come in Time to be extinguish'd. Plenty begets Wantonness and Pride, Wantonness is apt to invent, and Pride scorns to imitate; Liberty begets Stomach or Heart, and Stomach will not be constrain'd. Thus we come to have more Originals, and more that appear what they are; we have more *Humour*, because every Man follows his own, and takes a Pleasure, perhaps a Pride, to shew it.

—*Shakespear, Johnson, Shadwell, Etherege, and Wycherly* have shewn the Richness of this Source: They excell'd in the Variety and *Humour* of the Characters which they exhibited; and in this they have receiv'd just Applauses: But yet they did not exhaust the Spring from whence they drew: The ingenious Mr. *Congreve* has pursu'd the same Vein of *Humour*; and he has imitated his Predecessors so well, that he has by far out-done 'em all. In his Dramatic-Pieces there is the greatest Variety of *Humour* and of original Characters, set off by the greatest Delicacy of Sentiments, and adorn'd with the Beauties of the justest Diction that can possibly be imagined. Mr. *Dryden* must be allow'd to be a competent Judge in an Affair of this Nature, and he has given us the true Character and Panegyric of Mr. *Congreve* in the following Lines.

In him all Beauties of this Age we see; }
Etherege his Courtship, *Southern's* Purity; }
The Satir, Wit and Strength of manly *Wicherly*. }

'Tis true, there is some Difference between the Characters which enter into the Composition of Dramatic Pieces, and those which are represented by *Characteristic-Writers*; but this Difference is so small, that I doubt not but he, who is an able Master in one of these Kinds, would as successfully perform in the other. For, in reality, the essential Parts of the Characters, in the *Drama*, and in *Characteristic-Writings*, are the same.

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They are both an Image of one Life; a Representation of one Person: All the Diversity lies in the different Manner of representing the same Image. The *Drama* presents to the Eyes of a Spectator an Actor, who speaks and acts as the Person, whom he represents, is suppos'd to speak and act in real Life. The *Characteristic* Writer introduces, in a descriptive manner, before a Reader, the same Person, as speaking and acting in the same manner: And both must be perform'd in such a natural and lively manner, as may deceive the Spectator and Reader, and make them fancy they see the Person represented or characteris'd.

But tho' no *English* Author has attempted a Performance in this Kind, yet it must be confess'd that in some late diurnal Papers we have had excellent Specimens in the Characteristic-Way. The Papers, which I mean to point out, are the *Tatlers* and the *Spectators*. They are of the miscellaneous Kind, and were design'd for the universal Delight and Instruction of the *British* Nation. In these Papers are contained Abundance of true Wit and *Humour*, lively Descriptions of human Nature in its various Forms and Disguises, the Praises of Virtue, and pointed Satir against Vice; and here and there are interspers'd Characters of Men and Manners compleatly drawn to the Life.—If the great Authors, who were concerned in the Composition of those Papers, would have join'd their Abilities to form a Work of this Kind, I doubt not but it would have been inimitable, and deserv'd the next Place, in Point of Fame, to that of *Theophrastus*: For this is the highest Pitch to which Moderns can aspire. A greater Design would be Presumption, and would only serve to shew the greater Vanity of the Attempt. An establish'd Reputation of above two thousand Years cannot be easily shaken. *Theophrastus* is, and ever will be, an Original in *Characteristic-Writings*. His Fame still lives in our Memory, and the Main of his Characters still subsists in our Actions.

FINIS.

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PUBLICATIONS OF THE AUGUSTAN REPRINT SOCIETY
FIRST YEAR (1946-47)

[Transcriber's Note: Many of the listed titles are or will be available from Project Gutenberg. Where possible, the e-text number is given in brackets.]

Numbers 1-4 out of print. [#13484, #14528, #14973]

5. Samuel Wesley's *Epistle to a Friend Concerning Poetry* (1700) and *Essay on Heroic Poetry* (1693).



6. *Representation of the Impiety and Immorality of the Stage* (1704) and *Some Thoughts Concerning the Stage* (1704). [#15656]

SECOND YEAR (1947-1948)

7. John Gay's *The Present State of Wit* (1711); and a section on Wit from *The English Theophrastus* (1702). [#14800]
8. Rapin's *De Carmine Pastoralis*, translated by Creech (1684). [#14495]



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9. T. Hanmer's (?) *Some Remarks on the Tragedy of Hamlet* (1736). [#14899]
10. Corbyn Morris' *Essay towards Fixing the True Standards of Wit, etc.* (1744). [#16233]
11. Thomas Purney's *Discourse on the Pastoral* (1717). [#15313]
12. *Essays on the Stage*, selected, with an Introduction by Joseph Wood Krutch.

THIRD YEAR (1948-1949)

13. Sir John Falstaff (pseud.), *The Theatre* (1720).
14. Edward Moore's *The Gamester* (1753). [#16267]
15. John Oldmixon's *Reflections on Dr. Swift's Letter to Harley* (1712); and Arthur Mainwaring's *The British Academy* (1712).
16. Nevil Payne's *Fatal Jealousy* (1673).
17. Nicholas Rowe's *Some Account of the Life of Mr. William Shakespeare* (1709).
18. "Of Genius," in *The Occasional Paper*, Vol. III, No. 10 (1719); and Aaron Hill's Preface to *The Creation* (1720). [#15870]

FOURTH YEAR (1949-1950)

19. Susanna Centlivre's *The Busie Body* (1709).
20. Lewis Theobald's *Preface to The Works of Shakespeare* (1734). [In Preparation]
21. *Critical Remarks on Sir Charles Grandison, Clarissa, and Pamela* (1754).
22. Samuel Johnson's *The Vanity of Human Wishes* (1749) and Two *Rambler* papers (1750). [#13350]
23. John Dryden's *His Majesties Declaration Defended* (1681). [#15074]



24. Pierre Nicole's *An Essay on True and Apparent Beauty in Which from Settled Principles is Rendered the Grounds for Choosing and Rejecting Epigrams*, translated by J.V. Cunningham.

FIFTH YEAR (1950-51)

25. Thomas Baker's *The Fine Lady's Airs* (1709). [#14467]
26. Charles Macklin's *The Man of the World* (1792). [#14463]
27. Frances Reynolds' *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Taste, and of the Origin of Our Ideas of Beauty, etc.* (1785). [#13485]
28. John Evelyn's *An Apologie for the Royal Party* (1659); and *A Panegyric to Charles the Second* (1661).
29. Daniel Defoe's *A Vindication of the Press* (1718). [#14084]
30. Essays on Taste from John Gilbert Cooper's *Letters Concerning Taste*, 3rd edition (1757), & John Armstrong's *Miscellanies* (1770). [#13464]
31. Thomas Gray's *An Elegy Wrote in a Country Church Yard* (1751); and *The Eton College Manuscript*. [#15409]
32. Prefaces to Fiction; Georges de Scudery's Preface to *Ibrahim* (1674), etc. [#14525]

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The Society exists to make available inexpensive reprints (usually facsimile reproductions) of rare seventeenth and eighteenth century works. The editorial policy of the Society continues unchanged. As in the past, the editors welcome suggestions concerning publications. All income of the Society is devoted to defraying cost of publication and mailing.

Publications for the sixth year [1951-1952]

(At least six items, most of them from the following list, will be reprinted.)

Thomas Gray: *An Elegy Wrote in a Country Church Yard* (1751).
Introduction by George Sherburn. [#15409]

James Boswell, Andrew Erskine, and George Dempster: *Critical Strictures on the New Tragedy of Elvira* (1763). Introduction by Frederick A. Pottle. [#15857]

An Essay on the New Species of Writing Founded by Mr. Fielding (1751). Introduction by James A. Work.

Henry Gally: *A Critical Essay on Characteristic Writing* (1725).
Introduction by Alexander Chorney.

[John Phillips]: *Satyr Against Hypocrits* (1655). Introduction by Leon Howard.

Prefaces to Fiction. Selected and with an Introduction by Benjamin Boyce. [#14525]

Thomas Tyers: *A Biographical Sketch of Dr. Samuel Johnson* ([1785]). Introduction by Gerald Dennis Meyer.



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[Problems Noted by Transcriber:

p. xv, xvii, xxiv

judg; knowledg

spellings as in original

p. 16

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p. 78

and in a very / jejune Manner

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p. 88

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List of ARS Publications:

20. Lewis Theobald's *Preface to The Works of Shakespeare* (1734).

so in original: correct spelling is Theobald

Publications for the sixth year:

...Gray's *Elegy* and ..._Prefaces to Fiction_)

so in original: see titles 31 and 32, fifth year]