

# **Epistle to a Friend Concerning Poetry (1700) and the Essay on Heroic Poetry (second edition, 1697) eBook**

## **Epistle to a Friend Concerning Poetry (1700) and the Essay on Heroic Poetry (second edition, 1697) by Samuel Wesley**

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*Essays on Poetry*

No. 2

Samuel Wesley's *Epistle to a Friend concerning Poetry* (1700) and the *Essay on Heroic Poetry* (second edition, 1697)

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Edward N. Hooker

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## INTRODUCTION

We remember Samuel Wesley (1662-1735), if at all, as the father of a great religious leader. In his own time he was known to many as a poet and a writer of controversial prose. His poetic career began in 1685 with the publication of *Maggots*, a collection of juvenile verses on trivial subjects, the preface to which, a frothy concoction, apologizes to the reader because the book is neither grave nor gay. The first poem, "On a Maggot,"



is composed in hudibrastics, with a diction obviously Butlerian, and it is followed by facetious poetic dialogues and by Pindarics of the Cowleian sort but on such subjects as "On the Grunting of a Hog." In 1688 Wesley took his B.A. at Exeter College, Oxford, following which he became a naval chaplain and, in 1690, rector of South Ormsby; he became rector of Epworth in 1695. During the run of the *Athenian Gazette* (1691-1697) he joined with Richard Sault and John Norris in assisting John Dunton, the promoter of the undertaking. His second venture in poetry, the *Life of Our Blessed Lord and Saviour*, an epic largely in heroic couplets with a prefatory discourse on heroic poetry, appeared in 1693, was reissued in 1694, and was honored with a second edition in 1697. In 1695 he dutifully came forward with *Elegies*, lamenting the deaths of Queen Mary and Archbishop

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Tillotson. *An Epistle to a Friend concerning Poetry* (1700) was followed by at least four other volumes of verse, the last of which was issued in 1717. His poetry appears to have had readers on a certain level, but it stirred up little pleasure among wits, writers, or critics. Judith Drake confessed that she was lulled to sleep by Blackmore's *Prince Arthur* and by Wesley's "heroics" (*Essay in Defence of the Female Sex*, 1696, p. 50). And he was satirized as a mere poetaster in Garth's *Dispensary*, in Swift's *The Battle of the Books*, and in the earliest issues of the *Dunciad*. Nobody today would care to defend his poetry for its esthetic merits.

For a few years in the early eighteenth century Wesley found himself in the vortex of controversy. Brought up in the dissenting tradition, he had swerved into conformity at some point during the 1680's, possibly under the influence of Tillotson, whom he greatly admired (cf. *Epistle to a Friend*, pp. 5-6). In 1702 there appeared his *Letter from a Country Divine to his friend in London concerning the education of dissenters in their private academies*, apparently written about 1693. This attack upon dissenting academies was published at an unfortunate time, when the public mind was inflamed by the intolerance of overzealous churchmen. Wesley was furiously answered; he replied in *A Defence of a Letter* (1704), and again in *A Reply to Mr. Palmer's Vindication* (1707). It is scarcely to Wesley's credit that in this quarrel he stood shoulder to shoulder with that most hot-headed of all contemporary bigots, Henry Sacheverell. His prominence in the controversy earned him the ironic compliments of Defoe, who recalled that our "Mighty Champion of this very High-Church Cause" had once written a poem to satirize frenzied Tories (*Review*, II, no. 87, Sept. 22, 1705). About a week later Defoe, having got wind of a collection being taken up for Wesley—who in consequence of a series of misfortunes was badly in debt—intimated that High-Church pamphleteering had turned out very profitably for both Wesley and Wesley (Oct. 2, 1705). But in such snarling and bickering Wesley was out of his element, and he seems to have avoided future quarrels.

His literary criticism is small in bulk. But though it is neither brilliant nor well written (Wesley apparently composed at a break-neck clip), it is not without interest. Pope observed in 1730 that he was a "learned" man (letter to Swift, in *Works*, ed. Elwin-Courthope, VII, 184). The observation was correct, but it should be added that Wesley matured at the end of an age famous for its great learning, an age whose most distinguished poet was so much the scholar that he appeared more the pedant than the gentleman to critics of the succeeding era; Wesley was not singular for erudition among his seventeenth-century contemporaries.



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The “Essay on Heroic Poetry,” serving as Preface to *The Life of Our Blessed Lord and Saviour*, reveals something of its author’s erudition. Among the critics, he was familiar with Aristotle, Horace, Longinus, Dionysius of Halicarnasseus, Heinsius, Bochart, Balzac, Rapin, Le Bossu, and Boileau. But this barely hints at the extent of his learning. In the notes on the poem itself the author displays an interest in classical scholarship, Biblical commentary, ecclesiastical history, scientific inquiry, linguistics and philology, British antiquities, and research into the history, customs, architecture, and geography of the Holy Land; he shows, an intimate acquaintance with Grotius, Henry Hammond, Joseph Mede, Spanheim, Sherlock, Lightfoot, and Gregory, with Philo, Josephus, Fuller, Walker, Camden, and Kircher; and he shows an equal readiness to draw upon Cudworth’s *True Intellectual System* and Boyle’s new theories concerning the nature of light. In view of such a breadth of knowledge it is somewhat surprising to find him quoting as extensively as he does in the “Essay” from Le Bossu and Rapin, and apparently leaning heavily upon them.

The “Essay” was composed at a time when the prestige of Rymer and neo-Aristotelianism in England was already declining, and though Wesley expressed some admiration for Rapin and Le Bossu, he is by no means docile under their authority. Whatever the weight of authority, he says, “I see no cause why Poetry should not be brought to the Test [of reason], as well as Divinity...” As to the sacred example of Homer, who based his great epic on mythology, Wesley remarks, “But this [mythology] being now antiquated, I cannot think we are oblig’d superstitiously to follow his Example, any more than to make Horses speak, as he does that of Achilles.” To the question of the formidable Boileau, “What Pleasure can it be to hear the howlings of repining Lucifer?” our critic responds flippantly, “I think ’tis easier to answer than to find out what shew of Reason he had for asking it, or why Lucifer mayn’t howl as pleasantly as either Cerberus, or Enceladus.” Without hesitation or apology he takes issue with Rapin’s conception of Decorum in the epic. But Wesley is empiricist as well as rationalist, and the judgment of authority can be upset by appeal to the court of experience. To Balzac’s suggestion that, to avoid difficult and local proper names in poetry, generalized terms be used, such as *Ill-luck* for the *Fates* and the *Foul Fiend* for *Lucifer*, our critic replies with jaunty irony, “... and whether this wou’d not sound extreamly Heroical, I leave any Man to judge,” and thus he dismisses the matter. Similarly, when Rapin objects to Tasso’s mingling of lyric softness in the majesty of the epic, Wesley points out sharply that no man of taste will part with the fine scenes of tender love in Tasso, Dryden, Ovid, Ariosto, and Spenser “for the sake of a fancied Regularity.” He had set out to defend the



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Biblical epic, the Christian epic, and the propriety of Christian machines in epic, and no rules or authority could deter him. As good an example as any of his independence of mind can be seen in a note on Bk. I, apropos of the poet's use of obsolete words (*Life of Our Blessed Lord*, 1697, p. 27): it may be in vicious imitation of Milton and Spenser, he says in effect, but I have a fondness for old words, they please my ear, and that is all the reason I can give for employing them.

Wesley's resistance to a strict application of authority and the rules grew partly out of the rationalistic and empirical temper of Englishmen in his age, but it also sprang from his learning. From various sources he drew the theory that Greek and Latin were but corrupted forms of ancient Phoenician, and that the degeneracy of Greek and Latin in turn had produced all, or most, of the present European tongues (*ibid.*, p. 354). In addition, he believed that the Greeks had derived some of their thought from older civilizations, and specifically that Plato had received many of his notions from the Jews (*ibid.*, p. 230)—an idea which recalls the argument that Dryden in *Religio Laici* had employed against the deists. Furthermore, he had, like many of his learned contemporaries, a profound respect for Hebrew culture and the sublimity of the Hebrew scriptures, going so far as to remark in the "Essay on Heroic Poetry" that "most, even of [the heathen poets'] best Fancies and Images, as well as Names, were borrow'd from the Antient Hebrew Poetry and Divinity." In short, however faulty his particular conclusions, he had arrived at an historical viewpoint, from which it was no longer possible to regard the classical standards—much less the standards of French critics—as having the holy sanction of Nature herself.

Some light is shed on the literary tastes of his period by Wesley's two essays here reproduced, which with a few exceptions were in accord with the prevailing current. *The Life of Our Blessed Lord* shows strongly the influence of Cowley's *Davideis*. Wesley's great admiration persisted after the tide had turned away from Cowley; and his liking for the "divine Herbert" and for Crashaw represented the tastes of sober and unfashionable readers. In spite of the fact that he professed unbounded admiration for Homer as the greatest genius in nature, in practise he seemed more inclined to follow the lead of Cowley, Virgil, and Vida. Although there was much in Ariosto that he enjoyed, he preferred Tasso; the irregularities in both, however, he felt bound to deplore. To Spenser's *Faerie Queene* he allowed extraordinary merit. If the plan of it was noble, he thought, and the mark of a comprehensive genius, yet the action of the poem seemed confused. Nevertheless, like Prior later, Wesley was inclined to suspend judgment on this point because the poem had been left incomplete. To Spenser's "thoughts" he paid the

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highest tribute, and to his “Expressions flowing natural and easie, with such a prodigious Poetical Copia as never any other must expect to enjoy.” Like most of the Augustans Wesley did not care greatly for *Paradise Regained*, but he partly atoned by his praise for *Paradise Lost*, which was an “original” and therefore “above the common Rules.” Though defective in its action, it was resplendent with sublime thoughts perhaps superior to any in Virgil or Homer, and full of incomparable and exquisitely moving passages. In spite of his belief that Milton’s blank verse was a mistake, making for looseness and incorrectness, he borrowed lines and images from it, and in Bk. IV of *The Life of Our Blessed Lord* he incorporated a whole passage of Milton’s blank verse in the midst of his heroic couplets.

Wesley’s attitude toward Dryden deserves a moment’s pause. In the “Essay on Heroic Poetry” he observed that a speech of Satan’s in *Paradise Lost* is nearly equalled in Dryden’s *State of Innocence*. Later in the same essay he credited a passage in Dryden’s *King Arthur* with showing an improvement upon Tasso. There is no doubt as to his vast respect for the greatest living poet, but his remarks do not indicate that he ranked Dryden with Virgil, Tasso, or Milton; for he recognized as well as we that the power to embellish and to imitate successfully does not constitute the highest excellence in poetry. In the *Epistle to a Friend* he affirmed his admiration for Dryden’s matchless style, his harmony, his lofty strains, his youthful fire, and even his wit—in the main, qualities of style and expression. But by 1700 Wesley had absorbed enough of the new puritanism that was rising in England to qualify his praise; now he deprecated the looseness and indecency of the poetry, and called upon the poet to repent. One other point calls for comment. Wesley’s scheme for Christian machinery in the epic, as described in the “Essay on Heroic Poetry,” is remarkably similar to Dryden’s. Dryden’s had appeared in the essay on satire prefaced to his translation of Juvenal, published late in October, 1692; Wesley’s scheme appeared soon after June, 1693.

The *Epistle to a Friend concerning Poetry* is neither startling nor contemptible; it has, in fact, much more to say than the rhymed treatises on verse by Roscommon and Buckinghamshire. Its remarks on Genius are fresh, though tantalizing in their brevity, and it defends the Moderns with both neatness and energy. Much of its advice is cautious and commonplace—but such was the tradition of the poetical treatise on verse. Appearing within two years of Collier’s first attack upon the stage, it reinforces some of that worthy’s contentions, but we are not aware of its having had much effect.



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Edward Niles Hooker

AN  
EPISTLE  
TO A  
FRIEND  
CONCERNING  
POETRY.

By SAMUEL WESLEY.

*Fungor vice Cotis.*

LONDON

Printed for CHARLES HARPER, at the *Flower de Luce* in *Fleetstreet*. MDCC. 25.  
*Aprill.*

### PREFACE.

*I have not much to say of this Poem, before I leave it to the Mercy of the Reader. There's no need of looking far into it, to find out that the direct Design of a great part of it, is to Serve the Cause of Religion and Virtue; tho' 'twas necessary for that End to dispose the whole in such a manner as might be agreeable to the Tast of the present Age, and of those who usually give such sort of Books the Reading. If there be any Thoughts in it relating to Poetry, that either are not known to all Persons, or are tolerably ranged and expressed, the Reader is welcome to 'em for Over-weight: If there are too few of these, I yet hope the Pardon of all candid Judges, because I've done the best I cou'd on this Argument. I can't be angry with any Person for ranking me amongst the Ogybys; my Quarrel is with these that rank themselves amongst Atheists, and impudently defend and propagate that ridiculous Opinion of the Eternity of the World, and a fatal invincible Chain of Things, which, it seems, is now most commonly made use of to destroy the Faith, as our lewd Plays are to corrupt the Morals of the Nation:*



*An Opinion, big with more Absurdities than Transubstantiation it self, and of far more fatal Consequence, if receiv'd and believ'd: For besides its extremely weakening, if not destroying, the Belief of the Being and Providence of God, it utterly takes away any sort of Freedom in Humane Actions, reduces Mankind beneath the Brute Creation; perfectly excuses the greatest Villanies in this World, and entirely vacates all Retribution hereafter. One wou'd wonder with what Face or Conscience such a Sett of Men shou'd hope to be*



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*treated by the Rules of Civility, when they themselves break through those of Society, and common Humanity: How they can expect any fairer Quarter than Wolves or Tygers; or what Reason they can give why a Price should not be sett upon their Heads, as well as on the Others; or at least why they should not be securely hamper'd and muzzled, and led about for a Sight, like other Monsters. 'Tis the fatal and spreading Poyson of these Mens Examples and Principles which has extorted these warm Expressions from me; I cannot with Patience see my Countrey ruin'd by the prodigious increase of Infidelity and Immorality, nor forbear crying out with some Vehemence, when I am giving Warning to all honest Men to stand up in the Defence of it, when it is in greater and more eminent danger than it wou'd have been formerly, if the Spanish Armada had made a Descent amongst us: I don't speak of these things by distant Hear-say, or only from our publick Prints, but from my own Knowledg and little Acquaintance in the World, and therefore others must have observ'd much more, and cannot but fear, that if things go on as they now are, without a greater Check, and more severe Laws against these wide and contagious Mischiefs, at least without a more general united Endeavour to put those Laws already made in strict Execution, we are in a fair way to become a Nation of Atheists. 'Tis now no difficult matter to meet with those who pretend to be lewd upon Principles; They'll talk very gravely, look as if they were in earnest, and come sobrii ad perdendam Rempublicam: they wou'd be Criticks too, and Philosophers: They attack Religion in Form and batter it from every Quarter; they wou'd turn the very Scriptures against themselves, and labour hard to remove a Supreme Being out of the World; or if they do vouchsafe him any room in it, 'tis only that they may find Fault with his Works, which they think, with that Blasphemer of old, might have been much better order'd, had they themselves stood by and directed the Architect. They'll tell you the Errors of Nature are every where plain and visible, all monstrous, here too much and there too little; or, as one of their own Poets,*

Here she's *too sparing*, there *profusely vain*.



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*What would these Men have, or why can't they be content to sink single into the bottomless Gulph, without dragging so much Company thither with 'em? Can they grapple Omnipotence, or are they sure they can be too hard for Heaven? Can they Thunder with a Voice like God, and cast abroad the Rage of their Wrath? Cou'd they annihilate Hell, indeed, or did it only consist of such painted Flames as they'd fain believe it, they might make a shift to be tolerably happy, more quietly rake through the World, and sink into Nothing. There's too great reason to apprehend, that this Infection is spread among Persons of almost all Ranks and Qualities; and that tho' some may think it decent to keep on the Masque, yet if they were search'd to the bottom, all their Religion wou'd be found that which they most blasphemously assert of Religion in general, only a State Engin to keep the World in Order. This is Hypocrisie with a Witness; the basest and meanest of Vices; and how come Men to fall into these damnable Errors in Faith, but by Lewdness of Life? The Cowards wou'd not believe a God because they dare not do it, for Woe be to 'em if there be one, and consequently any Future Punishments. From such as these, I desire no Favour, but that of their Ill Word, as their Crimes must expect none from me, whose Character obliges me to declare an eternal War against Vice and Infidelity, tho' at the same time heartily to pity those who are infected with it. If I cou'd be ambitious of a Name in the World, it shou'd be that I might sacrifice it in so glorious a Cause as that of Religion and Virtue: If none but Generals must fight in this sacred War, when there are such infernal Hosts on the other side, they cou'd never prevail without one of the antient Miracles: If little People can but well discharge the Place of a private Centinel, 'tis all that's expected from us. I hope I shall never let the Enemies of God and my Countrey come on without Fireing, tho' it serve but to give the Alarm, and if I dye without quitting my Post, I desire no greater Glory. I have endeavour'd to shew that I had no Personal Pique against any whose Characters I may have given in this Poem, nor think the worse of them for their Thoughts of me. I hope I have every where done 'em Justice, and as well as I cou'd, have given 'em Commendation where they deserve it; which may also, on the other side, acquit me of Flattery with all Impartial Judges; for 'tis not only the Great whose Characters I have here attempted. And if what I have written may be any ways useful, or innocently diverting to the virtuous and ingenious Readers, he has his End, who is*



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Their Humble Servant

S. WESLEY.

AN  
EPISTLE  
TO A  
FRIEND  
CONCERNING  
POETRY.

As Brother *Pryme* of old from Mount *Orgueil*,  
 So I to you from *Epworth* and the *Isle*:  
 Harsh *Northern* Fruits from our cold Heav'ns I send,  
 Yet, since the *best* they yield, they'll please a *Friend*.  
 You ask me, What's the readiest way to *Fame*,  
 And how to gain a *Poet's* sacred Name?  
 For *Saffold* send, your Choice were full as just,  
 When burning *Fevers* fry your Limbs to Dust!  
 Yet, lest you *angry* grow at your *Defeat*,        }  
 And me as ill as that fierce *Spark* should treat }        10  
 Who did the Farrier into Doctor *beat*;        }  
 You to my little *Quantum*, Sir, are free,  
 Which I from HORACE glean or NORMANDY;  
 These with some grains of *Common Sense* unite,  
 Then freely *think*, and as I think I write.  
 First *poize* your *Genius*, nor presume to write  
 If *Phoebus* smile not, or some *Muse* invite:  
 Nature refuses *Force*, you strive in vain,  
 She will not *drag*, but struggling breaks the Chain.  
 How bright a Spark of *Heav'nly Fire* must warm!        20  
 What *Blessings* meet a *Poet's Mind* to form!  
 How oft must he for those *Life-Touches* sit,  
*Genius, Invention, Memory, Judgment, Wit?*  
 There's here no *Middle-State*, you must excel;  
*Wit* has no *Half-way-House* 'twixt *Heav'n* and *Hell* All cannot *All things*, lest  
 you mourn too late,  
 Remember *Phaeton's* unhappy *Fate*!  
 Eager to guide the *Coursers* of the *Day*,        }  
 Beneath their *Brazen Hoofs* he trampled lay,        }  
 And his bright *Ruines* mark'd their flaming Way. }        30  
 [Sidenote: *Genius.*]



You'll ask, What GENIUS is, and Where to find?  
'Tis the full *Power* and *Energy* of *Mind*:  
A *Reach* of *Thought* that skims all Nature o'er,  
*Exhausts* this narrow *World*, and asks for *more*:  
Through every *Rank of Beings* when't has flown,  
Can frame a *New Creation* of its own:  
By *Possible* and *Future* unconfin'd:  
Can stubborn *Contradictions* yoke, and bind  
Through *Fancy's* Realms, with Number, Time and Place,  
*Chimera-Forms*, a thin, an airy Race; 40  
Then with a secret *conscious Pride* surveys  
The *Enchanted Castles* which't had *Power* to raise.  
[Sidenote: *Wit.*]  
As *Genius* is the *Strength*, be WIT defin'd  
The *Beauty* and the *Harmony* of *Mind*:  
*Beauty's* Proportion, Air, each lively Grace  
The *Soul* diffuses round the *Heav'nly Face*:  
'Tis *various*, yet 'tis *equal*, still the same  
In *Alpine Snows*, or *Ethiopian Flame*;  
While *glaring Colours* short-liv'd Grace supply,  
Nor *Frost* nor *Sun* they bear, but *scorch* and *die*. 50



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[Sidenote: *Judgment.*]

Nor these alone, tho much they can, suffice,  
 JUDGMENT must join, or never hope the Prize:  
 Those *Headstrong Coursers* scowr along the Plains,  
 The *Rider's* down, if once he lose the *Reins*:  
 Soon the *Mad Mixture* will to all give Law,  
 And for the *Laurel Wreaths* present thee *Wreaths of Straw*.  
*Judgment's* the *Act of Reason*; that which brings  
 Fit *Thoughts* to *Thoughts*, and argues *Things* from *Things*,  
 True, Decent, Just, are in its *Balance* try'd,  
 And thence we learn to *Range, Compound, Divide.* 60

[Sidenote: *Invention and Memory.*]

A *Cave* there is wherein those *Nymphs* reside  
 Who all the Realms of *Sense* and *Fancy* guide;  
 Nay some affirm that in the deepest *Cell*  
 Imperial *Reason's* self does not disdain to dwell:  
 With Living *Reed* 'tis thatch'd and guarded round,  
 Which mov'd by *Winds* emit a Silver Sound:  
 Two *Crystal Fountains* near its *Entrance* play, }  
 Wide scatt'ring *Golden Streams* which ne'er decay, }  
 Two *Labyrinths* behind harmonious Sounds convey: }  
 Chiefly, within, the *Room of State* is fam'd 70

Of rich *Mosaick Work* divinely fram'd:  
 Of small *Extent* to view, 'twill all things hide,  
 Heav'n's Azure *Arch* it self not half so wide:  
 Here all the *Arts* their sacred Mansion chuse,  
 Here dwells the MOTHER of the Heav'n-born Muse:  
 With wond'rous mystic *Figures* round 'tis wrought  
*Inlaid* with FANCY, and *anneal'd* with *Thought*:  
 With more than humane Skill depicted here  
 The various *Images of Things* appear;  
 What *Was*, or *Is*, or labours yet to *Be* 80

Within the Womb of Dark *Futurity*,  
 May *Stowage* in this wondrous *Storehouse* find,  
 Yet leave unnumber'd empty *Cells* behind:  
 But ah! as fast they come, they fly too fast,  
 Not *Life or Happiness are more in haste*:  
 Only the *First Great Mind* himself can stay  
 The *Fugitives* and at *one Glance* survey;  
 But those whom he disdains not to befriend, }  
*Uncommon Souls*, who nearest Heav'n ascend }



Far more, at once, than others comprehend: } 90  
Whate'er within this *sacred Hall* you find, }  
Whate'er will *lodge* in your *capacious Mind* }  
Let *Judgment* sort, and skilful *Method* bind; }  
And as from these you draw your antient Store  
Daily supply the *Magazine* with more.  
Furnish'd with such *Materials* he'll excel  
Who when he *works* is sure to work 'em *well*;  
This ART alone, as *Nature* that bestows,  
And in *Perfection* both, th' accomplish'd *Verser* knows.  
Knows to *persuade*, and how to *speak*, and when; 100  
The *Rules of Life*, and *Manners* knows and *Men*:  
Those *narrow Lines* which *Good* and *Ill* divide;



# Page 11

[Sidenote: *Learning.*]

And by what *Balance Just* and *Right* are try'd:  
 How *Kindred-Things* with *Things* are closely join'd; }  
 How *Bodies* act, and by what *Laws* confin'd, }  
 Supported, mov'd and rul'd by th' *Universal Mind*. }  
 When the moist *Kids* or burning *Sirius* rise; }  
 Through what ambiguous *Ways* *Hyperion* flies, }  
 And marks our *Upper* or the *Nether Skies*. }  
 He knows those *Strings* to *touch* with artful Hand 110  
 Which rule Mankind, and all the World command:  
 What *moves* the *Soul*, and every secret *Cell*  
 Where *Pity*, *Love*, and all the *Passions* dwell.

The *Music* of his *Verse* can *Anger* raise,  
 Which with a softer *Stroak* he *smooths* and *lays*:  
 Can *Emulation*, *Terror*, all excite,  
 Compress the *Soul* with *Grief*, or *swell* with vast *Delight*.

If this you can, your *Care* you'll well bestow,  
 And some new *Milton* or a *Spencer* grow;  
 If not, a *Poet* ne'er expect to be, 120  
 Content to *Rime*, like *D*—y or like me.

But here perhaps you'll stop me, and complain,  
 To such *Impracticable Heights* I strain  
 A *Poet's Notion*, that if *This* be *He*,  
 There ne'er was one, nor e'er is like to be.

—But soft, my *Friend!* may we not *copy* well  
 Tho' far th' *Original* our *Art* excel?  
*Divine Perfection* we our *Pattern* make  
 Th' *Idea* thence of *Goodness* justly take;  
 But they who *copy* nearest, still must fall 130  
 Immensely short of their *Original*;

[Sidenote: *Converse.*]

But *Wit* and *Genius*, *Sense* and *Learning* join'd,  
 Will all come short if *crude* and *unrefin'd*;  
 'Tis *CONVERSE* only melts the stubborn *Ore*  
 And *polishes* the *Gold*, too rough before:  
 So *fierce* the *Natural Taste*, 'twill ne'er b' endur'd,  
 The *Wine* is *strong*, but never rightly *cur'd*.

[Sidenote: *Style.*]

*STYLE* is the *Dress* of *Thought*; a *modest Dress*,  
*Neat*, but not *gaudy*, will true *Critics* please:  
 Not *Fleckno's Drugget*, nor a worse *Extream* 140



All daub'd with *Point* and *Gold* at every Seam:  
Who only *Antique Words* affects, appears  
Like old King *Harry's* Court, all Face and Ears;  
Nor in a *Load* of *Wig* thy Visage shrowd,  
Like *Hairy Meteors* *glimm'ring through a Cloud*:  
Happy are those who here the *Medium* know,  
We hate alike a *Sloven* and a *Beau*.  
I would not follow *Fashion* to the height  
Close at the *Heels*, not yet be *out of Sight*:  
*Words* alter, like our *Garments*, every day,  
Now *thrive* and *bloom*, now *wither* and *decay*.

150



## Page 12

Let those of greater *Genius* new *invent*,  
 Be you with those in *Common Use* content.  
 A different *Style's* for *Prose* and *Verses* requir'd,  
*Strong figures* here, *Neat Plainness* there desir'd:  
 A different *Set of Words* to both belong;  
 What *shines* in *Prose*, is, *flat* and *mean* in *Song*.  
 The *Turn*, the *Numbers* must be vary'd here,  
 And all things in a *different Dress* appear.  
 This every *School Boy* lash'd at *Eaton* knows, } 160  
 Yet *Men of Sense* forget when they *compose*, }  
 And Father DRYDEN's *Lines* are sometimes *Prose*. }  
 A *vary'd Stile* do various *Works* require,  
 This *soft* as *Air*, and *tow'ring* that as *Fire*.  
 None than th' *Epistle* goes more *humbly* drest,  
 Tho' *neat* 'twou'd be, and *decent* as the *best*.  
 Such as th' ingenious *Censor* may invite }  
 Oft to return with eager *Appetite*; }  
 So HORACE wrote, and so I'd *wish* to write. }  
 Nor *creeps* it always, but can *mount* and *rise*, } 170  
 And with *bold Pinions* sail along the *Skies*.  
 The self-same *Work* of *different Style* admits,  
 Now *soft*, now *loud*, as best the *Matter* fits:  
 So Father THAMES from unexhausted *Veins*,  
 Moves *clean* and *equable* along the *Plains*;  
 Yet still of different *Depth* and *Breadth* is found,  
 And *humours* still the *Nature* of the *Ground*.  
 [Sidenote: *Reading*.]  
 READING will mend your *Style* and raise it higher,  
 And *Matter* find to feed th' *Immortal Fire*:  
 But if you would the *Vulgar Herd* excel, } 180  
 And justly gain the *Palm* of *Writing well*,  
 Wast not your *Lamp* in scanning *Vulgar Lines*,  
 Where *groveling* all, or *One in twenty* shines;  
 With *Prudence* first among the *Antients* chuse,  
 The *noblest* only, and the *best* peruse;  
 Such HOMER is, such VIRGIL's sacred *Page*,  
 Which *Death* defie, nor yield to *Time* or *Age*;  
 New *Beauties* still their *Vigorous Works* display,  
 Their *Fruit* still *mellows*, but can ne'er *decay*.  
 The *Modern Pens* not altogether slight, } 190  
 Be *Master* of your *Language* e'er you write!



*Immortal* TILLOTSON with Judgment scan,  
“That *Man of Praise, that something more than Man!*”  
Ev’n those who hate his *Ashes* this advise,        }  
As from black Shades resplendent Lightning flies,   }  
*Unwilling Truths* break through a *Cloud of Lies.*   }  
He *Words* and *Things* for *mutual Aid* design’d,  
Before at *Variance*, in just *Numbers* join’d;  
He always *soars*, but never’s *out of sight*,  
He taught us how to *Speak*, and *Think*, and *Write.*        200



## Page 13

If *English Verse* you'd in *Perfection* see,  
 ROSCOMMON read, and *Noble NORMANDY*:  
 We *borrow* all from their *exhaustless Store*,  
 Or little say they have not said *before*.  
*Poor Insects* of a *Day*, we toil and strive  
 To creep from *Dust* to *Dust*, and think we *live*;  
 These weak *imperfect Beings* scarce enjoy  
 E'er *Death's* rude *Hand* our *blooming Hopes* destroy:  
 With *Lynx's* Eyes each others *Faults* we find,  
 But to our *own* how few who are not *blind*? 210  
 How *long is Art*, how *short*, alas! our *Time!* }  
 How few who can above the *Vulgar* climb, }  
 Whose *stronger Genius* reach the *True Sublime!* }  
 With *tedious Rules* which we our selves transgress,  
 We make the *Trouble more* who strive to make it *less*.  
 But meanly why do you your *Fate* deplore,  
 Yet still write on?—Why do a *Thousand* more,  
 Who for their *own* or some *Forefathers* Crime  
 Are *doom'd* to wear their *Days* in *beating Rhime*?  
 But this a *Noble Patron* will redress, 220  
 And make you *better write*, tho you *write less*:  
 Whate'er a *discontented Mind* pretends,  
*Distinguish'd Worth* can rarely miss of *Friends*:  
 Do but *excel*, and he'll at last arise  
 Who from the *Dust* may lift thee to the *Skies*;  
 For his *own Sake* will his *Protection* grant;  
 What *Horace* e'er did yet *Mecaenas* want?  
 Or if the *World* its *Favours* should refuse,  
 With *barren Smiles* alone *reward* thy *Muse*;  
 Be thy *own Patron*, thou no more wilt need, 230  
 For all will *court* thee if thy *Works* *succeed*;  
 At least the few *Good Judges* will commend,  
 And *secret growing Praise* thy *Steps* attend.  
 Who shew'd *Columbus* where the *Indies* lay?  
 True to thy self, *charge through*, and *force* to *Fame* the way!  
 If *Envy* *snarl*, indulge it no *Reply*,  
 Write *better* still, and let it *burst* and *die!*  
 Rest pleas'd if you can please the *Wiser Few*,  
 Since *to please all is more than Heav'n it self can do*.  
 There are who *can* whate'er they *will* believe, 240  
 That *Bail's* too hard for *Beady*, *Three* are *Five*:



That Nature, Justice, Reason, Truth must fall,  
With *Clear Idea's* they'll *confound* 'em all:  
That *Parallels* may *travel* till they *meet*;  
*Faith* they can find in L——, no *Sense* in STILLINGFLEET.  
Disturb 'em not, but let 'em still enjoy  
Th' *unenvy'd Charms* of their *Eternal Moi*.  
If to the *craggy Top of Fame* you rise,  
Those who are *lab'ring after* ne'er *despise*.  
Nor those *above* on *Honours* dazling Seat     }           250



## Page 14

Tho *disoblig'd*, with *sawcy Rudeness* treat, }  
*Revenge* not always is *below the Great*. }  
 Their *Stronger Genius* may o'er thine prevail:  
*Wit, Power* and *Anger* join'd but rarely fail.  
 Tho *Eagles* would not chuse to *hawk* at *Flies* }  
 They'd *snap* 'em, should their *buzzing Swarms* arise }  
 Importunate, and hurt their *Sun bright Eyes*. }  
 Nor should the *Muses Birds* at *random* fly,  
 And *strike* at all, lest if they *strike they die*.  
 Why should we still be *lazily content* 260  
 With thredbare *Schemes*, and nothing *new* invent?  
 All *Arts* besides *improve, Sea, Air* and *Land* }  
 Are every day with *nicer Judgment* scan'd, }  
 And why should *this* alone be at a *stand*? }  
 Or *Nature* largely to the *Ancients* gave  
 And little did for *younger Children* save;  
 Or rather we *impartial Nature* blame  
 To hide our *Sloth*, and cover o'er our *Shame*;  
 As *Sinners*, when their *Reason's* drown'd in *Sense*,  
 Fall out with *Heav'n*, and quarrel *Providence*. 270  
 Yet should you our *Galenic Way* despise,  
 And some *new Colbatch* of the *Muses* rise;  
 No *Quarter* from the *College* hope, who sit  
*Infallible* at *Will's* and judg of *Sense* and *Wit*:  
 Keep fair with these, or *Fame* you *court* in vain,  
 A strict *Neutrality* at least *maintain*!  
 Speak, like the wise *Italian*, well of all;  
 Who knows into what *Hands* he's doom'd to *fall*?  
 Write *oft* and *much*, at *first*, if you'd *write well*,  
 For he who ne'er *attempts* will ne'er *excel*; 280  
*Practice* will *file* your *Verse*, your *Thoughts refine*,  
 And *Beauty* give, and *Grace* to every *Line*:  
 The *Gnat* to fam'd *AEneis* led the way,  
 And our *Immortal COWLEY* once did *play*.  
 Let not the *Sun of Life* in vain decline,  
 Or *Time* run *waste*; *No Day* without a *Line*.  
 Yet learn by me, my *Friend*, from *Errors* past;  
 O never *write*, or never *Print* in *Haste*!  
 The *worst Excuse* Ill *Authors* e'er advance,  
 Which does, like *Lies*, a *single Guilt* enhance. 290  
 Lay by your *Work*, and leave it on the *Loom*,



Which if at *mod'rate distance* you resume,  
A *Father's Fondness* you'll with Ease look through,  
And *Objects* in a proper *Medium* view.  
'Tis *Time* alone can *Strength* and *Ripeness* give;  
A *Hasty Birth* can ne'er expect to *live*.  
Fly, *low* at first, you'll with Advantage *rise*;  
This *pleases* all, as that will all *surprize*.  
[Sidenote: *The Subject*.]  
No *Work* attempt but where your *Strength* you know,



## Page 15

Be *Master of your Subject, Thoughts will flow:* 300  
 The *newer* 'tis, the *choicer Fruit* 'twill yield,  
 More *Room* you have to work if *large* your *Field*;  
 The *Sponge* you oftner than the *Pen* will want,  
 And rather *Reason* see to *prune* than *plant*;  
 Yet where the *Thoughts* are *barren, weak* and *thin*,  
 New *Cyons* should be neatly *grafted* in.  
 [Sidenote: *A Judge.*]  
 If you with *Friend* or *Enemy* are blest,  
 Your *Fancy's Offspring* ne'er can want a *Test*,  
 Tho *Both*, perhaps may *overshoot* the *Mark*:  
 First *Spite* with *Envy* charges in the *Dark*; 310  
*Unread* they *damn*, and into *Passion* fall,  
 'Tis *Stuff*, 'tis *Blasphemy* 'tis *Nonsense* all;  
 They *sleep* (when *doz'd before*) at every *Line*, }  
 While your more *dang'rous Friend* exclaims,—'Tis fine, }  
 'Tis *furiously Delightful*, 'tis *Divine*; }  
 Th' *inspiring God's* in ev'ry *Page* confess'd;  
 A *COWLEY* or a *DRYDEN* at the least!  
 Yet you'll from *both* an *equal Judgment* frame  
 And stand the *nearest Candidate* for *Fame*:  
 What *Envy* praises, or what *Friends* dislike, 320  
 This bears the *Test*, and that the *Sponge* should strike.  
 Chuse to be *absent* when your *Cause* is try'd,  
 Lest *Favour* should the *partial Judge* misguide;  
 Not *others Thoughts* implicitly prefer,  
 Your *Friend's* a *Mortal*, and like *you*, may *err*.  
 Upon the *last Appeal* let *Reason* sit,  
 And *here*, let *all Authority* submit.  
 Divest your *self of self* whate'er you can,  
 And think the *Author* now some *other Man*.  
 A thousand trivial *Lumber-Thoughts* will come, 330  
 A thousand *Fagot-Lines* will crowd for room;  
*Reform* your *Troops*, and no *Exemption* grant,  
 You'll gain in *Strength*, what you in *Numbers* want.  
 Nor yet *Infallibility* pretend;  
 He still *errs on* who thinks he ne'er can *mend*:  
 Reject that *hasty*, that *presumptuous Thought*!  
 None e'er but *VIRGIL* wrote without a *Fault*;  
 (Or *none* he has, or none that *I can find*,  
 Who, dazzled with his *Beauties*, to his *Moles* am blind.)



Who has the *least* is *happiest*, he the *best*, 340  
Who *owns* and *mends* where he has once *transgrest*.  
Nor will *good Writers smaller Blots* despise,  
Lest those neglected should to *Crimes* arise;  
Such *Venial Sins* indulg'd will *mortal* prove,  
At least they from *Perfection* far remove.  
Nor *Critical Exactness* here deride,  
It looks like *Sloth* or *Ignorance*, or *Pride*;  
*Good Sense* is spoild in *Words unapt* exprest,



## Page 16

And *Beauty* pleases more when 'tis *well drest*.  
 [Sidenote: *Method*.]

Forget not *METHOD* if the *Prize* you'd gain, 350  
 'Twill cost you *Thought*, but richly pays the *Pain*;  
 What *first*, what *second*, or what *last* to place,  
 What here will *shine*, and there the *Work* disgrace.  
 Before you build, your *MODEL* justly lay,  
 And ev'ry Part in *Miniature* survey;  
 Where airy *Terraces* shall threat the *Skies*,  
 Where *Columns* tow'r, or neat *Pilasters* rise;  
 Where cool *Cascades* come *roaring* down the *Hill*,  
 Or where the *Crystal Nymph* a *mossie Bason* fill:

What *Statues* are to grace the *Front* design'd, 360  
 And how to throw the *meaner Rooms* behind.  
 Draw the *Main Strokes* at first, 'twill shew your *Skill*,  
*Life-Touches* you may add whene'er you will.  
 Ev'n *Chance* will sometimes all our *Art* excel,  
 The *angry Foam* we ne'er can *hit* so well.  
 A *sudden Thought*, all beautiful and bright,  
 Shoots in and *stunns* us with *amazing Light*;  
 Secure the *happy Moment* e'er 'tis past,  
 Not *Time* more *swift*, or *Lightning* flies so fast.  
 All must be *free* and *easie*, or in vain 370  
 You *whip* and *spur*, and the *wing'd Courser* strain:  
 When *foggy Clouds* hang *bellying* in the *Skies*,  
 Or *fleety Boreas* through th' *Horizon* flies;  
 He then, whose *Muse* produces ought that's *fine*,  
 His *Head* must have a *stronger Turn* than mine:  
 Like *Sybils Leaves* the *Train of Thoughts* are rang'd,  
 Which by *rude Winds* disturb'd, are *nothing* if they're chang'd.  
 Or are there too in *Writing softer Hours*?  
 Or is't that *Matter* nobler *Mind* o'erpow'rs,  
 Which boasts her *native Liberty* in vain, 380  
 In *Mortal Fetters* and a *Slavish Chain*?  
*Death* only can the *Gordian Knot* divide, }  
 Tho by what secret wondrous *Bands* 'tis ty'd, }  
 Ev'n *Reason's* self must own she can't decide: }  
 For as the *rapid Tides* of *Matter* turn }  
 We're fann'd with *Pleasure* or with *Anger* burn, }  
 We *Love* and *Hate* again, we *Joy* and *Mourn*. }  
 Now the swift *Torrent* high and headstrong grows,



*Shoots* through the Dykes, and all the Banks *o'erflows*;  
Strait the *capricious Waters* backward fly,  
The *Pebbles* rake and leave the Bottom *dry*; 390  
Watch the *kind Hour* and seize the *rising Flood*,  
Else will your *dreggy Poem* taste of *Mud*.  
Hence old and batter'd *Hackneys* of the *Stage*,  
By long Experience render'd *Wise* and *Sage*,  
With pow'rful *Juices* restive Nature urge,  
Or else with *Bays* of old, they *bleed* and *purge*;



## Page 17

Thence, as the *Priestess* from her *Cave* inspir'd,  
 When to his *Cell* the *rancid God* retir'd,  
*Double Entendres* their fond *Audience* blind,  
 Their *boasted Oracles* abuse Mankind: 400  
*False Joys* around their *Hearts* in *Slumbers* play,  
 And the warm *tingling Blood* steals fast away;  
 The *Soul* grows *dizzy*, lost in *Senses Night*,  
 And melts in pleasing *Pain* and vain *Delight*.  
 Not that the *sowrest Critick* can reprove  
 The *soft* the moving *Scenes* of *Virtuous Love*:  
*Life's Sunny Morn*, which wears, alas! too fast;  
*Pity* it e'er should *hurt*, or should not *always last*!  
 Has *Bankrupt Nature* then no *more* to give,  
 Or by a *Trick* persuades Mankind to *live*? 410  
 No—when with *Prudence* join'd 'tis still the *same* }  
 Or *ripens* into *Friendship's* nobler *Name*, }  
 The *Matter* pure, immortal is the *Flame*. }  
 No *Fool*, no *Debauchee* could ever prove  
 The *honest Luxury* of *Virtuous Love*;  
 Then *curs'd* are those who that *fair Name* abuse,  
 And holy *Hymen's* sacred *Fillets* loose;  
 Who *poison Fountains*, and *infect* the *Air*,  
*Ruine* the *Witty*, and *debauch* the *Fair*;  
 With *nauseous Images* their *Scenes* debase 420  
 At once their *Country's Ruine* and *Disgrace*.  
*Weigh* well each *Thought* if all be *Just* and *Right*,  
 For those must clearly *think* who clearly *write*.  
 Nothing *obscure*, *equivocal*, or *mean*,  
 Much less what is or *impious* or *obscene*:  
 Altho the tempting *Serpent* play his part,  
 And wind in *glitt'ring Folds* around thy *Heart*;  
 Reject the *trait'rous Charmer*, tear him thence,  
 And keep thy *Vertue* and thy *Innocence*.  
 [Sidenote: *The Manchinel, or Eves Apple*.]  
 In wild *America's* rank *Champaign* grows 430  
 A *Tree* which *Europe* oft too dearly knows;  
 It rises high in *cool enchanting Groves*,  
 Whose green broad *Leaves* the fainting *Trav'ler* loves;  
*Fair* is the treach'rous *Fruit*, and charms your *Eye*,  
 But ah! beware! for if you *taste* you *die*.  
 Too well alas! it *thrives* when *planted* here,



Its deadly Branches shade our *Theatre*.  
Of *Mesures, Numbers, Pauses* next I sing,  
And rest the breathless *Muse* with cautious *Wing*:  
Of *Embryo Thoughts*, unripen'd yet by Time, 440  
The Rules of *Verse*, of *Quantity* and *Rhime*:  
With trembling Steps through *Shades* unknown I stray,  
And mark a *rugged* and a *dubious* way;  
Yet some small *glimm'ring Light* will hence be show'd,  
And future *Trav'lers* may enlarge the *Road*.



## Page 18

[Sidenote: *Measure.*]

Of CHAUCER'S Verse we scarce the *Measures* know,  
 So *rough* the *Lines*, and so *unequal* flow;  
 Whether by Injury of *Time* defac'd,  
 Or *careless* at the *first*, and writ in *haste*;  
 Or *coursly*, like old *Ennius*, he *design'd* 450  
 What After-days have *polish'd* and *refin'd*.  
 SPENCER more *smooth* and *neat*, and none than He  
 Could better skill of *English Quantity*;  
 Tho by his *Stanza* cramp'd, his *Rhimes* less chast,  
 And *antique Words* affected all disgrac'd;  
 Yet *vast* his *Genius*, *noble* were his *Thoughts*,  
 Whence equal Readers wink at *lesser* Faults.  
 From *France* their *Alexandrins* we receive  
 Which more of *Liberty* and *Compass* give; 460  
 Hence by our dull Translators were they us'd,  
 Nor CHAPMAN nor old STERNHOLD these refus'd;  
 They borrow from *Hexameters* their *Feet*,  
 Which with *Asclepiads* and *Iambicks* meet;  
 Yet in the midst we still a *Weakness* see,  
 Their *Music* gives us no *Variety*.  
 More *num'rous* the *Pentameter* and *strong*,  
 Which to our *Saxon Fathers* did belong.  
 In this their antient *Edda*[1] seems to write,  
*Mysterious Rhimes*, and *horrid* to the *sight*:  
 Their *Runic Staves* in this on *Rocks* engrav'd, 470  
 Which long th' Assaults of *Time* it self have brav'd.  
 In this our antient *British Bards* delight; }  
 And, if I measure his *rough Numbers* right, }  
 In this old *Taliessin* us'd to Write[2]. }  
 This still *Possession* keeps, few else we read,  
 And *Right* as well as *Fact* may justly plead;  
 Altho the *French Intruders* oft pursue  
 Their *baffled Title*, and their *Claim* renew;  
 Too oft *Impressions* on our *Armies* make,  
 Cut off our *Straglers* and our *Out-Guards* take, 480  
 Which lazily our Authors now admit,  
 And call th' *Excursions of Luxuriant Wit*;  
 With *Badger-Feet* the two-top'd *Mount* we climb,  
 And stalk from *Peak* to *Peak* on *Stilts of Rime*.  
 Sweet WALLER'S *Dimeter* we most approve



For cheerful *Songs* and *moving Tales of Love*,  
Which for *Heroic Subjects* wants of *Strength*,  
Too *short*, as *Alexandrins* err in *Length*.  
Our *Ear's* the Judge of *Cadence*; nicely weigh  
What *Consonants*; rebel, and what obey;  
What *Vowels* mixt compose a pleasing *Sound*,  
And what the tender *Organs* grate and wound.  
Nor at thy Reader's *Mercy* chuse to lie,  
Nor let *his Judgment* want of *thine* supply:  
So *easie* let thy *Verse* so *smoothly* fall,  
They must be read *aright* if read at all.  
[Sidenote: *Numbers*.]  
Nor *equal Numbers* will for all suffice,

490



## Page 19

The *Sock* creeps low, the *Tragic Bushkins* rife;  
None knew this *Art* so well, so well did use  
As did the *Mantuan Shepherd's* Heav'nly Muse: 500  
He marry'd *Sound and Sense*, at odds before,  
We hear his *Scylla bark, Charybdis roar*;  
And when in *Fields* his *Fiery Coursers* meet  
The *hollow Ground* shakes underneath their feet:  
Yet nicer *Ears* can taste a *Diff'rence* when  
Of *Flocks* and *Fields* he *sings* or *Arms* and *Men*.  
If I our *English Numbers* taste aright,  
We in the grave *Iambic* most delight:  
Each *second Syllable* the *Voice* should *rest*,  
*Spondees* may serve, but still th' *Iambic's* best: 510  
Th' unpleasing *Trochee* always makes a *Blot*,  
And lames the *Numbers*; or, if this forgot,  
A strong *Spondaic* should the *next* succeed,  
The feeble *Wall* will a good *Buttress* need:  
Long *Writing, Observation, Art* and *Pain*  
Must here unite if you the *Prize* would gain.  
[Sidenote: *Pauses.*]  
*Pause* is the *Rest* of *Voice*, the poor *Remains*  
Of *antient Song* that still our *Verse* retains:  
The *second Foot* or *third's* our usual *Rest*,  
Tho more of *Art's* in *varying* oft exprest. 520  
At ev'ry *Word* the *Pause* is sometimes[3] made,  
And wond'rous *Beauty* every where displaid:  
—But here we *guess*, and *wander* in the *dark*;  
How should a hoodwink'd *Archer* hit the *Mark*?  
The little *Glimpse* that DRYDEN gives, is more  
Than all our *careless Writers* knew before;  
A few *Chance Lines* may smooth and roundly fly,  
But still no *Thanks* to us, we know not why.  
He finds *Examples*, we the *Rule* must make,  
Tho who without a *Guide* may not mistake? 530  
[4] "*Tho deep yet clear, tho gentle yet not dull,*  
*Strong without Rage, without o'er flowing full.*"  
If we that *famous Riddle* can unty,  
Their brightest *Beauties* in the *Pauses* lie,  
To *Admiration vary'd*; next to these  
The *Numbers* justly order'd charm and please:  
Each *Word*, each happy *Sound* is big with *Sense*,



They all *deface* who take one *Letter* thence.

[Sidenote: *Quantity*.]

But little more of *Quantity* we know

Than what our *Accent* does, and *Custom* show:

540

The *Latin Fountains* often we forsake,

As they the *Greek*; nay *diff'rent Ages* take

A *diff'rent Path*; *Perfume* and *Envy* now

We say, which *Ages past* would scarce allow:

If no *Position* make our *Accent* strong

Most *Syllables* are either *short* or *long*.

[Sidenote: *Rhime*.]

*Primitive Verse* was grac'd with pleasing *Rhimes*,

The *Blank* a lazy Fault of *After-times*;

Nor need we other proof of this to plead



## Page 20

With those the sacred [5] *Hebrew Hymns* can read: 550  
 If this to *lucky Chance* alone be due,  
 Why *Rhime* they not in *Greek* and *Latin* too?  
 [6] PINDAR at first his ancient *Copy* trac'd,  
 And sometimes equal *Sounds* his *Numbers* grac'd;  
 Till with the more than *human Labour* tir'd,  
 He *drop'd* his *Rhime*, and own'd him *uninspir'd*.  
 ORPHEUS and HOMER too, who first did dream  
 Of *num'rous Gods*, and left the *One Supreme*,  
*Religion* both and *Poetry* did wrong,  
*Apostatiz'd* from *Rhime*, and lost the *Soul of Song*. 560  
 Yet still some weak and glimm'ring *Sparks* remain'd,  
 And still our *Great Forefathers* this retain'd;  
 Nor *Inundations* of *Barbarian Rome*,  
 Our ancient *Rhime* could wholly overcome.  
 [Sidenote: *Vide p. 13.*]  
 Ne'er *cramp* thy *Reason* for some paltry *Chime*,  
 Nor sacrifice *Good Sense* to *Numbers* and to *Rhime*:  
 Both may be *sav'd* and made *good Friends*; and here  
 The *Poets Art* and *Happiness* appear:  
 But when some *stubborn Word* denies to draw  
 In *Numbers*, and defies the *Muses Law*, 570  
 Reject it strait, unworthy such a *Grace*,  
 Another *yoke* which better fills the *Place*:  
 Much *Reading* will thy *Poverty* amend  
 And *Taggs* without the help of *Crambo* lend.  
 The *Double Rhime* is *antiquated* grown,  
 Or us'd in *Satyr* or *Burlesque* alone;  
 Nor loves our stronger *Tongue* that tinkling *Chime*,  
 The *Darling* of the *French*, a *Female Rhime*.  
 Now, daring *Muse!* attempt a *stronger Flight*,  
 Beyond a *Vulgar Verser's* cautious *Height*, 580  
 Beyond thy self, and consecrate to *Fame* }  
 Those who a *Title* to the *Laurel* claim, }  
 And may to after-times *embalm* thy Name; }  
 Commend the *Good*, to all but *Vice* be kind,  
 And cast the *smaller Faults* in *shades* behind;  
 Who *first*, who *next*; the *Balance* justly hold,  
 As that which shines above, and flames with *Heav'nly Gold*.  
 Great N——BY the first, ROSCOMMON gone,  
 He rules our *Empire* now of *Wit* alone:



The *Beauties* he of *Verse* exactly knows, 590  
 The famous DRYDEN'S not more smoothly flows:  
 Had ORPHEUS half so sweetly mourn'd his *Fate*,  
 As VIRGIL sung, or *Sh—d* did *translate*;  
 H' had made the *Manes* once again *relent*,  
 They would again *Eurydice* have sent:  
*Death's Temple* we with *sacred Aw* survey,  
 With *Admiration* read his *Great Essay*:  
 Was *Art* or bounteous *Nature* here more *kind?* }  
*Strong Sense!* Uncommon *Learning!* *Thoughts* refin'd! } 600  
 A *Godlike Person*, and an *equal Mind!* }



## Page 21

[Sidenote: *Paraphrase on Psal. 148 O Azure Vaults, &c.*]

The *next* in Dignity, if not the *same*,  
 Is Deathless Dorsot's lov'd and noble *Name*:  
 How did he sing, (listen'd the *Heav'nly Quire*;) )  
 The Wond'rous Notes of DAVID's *Royal Lyre*!  
 Ah! *Why no more* must we for ever long  
 And vainly languish for so *sweet* a *Song*?  
 The next is *Tityrus*, who not disdains  
 To read his *Name* among the *tuneful Swains*;  
*Unweary'd* in his *Prince's* glorious *Cause*, 610  
 As he of *Faith*, Defender of the *Laws*;

*Easie* to all but to himself, he shares  
 His Monarch's *Favours*, and his Monarch's *Cares*:  
 His flowing *Language* cloaths his *massie Sense*, }  
 Nor makes with *pompous Words* a vain pretence, }  
*Sound* without *Soul*, to *Wit* and *Eloquence*. }

Tho *Great*, he's still the same he was before:  
 —I *sue for nothing*, and I'll say no more.  
*Montague* left the *Muses* peaceful *Seat*,  
 And bore the *Cares* and *Honours* of the *Great*: 620

The *Pollio* he of our *Augustan* days,  
 Who *Wit* rewards with more than *hungry Praise*;  
*True Worth* his *Patronage* can never miss,  
 He has his *Prince's Smiles* and *that* has *his*.  
 Nor should he pass unprais'd whom all admire,  
 Who, mixt with *Seraphs*, rules the *Western Quire*;  
*Flowing* and *pure* his unexhausted *Vein*,  
 As *Silver Thames*, which, rolling down the *Plain*,  
 Salutes his *Sacred Dome*.—

But those *profane* who meanly thus *commend*, 630  
 Th' *Immortal Cowley's* and the *Muses* Friend.

Of *matchless DRYDEN* only *Dryden's* Skill  
 Could justly say enough,—of *Good* or *Ill*.  
*Envy* must own he has our *Tongue refin'd*,  
 And manly *Sense* with tend'rest *Softness* join'd:  
 His *Verse* would *Stones* and *Trees* with *Soul* inspire,  
 As did the *Theban* and the *Thracian Lyre*:

His youthful *Fire* within, like *Etna*, *glows*,  
 Tho *Venerable Age* around his *Temples* *snows*:  
 If from the *modern* or the *antient* Store 640  
 He *borrow*s ought, he always *pays* 'em more:



So much *improv'd*, each *Thought*, so *fine* appears,  
WALLER or OVID scarce durst own 'em *theirs*.  
The Learned *Goth* has scowr'd all *Europe's* Plains, }  
*France, Spain*, and fruitful *Italy* he *drains*,    }  
From every Realm and every Language *gains*:        }  
His *Gains* a *Conquest* are, and not a *Theft*;  
He wishes still new *Worlds* of *Wit* were left:  
Thus *haughty Rome*, when, all the *Firm* surpass'd,  
Her *Eagles* found our *moated World* at last;        650



## Page 22

Touching upon th' *unhospitable* Coast,  
*Good Laws* bestow'd for our *wild Freedom* lost;  
 With *Arts of Peace* our stubborn Soil manur'd,  
 And *naked Limbs* from *Frost* and *Sun* secur'd:  
 —But ah' how *dear* the *Price* of all we gain!        }  
 What *Shoals of Vices* with 'em cross'd the Main?        }  
 What *Pride*, what *Luxury*, a foul, an odious Train?   }  
 Who weighs, like *Galcacus*, the *Good* with *Ill*,  
 Would wish they'd let us been *Barbarians* still:  
 Such *thankless Pains* *Ignatian Firebrands* take        660  
 An *honest Pagan* spoil, and a *bad Christian* make.  
 Blest be kind Heav'n, which wrap'd me in a *Gown*,  
 And drew me early from the *fatal Town*!  
 And blest *Her Name*, to endless Ages blest,  
 Who gave my weary *Muse* this calm *Retreat* and *Rest*.  
 True to my God, my Country, and my Friend,        }  
 Here, may I Life, not *wholly useless*, spend,        }  
*Steal* through the World, and *smiling* meet my *End*! }  
 I envy not *Great Dryden's* loftier Strain        }  
 Of *Arms* and *Men* design'd to entertain,        }        670  
*Princes* and *Courts*, so I but please the *Plain*: }  
 Nor would I barter *Profit* for *Delight*,  
 Nor would have writ like him, like him to write.  
 If there's *Hereafter*, and a last *Great Day*,  
 What *Fire's* enough to *purge* his *Stains* away?  
 How will he wish each *lewd* applauded *Line*        }  
 Which makes *Vice pleasing*, and *Damnation shine*, }  
 Had been as *dull* as honest *Quarles* or *mine*!        }  
 With *sixty Years of Lewdness* rest content!  
 It mayn't be yet *too late*, O yet *Repent*!        680  
 Ev'n *Thee* our *injur'd Altar* will receive;  
 While yet there's *Hopes* fly to its *Arms* and live!  
 So shall for *Thee* their *Harps* the *Angels* string,  
 And the *Returning Prodigal* shall sing;  
 New *Joys* through all the *Heav'nly Host* be shown  
 In *Numbers* only *sweeter* than thy *own*.  
 CONGREVE from *Ireland* wond'ring we receive,        }  
 Would he the *Town's loose way* of Writing leave,        }  
 More Worth than all their Forfeit Lands will give: }  
*Justness of Thought*, a *Courtly Style*, and clear,        690  
 And well-wrought *Passions* in his *Works* appear:



None knows with *finer Strokes* our Souls to move,  
And as he please we *smile*, or *weep*, or *love*.  
When *Dryden* goes, 'tis he must fill the *Chair*,  
With *Congreve* only *Congreve can compare*.  
Yet, tho he *natural* is as untaught Loves,  
His *Style* as *smooth* as *Cytherea's* Doves,  
When e'er unbyass'd *Judges* read him o'er,  
He sometimes *nodds*, as *Homer* did before:



## Page 23

Some Lines his most *Admirers* scarce would please, 700  
 Nor *B—*'s Verse alone could *raise Disease*. [7]  
 For *smooth* and *well turn'd Lines* we *T—* admire,  
 Who has in *Justness* what he wants in *Fire*:  
 Each *Rhime*, each *Syllable* well-weigh'd and fair,  
 His *Life* and *Manners* scarce more *regular*.  
 With *Strength* and *Flame* prodigious *D—s* writes  
 Of *Loves* lost *Wars*, and cruel martial *Fights*:  
 Scarce *LEE* himself strove with a *mightier Load*,  
 Or *labour'd* more beneath th' *Incumbent God*:  
 Whate'er of old to *Rome* or *Athens* known, 710  
 What *France* or *We* have *glean'd*, 'tis all his *own*.  
 How few can equal *Praise* with *C—ch* obtain,  
 Who made *Lucretius smooth*, and *chast*, and *plain*?  
 Courted by *Fame* he could her *Charms* despise, }  
 Still woo'd by that *false Fair* he still denies, }  
 And press'd, for *Refuge* to the *Altar* flies; }  
 Like *votive Tablets* offers up his *Bays*,  
 "And leaves to our lewd *Town* the *Drudgery of Plays*."  
 In lofty *Raptures*, born on *Angels Wings* }  
 Above the *Clouds*, above *Castalian Springs*, } 720  
*N—* inspir'd, of *God* and *Nature* sings; }  
 And if one *Glance* on this *poor World* he throw,  
 If e'er he mind the *Croud* and *Buzz* below;  
 Pities our *fruitless Pains* for *Fame* and *Praise*,  
 And wonders why we *drudge* for *Crowns* and *Bays*.  
 Could *B—* be *sober*, many he'd excel,  
 Few know the *Antients*, or could use so well;  
 But ah! his *Genius* with his *Virtue's* fled,  
 Condemn'd to *Want of Grace* and *Want of Bread*.  
 Ev'n *Envy B—re's Subject* must confess } 730  
*Exact* and *rare*, a *curious Happiness*, }  
 Nor many could the *Fable better dress*: }  
 Of *Words* what *Compass*, and how vast a *Store*!  
 His *Courage* and his *Vertue's* only more:  
 More various *Scenes of Death* his *Fights* display  
 Then *Aghrim's Field* or *London's fatal Day*:  
 Let *beauteous Elda's Tears* and *Passion* prove  
 His *Soul* is not *unknowing how to love*:  
 Disrob'd of *Clouds* he view'd the *Stagyrite*  
 As *Nature* he, confess'd to *Human sight*:



His *Rules* surveys, and traces to their *Springs*, } 740  
Where the *blind Bard* of flaming *Ilium* sings; }  
Thence with the *Mantuan Swan* in narrower Rings, }  
Tho more *exact*, he, stooping from his height,  
Reviews the same *fierce Wars* and *Gods* and *Heroes* fight:  
That beauteous antient *Palace* he surveys }  
Which *Maro's Hands* had only Strength to raise, }



## Page 24

*Models* from thence, and *copies* every *Grace*: }  
 Each *Page* is big with *Virgil's Manly Thought*,  
 To follow him too near's a *glorious Fault*.  
 He dar'd be *virtuous* in the *World's Despite*, 750  
 While D——n lives he dar'd a *Modest Poem* write.  
 Who can th' ingenious S——y's *Praise* refuse,  
 Who serves a grateful *Prince*, and grateful *Muse*?  
 Or P——r read unmov'd, whose every *Page*  
 So just a *Standard* to the opening *Age*?  
 Neat S——n's courtly *Vein's* correct and clear,  
 Nor shall he miss his *Praise* and *Station* here:  
 Nor should the *rest* whom I *unnam'd* must leave,  
 (Tho such *Omission* they'll with ease *forgive*;) 760  
*Unknown* to me, let each his *Works* commend,  
 Since *Virtue*, *Praise*, as *Shame* does *Vice* attend.  
*Poets*, like *Leaves* and *Words*, their *Periods* know,  
 Now *fresh* and *green*, now *sear* and wither'd grow;  
 Or *burnt* by *Autumn's Heat*, and *Winter's Cold*,  
 Or a *new hasty Birth* shoves off the *old*.  
 Happy are those, and such are *some* of ours, }  
 Who blest by bounteous *Heav'n's* indulgent *Show'rs* }  
 Bear wholesome *Fruit*, and not gay *pois'nous Flow'rs*: }  
 Who would not ev'n a *Lawreat's self* commence 770  
 Or at their *Virtue's* or their *Faith's* Expence:  
 Renounce their *Creed* to save a *wretched Play*, }  
 And for a *crowded House* and *full Third Day* }  
 At one *bold Stroke* throw all their *Heav'n* away. }  
 What gain'd *Euripides* by all his *Sense*,  
 Who madly rail'd against a *Providence*?  
*Apostate Poets* first seduc'd *Mankind*,  
*But ours* upon the *Pagan Herd* refin'd;  
 They *Vertue* prais'd at least, which ours *abuse*,  
 And more than *Paganize* the *Heav'n-born Muse*: 780  
 No *Signs* of *Grace*, or of *Repentance* show,  
 Like *Strumpets* lash'd, more *impudent* they grow.  
 Now learn, my *Friend*, and freely I'll impart  
 My *little All* in this delightful *Art*:  
 Of *Poetry* the various *Forms* and *Kinds*,  
 The widest, strongest *Grasp* of human *Minds*:  
 Not *all* from *all*, but *some* from *each* I take,  
 Since we a *Garland* not a *Garden* make.  
 [Sidenote: *Epic*.]  
 EPIC's the *first* and *best*, which mounting sings }



In *Mighty Numbers* worthy *mighty Things*, } 790  
Of *High Adventures*, *Heroes*, *Gods* and *Kings*: }  
By lively *Schemes* the Mind to *Vertue* forms,  
And far beyond *unactive Precept* warms.  
The *Subject* may be either *feign'd* or *true*,  
*Too Old* it should not be, but less *too New*:  
*Narration* mixt with *Action* most delights,



# Page 25

*Intrigues and Councils, vary'd Games and Fights:*  
 Nothing so long as may the Reader tire,  
 But all the just well-mingled *Scenes* admire.  
 Your *Heroe* may be *virtuous*, must be *brave*;  
 Nothing that's *mean* should his great Soul enslave:  
 Yet Heav'ns unequal *Anger* he may *fear*,  
 And for his *suffering Friends* indulge a *Tear*:  
 Thus when the *Trojans Navy* scatter'd lay  
 He *wept*, he *trembled*, and to Heav'n did *pray*;  
 But when bright *Glory beckon'd* from afar,  
 And *Honour* call'd him out to meet the *War*;  
 Like a fierce *Torrent* pouring o'er the *Banks*,  
 Or *Mars* himself, he *thunders* through the *Ranks*;  
*Death* walks before, while he a *Foe* could find, 810  
*Horror* and *Ruine* mark long frightful *Lanes* behind.

[Sidenote: *Machines*.]  
 For *worn* and *old MACHINES* few Readers care,  
 They're like the *Pastboard Chaos in the Fair*:  
 If ought surprizing you expect to shew,  
 The *Scenes* if not the *Persons* should be *new*:  
 With *both* does MILTON'S wondrous Scheme begin,  
 The *Pandemonium, Chaos, Death* and *Sin*;  
 Which *D—s* had with like *Success* assay'd, }  
 Had not the *Porch of Death's Grim Court* been made }  
 Too *wide*, and there th' impatient *Reader* staid. } 820

And *G—h*, tho *barren* is his *Theme* and *mean*,  
 By this has *reach'd* at least the fam'd *Lutrine*.  
 If *tir'd* with such a plenteous *Feast* you call  
 For a far meaner *Banquet, Meal* and *Wall*;  
 The *best* I have is *yours*, tho 'tis too *long*,  
 And what's behind will into *Corners* throng.  
 A *Place* there is, if *Place* 'tis nam'd aright, }  
 Where scatter'd *Rays* of pale and sickly *Light*, }  
 Fringe o'er the *Confines* of *Eternal Night*. }

*Shorn* of their *Beams* the *Sun* and *Phoebe* here 830  
 Like the *fix'd Stars*, through *Glasses* view'd, appear;  
 Or those faint *Seeds of Light*, which just display  
 Ambiguous *Splendor* round the *milky Way*;  
 The *Waste* of *Chaos*, whose *Auguster* Reign  
 Does those more barren doubtful *Realms* disdain:  
 Here dwell those *hideous Forms* which oft repair }  
 To breath our upper *World's* more *chearful Air* }  
 Bleak *Envy*, grinding *Pain*, and meagre *Care*; }



*Disease and Death, the Goddess of the place,  
Death, the least frightful Form of all their Race;                   840  
Ambition, Pride, false Joys and Hopes as vain,  
Lewdness and Luxury compose her Train:  
How large their Interest, and how vast their Sway  
Amid the wide invaded Realms of Day!*



## Page 26

Soon would they our frail Race of *Mortals* end,  
 Did not kind *Heav'n* auspicious *Succours* lend;  
 Sweet *Angel-Forms*, *Peace*, *Virtue*, *Health* and *Love*,  
 How near ally'd, how like to those *above*!  
 These often drive the *Air*, those *Furies* chace  
 And fetter in their own *infernal Place*: 850  
 These lent at once NASSAW and ENGLAND Aid,  
 And bright MARIA to our *Shores* convey'd:  
 Her, all their *Pow'r* and all their *Charms* they gave,  
 To *govern* what her *Heroe* came to *save*.  
 Nor *Envy* this, who in her noisome Cell  
 By *Traitors* in their swift *Descent to Hell*,  
 Her rising *Glories* heard, then with a *Groan*  
 She crawl'd before her *Sov'reign's* direful *Throne*:  
 A *Pile of Sculls* the odious *Fantom* bore,  
 With *Bones* half-naked mixt, and dropping putrid *Gore*; 860  
 There thus—Shall *Heav'n* defraud us of our *Reign*,  
 And BRITAIN, only BRITAIN break her *Chain*?  
 What can we there, while more than *mortal Grace*  
 Forbids our *Entrance*, and secures the *Place*?  
 Awhile I *gaz'd* and *viewed* her as I *fled*,  
 When first she came, till half my *Snakes* were dead;  
 And had I tarry'd longer near her *Throne*,  
 Had soon some base *insipid Vertue* grown:  
 So fast the wide *progressive Ills* increase, }  
 If longer unoppos'd our *Power* will cease; } 870  
 The base degenerate World *dissolve* to *Peace*; }  
 Our boasted *Empire* there will soon be o'er,  
 And *Mortals* tremble at our *Arms* no more.  
 She said, her *Tidings* all the *Court* affright,  
 And doubled *Horror* fill'd the *Realms of Night*:  
 Till out foul *Lewdness* leap'd, and shook the *Place*. }  
 The *fulsom'st Fiend* of all th' *infernal Race*; }  
 A crusted *Leprosie* deform'd her *Face*; }  
 With half a *bloodshot Eye* the *Fury* glar'd,  
 Yet when for *Mischief* she above prepar'd, 880  
 She *painted* and she *dress'd*, those *Arts* she knew,  
 And to her *self* her self a *Stranger* grew,  
 (Thus *old* and batter'd *Bawds* behind the *Scenes*,  
 New *rigg'd* and *dawb'd*, pass on the *Stage* for *Queens*;)



I've yet some *trusty Friends* in *Ambush* there, }  
All is not lost, we've still the *Theatre*: }  
I'll batter *Virtue* thence, nor fear to gain }  
New *Subjects daily* from her *hated Reign*; }  
Is not Great *D*—— ours and all his *Train*? }  
He knows he has new *Laurels* here prepar'd, } 890  
For those he lost *above*, a just Reward, }  
For his wide *Conquests* he'll *command the Guard*: }  
*Headed* by him one *Foot* we'll scorn to yield,



## Page 27

Tho *Virtue's* glitt'ring *Squadrons* drive the *Field*:  
 Grant me, Dread *Sov'reign!* a *Detachment* hence }  
 We'll not be long alone on our *Defence*, }  
 But hope to drive the proud *Assailants* thence. }  
 Bold *Blasphemy* shall lead our black *Forlorn*,  
 With *Colours* from *Heav'n's Crystal Ramparts* torn,  
 And *Anti-Thunderrs* arm'd; *Profaneness* next 900  
 Their *Canon* seize, and turn the *Sacred Text*  
 Against th' *Assailants*; brave *Revenge* and *Rage*  
 Shall our *main Batt'ry* ply, and guard the *Stage*.  
 —But most I on dear *Ribaldry* depend,  
 We've not a *surer* or a *stronger Friend*.  
 Now shall she *broad* and *open* to the *Skie*,  
 Now *close* behind some *double Meaning* lye;  
 Now with *sulphureous Rivers* lave the *French*,  
 And choak th' *Assailants* with infernal *Stench*;  
 Each nicer *Vertue* from the *Walls* repel, 910  
 And *Heav'n* it self regale with the *Perfumes of Hell*.  
 This from the *World* our dreaded *Foe* will drive,  
 As *murm'ring Bees* are forc'd to leave their *Hive*;  
*Souls* so *refin'd* such *Vapours* cannot bear,  
 But seek their *native Heav'n* and purer *Air*:  
 When *She* and all her heav'nly *Guards* are gone  
 And her bright *Heroe* absent, all's our own:  
 If any *pious Fools* should make a stand,  
 To stop our *Progress* through the conquer'd *Land*,  
 They soon shall pass for *hot-brain'd Visionairs*, 920  
 We'll run 'em down with *Ridicule* and *Farce*.  
 Must they *reform* the *World!* A likely *Task!*  
 Tis *Vizard* all, and them we'll soon *unmask*.  
 The rest will *tumble* in, or if they stay  
 And loiter in *Damnation's* ample *Way*,  
 I've one *Expedient* left, which can't but take,  
 My last *Reserve*; From yon black *brimstone* *Lake*,  
 Whence two *Canals* thro *subterranean Veins*  
 Are drawn to *Sodom* and *Campania's* *Plains*,  
 My self I'll fill a *Vial*, and infuse 930  
 My very *Soul* amid the *potent Juice*:  
 This *Essence* near my *Heart* I'll with me bear, }  
 And this among my *dearest Fav'rites* share, }  
 Already *tutor'd* by the *Theatre*; }



Who pass'd those *Bugbears Conscience, Law and Shame*  
Have there been taught that *Virtue's* but a *Name*:  
*Exalted Souls* who *vulgar Sins* despise;  
Fit for some *new discover'd nobler Vice*;  
One *Drop* of this their *frozen Blood* shall warm,  
And *frighted Nature's feebler Guards* disarm 930  
Till their *chill Veins* with hotter *Fevers* glow }  
Than any *Etna* or *Vesuvius* know, }  
Scarce equal'd by their *Parent Flames* below; }



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Till wide around the *gen'rous Canker* spread,  
 And *Vengeance* draw on each *devoted Head*:  
 Impatient *Heav'n* it self our *Arms* shall join,  
 The *Skies* again with *forky Lightnings* shine;  
 Till glutt'd *Desolation* pants for *Breath*,  
 And *guilty Shades* shall croud the *Realms of Death*.  
 —She said, the *Motion pleas'd* she *wings* away 940  
 And in blue *pois'nous Foggs* invades the *Day*:  
 Part of her *direful Threats* too true we find,  
 And *Heav'n* avert the *Plagues* that yet remain *behind!*  
 [Sidenote: *Tragedy*.]  
 The *Path* which *Epic* treads the *TRAGIC Muse*  
 With *daring* tho *unequal Steps* pursues,  
 A *little Epic* shines through every *Scene*,  
 Tho more of *Life* appears, and less *Machine*;  
 More *Action*, less *Narration*, more *Delight*;  
 We see the *Gods* descend, and *Heroes* fight.  
 While *Oedipus* is *raving* on the *Stage*, 950  
 Mild *Pity* enters and dissolves our *Rage*;  
 We *low'r* our *haughty Spirits*, our *Pride* and *Hate*,  
 And learn to *fear* the sad *Reverse of Fate*.  
 A *Tyrant's Fall*, a treach'rous *Statesman's End*  
 Clear the *Just Gods*, and equal *Heav'n* defend:  
 Ungrateful *Factions* here themselves torment,  
 And *bring* those very *Ills* they would *prevent*:  
 Nor think the lost *Intrigues* of *Love* too mean  
 To fill the *Stage* and grace toe *Tragic Scene!*  
 Who from the *World* this *Salt of Nature* takes, 960  
*Twice Slaves of Kings* of *Life* a *Desart* makes.  
 The *Moral* and *Pathetick* neatly join'd,  
 Are best for *Pleasure* and for *life* design'd.  
 Be this in *Tragic* an *Eternal Law*;  
*Bold Strokes* and *larger* than the *Life* to draw:  
 Let all be *Great*; when here a *Woman's* seen,  
 Paint her a *Fury*, or a *Heroine*:  
*Slaves*, *Spendthrifts*, angry *Fathers*, better fit  
 The meaner *Sallies* of *COMEDIAN Wit*;  
 But *Courtly HORACE* did their *Stage* refuse, 970  
 Nor was it trod by *Maro's* heav'nly *Muse*:  
 A *Walk* so *low* their *nobler Minds* disdain,  
 Where *sordid Mirth's* exchang'd for *sordid Gain*;



Where, in false *Pleasure* all the *Profit's* drown'd,  
Nor *Authors* with just *Admiration* crown'd:  
Hence was the *Sock* a Task for *servile Wit*,  
Course PLAUTUS hence, and neater TERENCE writ:  
Yet if you still your *Fortune* long to take,  
And long to hear the *crowded Benches* shake; 980  
If you'd *reform* the *Mob*, lov'd *Vice* restrain,  
The *Pulpits* break, and neighb'ring *B*—— drain;  
Let *Heav'n* at least, if not its *Priests*, be free,



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The *Bible* sures's too *grave* for *Comedy*:  
 If she nor *lewdly* nor *profanely* talk  
 She'll have a *cleaner*, tho a *narrower Walk*.  
 Our Nation's *endless Humour* will supply  
 So large a *Fund* as never can be *dry*;  
 Why then should *Vice* be *bare* and *open* shown,  
 And with such *Nauseous Scenes* affront the *Town*? 990  
 Why thrive the *Lewd*, their *Wishes* seldom crost,  
 And why *Poetic Justice* often lost?  
 They plead they copy *Nature*.—Don't abuse  
 Her *sacred Name* with such a *vile Excuse*!  
 She wisely *hides* what these, like *Beasts display*, }  
 Ev'n *Vice* it self, less *impudent* than they, }  
 Remote in *Shades*, and far from *conscious Day*. }  
 From this *Retrenchment* by strong *Reason* beat,  
 They next to *poor Necessity* retreat:  
 The *Murderers*, *Bawds* and *Robbers* last pretence 1000  
 With equal *Justice*, equal *Innocence*!  
 So *Crack*, in *pious Fit*, will plead she's *poor*,  
 'Tis a *hard Choice*, Good Sir, to *starve* or *whore*!  
 —Is there no *Third*, or will such *Reas'nings* pass  
 In *Bridewel's* rigid *Court*, or save the *Lash*?  
 Where the *stern Judge*, like *Radamanth*, surveys  
 The *trembling Sinner*, and each *Action weighs*.  
 A lazy, black, encumber'd *Stream* rolls by,  
 Whole thick *sulphureous Vapours* load the *Sky*;  
 Near where, in *Caves* from *Heav'n's* sweet *Light* debar'd, 1010  
*Shrieks*, *Groans*, and *Iron Whips*, and *Clanks of Chains* are heard.  
 And can't you *thrash*, or *trail a Pike* or *Pole*?  
 Are there no *Jakes* in *Town*, or *Kennels* foul?  
 No *honester Employment*, that you chuse  
 With such *vile Drudgery* t'abase the heav'n born *Muse*?  
 The num'rous *ODE* in various *Paths* delights,  
*Love*, *Friendship*, *Gods*, and *Heroes*, *Games* and *Fights*:  
 Her *Age* with *Veneration* is confess'd  
 The *first great Mother* she of all the rest,  
 This [8] *MOSES* us'd, and *DAVID'S* Royal *Lyre*, }  
 This he whom wond'ring *Seraphs* did *inspire*, } 1020  
 Whence *PINDAR* stole some *Sparks of heav'nly Fire*, }  
 Who now by *COWLEY's* happy *Muse* improv'd,  
 Is *understood* by some, by more *belov'd*:



The *Vastness* of his Thought, the daring *Range*,  
That imperceptible and pleasing *Change*,  
Our jealous *Neighbours* must themselves confess  
The *British Genius* tracks with most Success;  
But still the *Smoothness* we of *Verse* desire,  
The *Regulation* of our *Native Fire*:  
This from experienc'd *Masters* we receive, 1030  
Sweet FLATMAN'S Works, and DRYDEN'S this will give.  
If you in *pointed SATYR* most delight,  
Worry not, where you only ought to *bite*:



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*Easie* your *Style*, unstudy'd all and clear.  
*Prosaic Lines* are pardonable here.  
 There are whose *Breath* would blast the *brightest Fame*, }  
 Who from *base Actions* court an *odious Name*, }  
 With *Beauty* and with *Virtue* War proclaim; }  
 Who *bundle* up the *Scandals* of the *Town*, } 1040  
 And in *lewd Couplets* make it all their *own*:  
*Just Shame* be *theirs* who thus *debauch* a *Muse*,  
 To vile *Lampoons* a *noble Art* abuse:  
 As *ill* be *theirs*, and *half* of *DATS's Fate*,  
 Who always dully rail against the *State*.  
*Kings* are but *Men*, nor are their *Councils* more,  
 Those *Ills* we can't *avert* we must *deplore*:  
 Not *many Poets* were for *Statesmen* made,  
 It asks more *Brains* than stocks the *Rhiming Trade*:  
 (At least, when they the *Ministry* receive, } 1050  
 To *Poets Militant* their *Muse* they leave.)  
 All *sordid Flat'ry* hate, it pleases none  
 But *Tyrants* grinning on their *Iron Throne*:  
 Yet where wer'e rul'd with *wise* impartial *Sway*,  
 The *Muses* should their *grateful Homage* pay:  
 'Tis *base* alike a *Tyrant's Name* to raise,  
 And grudge a *Parent Prince* our *tributary Praise*.  
 No wonder those who by *Proscriptions* gain }  
 In *Marian Days*, or *Sylla's* bloody *Reign*, }  
 Of the divine *Augustus* should complain; } 1060  
 Who stoops to wear a *Crown's uneasy Weight*,  
 As *Atlas* under *Heav'n*, to prop the *State*:  
 No *Glory* strikes his *Great exalted Mind*,  
 No *Pleasure* like obliging all *Mankind*;  
 He lets the *Factious* their weak *Malice* vent,  
 Punish'd enough while they themselves *torment*:  
*Satiate* with *Conquest*, his dread *Sword* he sheaths,  
 And with a *Nod* *disbands ten thousand Deaths*.  
 Who dares *Rebellious Arms* against him move  
 While his *Praetorian Guard's* his *Subjects Love*? } 1070  
 Admir'd by all the *bravest* and the *best*,  
 Who wear a *Roman Soul* within their *ample Breast*:  
 Tho' *charm'd* with *both*, which shall they more *admire*  
 In *Peace* his *Wisdom*, or in *War* his *Fire*?  
 —*One Labour* yet remains, and that they *ask*,  
*Alcides* never clear'd a *nobler Task*;  
 O *Father!* banish'd *Vertue* O restore!



Let *Hydra Vice* pollute thy *Reign* no more!  
Strike through the *Monster-Form*, which threatning stands,  
Fierce with a *thousand Throats*, a *thousand Hands!* 1080  
*Rescue* once more thy *Trojans sacred Line* }  
From *slavish Chains*, so shall thy *Temples* shine }  
With *Stars*, and all *Elysium* shall be *thine.* }

*FINIS.*



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### FOOTNOTES:

[1] *Vide Edda Samundi—apud Sheringham, de Gentis Anglorum Origine, pag. 28, 29.*

*Hiaelp beiter eitt eun thad thier hialpa mun  
Vid Sikum og Sottum goiru allum,  
Thad kenn eg aunad er thorfa Ita  
Syner their ed vilia lakner lisfa.*

[Transcriber's Note: extremely difficult to read in the original. Transcription may not be accurate.]

I know your only Help, the pow'rful Charm  
That aids in ev'ery Grief and every Harm,  
I know the Leaches Craft, and what they need  
Who Doctors in that Noble Art proceed.

[2] *the Vide British Chronicle, and Taliessin's Prophecies;*

*Prryff fard l'yffred in ydwyfi i Elphin  
Am gwalad gynifio [indecipherable] Goribbin.  
Ionas ddewn am golwis Merddin  
Sebach Pob Brenmam geilw Taliesin.  
Gwea a gasgle elud Tra feyna bud,  
Gwererbin didd brawd in chospo i gnawd,  
Gwae ni cheidw i geil ag if yufug eil,  
Gwae in cheidw i ddefend chog bleiddna.*

[Transcriber's Note: extremely difficult to read in the original. Transcription may not be accurate.]

*Me Elphin now his Bard may justly boast  
Who long of old amid the Fire-wing'd Host:  
Once Merlin was I call'd, well known to Fame,  
Whom future Kings shall Taliessin name.  
Wo to the Wretch who Wealth by Rapine gains,  
And wo to him who Fasts and Pray'rs refrains;  
Wo to the Shepherds who their Flocks betray,  
And will not drive the Ravish Wolves away.*

[3] *Olli sedaro rescondit corde Latinus. Virg.*

[4] *Mr. Dryden's Riddle, in his Preface to Virgil.*

[5] *This was observ'd before Mr. Le Clerc was born. Vide Song of the Well, Num. 21. 17.*



[Hebrew text]

*Vide Psal. 80, & 81. Where some Verses have Treble, where Quadruple Rhimes, four in one Verse.*

[6] Ode 1. [Greek: indecipherable]

[7] *Vide Collier's Reflexions on Moarning Bride, and Garth's Dispensary.*

[8] *I know some have affirm'd that Moses's Song in the 14<sup>th</sup> of Exodus was writ in Hexameters, but I can't perceive any such thing in it, any more than in the 90<sup>th</sup> Psalm, or the Book of Job, which seem to be written about the same time with it. The Song of the Well, in Numbers, pag. 15. is clearly an Ode of unequal Measures.*

[Illustration: *THE LIFE of Christ.*

An Heroic Poem.

*In Ten BOOKS with sixty Copper Plates.*

London:

*Printed for Charles Harper, & Benj. Motte.]*

THE  
LIFE  
OF OUR  
Blessed Lord & Saviour  
JESUS CHRIST.

AN  
HEROIC POEM:  
DEDICATED TO  
Her Most Sacred MAJESTY.



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### THE PREFACE, Being an ESSAY on HEROIC POETRY

A Just Heroic Poem is so vast an Undertaking, requires so much both of Art and Genius for its Management, and carries such Difficulty in the Model of the Whole, and Disposition of the several Parts, that it's no Wonder, if not above One or Two of the Ancients, and hardly any of the Moderns, have succeeded in their Attempts of this Nature. Rapin, and other Masters of Epic, represent it as an Enterprize so hardy, that it can scarce enter into the Mind of a wise Man, without affrighting him, as being the most perfect Piece of Work that Art can produce. That Author has many excellent Reflexions and Rules concerning it in his Discourse sur la Poetique; but Bossu is the first I've seen who has writ a just and perfect Tract thereon, wherein he has in a clear and Scholastic Method amass'd together most that's to be found in Antiquity on that Subject, tho' chiefly keeping to the Observations of Aristotle, which he drew from Homer, and who seems the first that reduced Poetry to an Art. That Author defines Epic, "An Artificial Discourse, in order to form the Manners by Instructions, disguis'd under the Allegories of some one important Action, recited in Verse, in a manner probable, diverting and admirable;" which he thus himself abridges, "'Tis a Fable, agreeably imitated on some important Action, recited in Verse in a manner that's probable and admirable;" In which Definition are contain'd, as he afterwards explains it, the general Nature of Epic, and that double, Fable and Poem: The Matter, some one important Action probably feign'd and imitated: Its Form, Recitation or Narration: And lastly, its End, Instruction, which is aimed at in general by the Moral of the Fable; and besides in the particular Manners of the Persons who make the most considerable Figure in the Work.



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To begin with Fable, which he makes included in the general Nature or Essence of Epic. This, he says, is the most essential Part of it; "That some Fables and Allegories scatter'd up and down in a Poem don't suffice to constitute Epic, if they are only the Ornaments, and not the very Foundation of it." And again, "That 'tis the very Fund and principal Action that ought to be Feign'd and Allegorical:" For which reason he expresly excludes hence all simple Histories, as by Name, Lucan's Pharsalia, Silius Italicus's Punic War, and all true Actions of particular Persons, without Fable: And still more home; that 'tis not a Relation of the Actions of any Hero, to form the Manners by his Example, but on the contrary, a Discourse invented to form the Manners by the Relation of some one feign'd Action, design'd to please, under the borrow'd Name of some illustrious Person, of whom Choice is made after we have fram'd the Plan of the Action which we design to attribute to him.

Nor indeed is Bossu singular in his Judgment on this Matter, there being few or none who have ever writ on the same Subject, but are of the same mind: For thus Boileau in his Art of Poetry,

Dans la vaste recit d'une longue action  
Se soutient par la Fable & vit de Fiction.

Which his Translator I think better;

In the Narration of some great Design,  
Invention, Art, and Fable, all must join.

Rapin too gives his Vote on the same side, Rien n'est, says he, plus essentiel au Poem Epique, que la Fiction; and quotes Petronius to that purpose, Per ambages, Deorumque ministeria praecipitandus est Liber Spiritus. Nor is't only the Moderns who are of this Opinion; for the Iliads are call'd in Horace, Fabula qua Paridis, &c. And lastly, even Aristotle himself tells us, "That Fable is the principal thing in an Heroic Poem; and, as it were, the very Soul of it." [Greek: Arche kai oion psyche.] And upon this occasion commends Homer for lying with the best Grace of any Man in the World: Authorities almost too big to admit any Examination of their Reason, or Opposition to their Sentiments. However, I see no cause why Poetry should not be brought to the Test, as well as Divinity, or any more than the other, be believed on its own bare ipse dixit.

Let us therefore examine the Plan which they lay for a Work of this Nature, and then we may be better able to guess at those Grounds and Reasons on which they proceed.

In forming an Heroic-Poem, the first thing they tell us we ought to do, is to pitch on some Moral Truth, which we desire to enforce on our Reader, as the Foundation of the whole work. Thus Virgil, as Bossu observes, designing to render the Roman People pleased and easie under the new Government of Augustus, laid down this Maxim, as the Foundation of his Divine AENEIS: "That great and notable Changes of State are not

accomplished but by the Order and Will of God: That those who oppose themselves against them are



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impious, and frequently punished as they deserve; and that Heaven is not wanting to take that Hero always under its particular Protection, whom it chuses for the Execution of such grand Designs." This for the Moral Truth; we must then, he says, go on to lay the general Plan of the Fiction, which, together with that Verity, makes the Fable and Soul of the Poem: And this he thinks Virgil did in this manner, "The Gods save a great Prince from the Ruines of his Country, and chuse him for the Preservation of Religion, and re-establishing a more glorious Empire than his former. The Hero is made a King, and arriving at his new Country, finds both God and Men dispos'd to receive him: But a neighbouring Prince, whose Eyes Ambition and Jealousie have closed against Justice and the Will of Heaven, opposes his Establishment, being assisted by another King despoil'd of his Estate for his Cruelty and Wickedness. Their Opposition, and the War on which this pious Prince is forc'd, render his Establishment more just by the Right of Conquest, and more glorious by his Victory and the Death of his Enemies." These are his own Words, as any may see who are at the pains to consult him; nor can I help it, if either Virgil or Bossu happen to be Prophets.

When the Poet has proceeded thus far, and as Bossu calls it, dress'd his Project, he's next to search in History or receiv'd Fable, for some Hero, whose Name he may borrow for his Work, and to whom he may suit his Persons. These are Bossu's Notions, and, indeed, very agreeable to Aristotle, who says, that Persons and Actions in this sort of Poetry must be feign'd, allegorical, and universal.

This is the Platform they lay; and let's now see if we can discover the Reasons whereon they found these Rules, being so unanimous for Fable rather than true History, as the Matter of an Heroic Poem; and, if I mistake not, these are some of the principal.

1. Because they had observ'd the best Models of Heroic Poems were laid after this manner; the greatest part of the Action both in Homer and Virgil being pure Fable. Homer beginning, and all the rest following his Steps.
2. Because no single Hero, or true History, which the Ancients knew was sufficient, without Fable, to furnish Matter for an Epic Poem. History, says Aristotle, treats of particular Things as they really are; Poetry, as they ought to be; and therefore he prefers Poetry as the more grave and more instructive; the Poets being forc'd to follow the same Methods with their Kindred-Art, that of the Painters, and gather a great many Beauties together, out of 'em all, to steal one Venus.
3. A third Reason may be, because, supposing they should have found some one Example from whence to enforce strongly any particular Point of Morality, yet it would have miss'd those other Characters of Epic, most of its Agreeableness, and all its Power to raise Admiration. A chaste Historian must not go about to amuse his Reader with Machines; and a Poet that would imitate him, must have been forc'd to thin his Stage

accordingly, and disband all his glorious Train of Gods and Godesses, which composes all that's admirable in his Work; according to that of Boileau; Chaque Virtue devient une divlnitie.



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And these, if I mistake not, were the main Reasons on which the foremention'd Rules were grounded. Let's now enquire into the Strength and Validity of them: To begin with Homer, he wrote in that manner, because most of the ancient Eastern Learning, the Original of all others, was Mythology. But this being now antiquated, I cannot think we are oblig'd superstitiously to follow his Example, any more than to make Horses speak, as he does that of Achilles, 2. If a Poet lights on any single Hero, whose true Actions and History are as important as any that Fable ever did or can produce, I see no reason why he may not as well make use of him and his Example to form the Manners and enforce any Moral Truth, as seek for one in Fable for that purpose: Nay, he can scarce fail of persuading more strongly, because he has Truth it self; the other but the Image of Truth, especially if his History be, in the Third place, of it self diverting and admirable. If it has from its own Fund, and already made to his hand those Deorum Ministeria, which cost the Poet so much in the forming 'em out of his own Brain. Nor can we suppose Fiction it self pleases; no, 'tis the agreeable and the admirable, in the Dress of Truth; and such a Plan as this would effectually answer both the Ends of Poetry in general, delectari & monere, nay come up fuller to the End of Epic, which is agreeable Instruction; and thence it follows strongly, that a Poem written in such a manner, must, notwithstanding the foregoing Rules, be a true and proper Heroic Poem, especially if adorn'd with Poetical Colours and Circumstances through the whole Body thereof.

Now that all this is not gratis dictum, I think I can prove, even from most of those very Authors I've already produc'd, as of the contrary Opinion; and that I can make it appear, Bossu goes too far in fixing Fable as the Essential Fund and Soul of the principal Action in an Epic Poem. To begin with Rapin, who has this Passage, sur la Poetique, Reflex. 5. La Poesie Heroique, &c. "Heroique Poesie, according to Aristotle, is a Picture or Imitation of an Heroic Action; and the Qualities of the Action are, That it ought to be (among others) true, or at least, such as might pass for true;" Thus he. And hence it follows, according to him and Aristotle, that the principal Action in Heroic, not only ought to pass for Truth, but may be really true: For Horace, he does indeed call the Iliads a Fable; but then he does not oblige his Poet superstitiously to follow Homer in every thing, owning that he sometimes doats as well as other Men: Further, this may, and I think does, refer rather to the Dress and Turn of the Action, than to the Bottom and Ground of his History, which there's at least as much, if not more reason to believe true than false: And in the same Sense may we take Petronius and Boileau; nay, if we don't take 'em thus, I can't tell whether there were ever such a thing as a true Heroic Poem in the World; not so much as the Fairy-Queen,



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Gondibert, or Orlando Furioso; all which have Fable enough in 'em of any reason; but their principal Actions might be still true, as we are sure was that of the best Heroic that ever was written; (I need not say I mean Virgil) since few or no Authors ever deny'd that there was such a Man as AEneas, or even that he came into Italy, built Cities there, and erected a Kingdom, which Tully mentions, as a generally receiv'd Tradition in those Parts, and which it seems he thought not frivolous, but true and solid; otherwise he'd scarce have given it a place in his Argument for his Client. Of this Opinion too seems Horace himself, in his Art of Poetry, namely, That there's no necessity of the principal Action's being feign'd; for his Direction is, "Aut famam sequere, aut sibi convenientia finge; Either follow Tradition or Fame, or else feign what's agreeable thereunto." He makes not feigning essential to Heroic Action, but gives leave to follow Fame, who is not so great a Lyar, but that she is sometimes in the right. Nay, what if we should after all have Bossu himself on our side, which I'm mistaken if he be not; for these are his Expressions, Lib. 1. Cap. 7. Le Fiction, &c. "The Fiction may be so disguis'd under the Verity of the History, that those who are ignorant of the Art of the Poet, may believe it not a Fiction; and to make the Disguisement well, he ought to search into History for the Names of some Persons, to whom such an Action has probably or truly happen'd, &c." Hence 'tis evident, that according to Bossu's own Notion, the main Action may be true; which appears even from Aristotle himself, as quoted by him, 97. [Greek: Kan ara] &c. "An Author is not less a Poet, because the Incidents he recites have truly happen'd; if so be that which happen'd had the appearance of Truth, and all that Art demands, and be really such as it ought to have been feign'd." And this Bossu himself illustrates admirably well by an ingenious Simile; "A Statuary," says he, "first forms his Design, Posture, Altitudes which he intends for his Image; but if he then lights on any precious Material, Agate, or such like, where the Figure, the Colours, and Veins will not be accommodated to all he design'd, he regulates his Design and Imagination according to his Matter; nor ought we to believe, at the same time, that these singular lucky Hits condemn the Justness of his Art." From all which, I must leave it to the Reader, whether I han't sufficiently prov'd what I've undertaken; that Fiction is not necessary to the principal Action of our Heroic Poem; on which I've been something more large, not so much on my own account; for 'tis indifferent to me by what Name any Man calls my Poem, so it answers the great End of Epic, which is Instruction; but because I've heard some Persons have been so conceited as to criticise on our immortal Cowley for this very reason, and deny his Davideis the Honour of being an Heroic Poem, because the Subject thereof is a true History.



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And here I should drop the Discourse of Fable, were there not another sort of Persons still to deal with, perhaps more importunate than the former: The first will not like a Piece unless 'tis all Fable, or at least the Foundation of it: These latter run into the contrary extreme, and seem unwilling or afraid to admit anything of Fable in a Christian Poem; and as Balzac in his Critics on Heinsius his Baptista, are frighted, as at some Magical Charm, if they find but one Word there which was made use of by the old Heathens; which, says he, (unluckily as things have since happened) is as preposterous as to see Turks wear Hats, and Frenchmen Turbants; the Flower-de-lis in the Musselmens Colours, or the Half-Moon on the Standard of France. He's, however, it must be granted, justly angry with Tasso, as Mr. Dryden since, for setting his Angels and Devils to stave and tail at one another; Alecto and Pluto on one side, and Gabriel and Raphael o' t'other; as well as with Sannazarius, for mingling Proteus and David, and calling the Muses and Nymphs to the Labour of the Blessed Virgin, Tho' the truth is, the Italian Poets seem more excusable, at least to a Papist, in this Case, than any other Nation, who parted with as little of their Idolatry as they could possibly, after they had kept it as long as they were able, making the Change very easie, and turning their Pantheon into an All Saints; much like the good Fathers in the Spanish Conquests in America, who suffer the Natives to keep their Old Idols, so they'll but pay for 'em, and get 'em christen'd; by this means making many a good Saint out of a very indifferent Devil. So far, I say, Balzac is undoubtedly in the right, that Christianity and Heathenism ought not to be confounded, nor the Pagan Gods mention'd, but as such, in Christian Poems. Of which Boileau also says, "They should not be Fill'd with the Fictions of Idolatry;" tho' he tells us just before,

In vain have our mistaken Authors try'd  
Those ancient Ornaments to lay aside.

As tho' he were afraid lest all Poets shou'd be forc'd to turn Christians, and yet in the next Lines he thinks it full as bad,

To fright the Reader in each Line with Hell,  
And talk of Satan, Ashtaroth and Bel.

As tho' he'd have no Christian to be a Poet. And much at the same rate is Monsieur Balzac very angry with Buchanan, for the same reason; nor will he by any means let us substitute Belzebub, Asmodeus, and Leviathan, in the room of Alecto, Tisiphone, and Megaera, which is, in his Opinion, perfect Pedantry and Affectation; and is extremely afraid, lest any of those Barbarous Hebrew Words should disfigure the purity of the Latin Tongue; when surely he cou'd not but know, that this pure Latin Tongue it self, for which he's so much concerned, is nothing but the gradual Corruption or Barbarizing of the Greek; as that of the Phonician and Hebrew before; and the Italian, and his own French too, from the Latin afterwards,



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by the adulterous mixture of 'tis hard to say how many Languages: So that between 'em, they'd make it impossible for a Christian Poet to write a good Heroic Poem, or even a Tragedy, on any, but profane Subjects; by taking away all the Machines, and therein whatever is admirable. No, says Balzac, instead of those hard Words and proper Names, Appellatives may be chosen, Words common to all People: As for example, Ill luck instead of the Fates, and the Foul Fiend for Lucifer; and whether this wou'd not sound extreamly Heroical, I leave any Man to judge: It being besides certain, that 'tis singulars and particulars which give an Air of Probability, and the main Life and Beauty to a Poem, especially of this Nature; without which it must of necessity sink and languish. However so much of Truth, I must confess, there is in what he says, that I verily believe Magor-missabib, or Mahershal-alhashbaz, wou'd scarce yoke decently in one of our Pentameters, but be near as unquiet and troublesome there, as a Mount Orgueil it self. Nor can partiality so far blind my Judgment as not to be my self almost frighted at second hearing of such a thundering Verse, as Belsamen Ashtaroth Baaltii Ba'al: Which seems as flat Conjunction, as Zinguebar, Oran, &c. tho' 'tis now too late to amend it. But then there are other Words or a more soft and treatable Cadence, even in the same Hebrew Language, especially when mollified by a Latin or Greek form, or Termination; and such as these one may make use of and let others alone: though neither is our bolder rougher Tongue so much affrighted at them, as the French and Latin.

But Boileau pushes the Objection further, and wou'd make it bear against the Things as well as Words, persuading himself,

Our God and Prophets that he sent,  
Can't act like those the Poets did invent.

Tho' he too, is short in History, how excellent soever in Poetry. For first, the Heathen Poets did not invent the Names of their Gods and Heroes, but had 'em from Eastern Tradition, and the Phenician and Jewish Language, tho' deflected and disguis'd after the Greek and other Forms, as Josephus tells us, which the learned Bochart has proved invincibly; and I have made some Essay towards it, in my Sixth Book. Nay further, it seems plain to me, that most, even of their best Fancies and Images, as well as Names, were borrow'd from the Antient Hebrew Poetry and Divinity, as, were there room for't, I cou'd, I think, render more than probable, in all the most celebrated Strokes of Homer, moat of the Heathen Poetical Fables, and even in Hesiod's blind Theogonia. Their Gods or Devils, which you please, were not near as Antient as the Hebrews. The Word Satan is as ancient as Job; nor can they shew us a Pluto within a long while of him. Ashtaroth, and Astarte, are old enough to be Grandmothers to their Isis, or Venus, and Bel, of the same standing with Idolatry. Lawful it must certainly be, to use these very Heathen Gods in Christian, since they were



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us'd in sacred Hebrew Poetry, in due place, and in a due manner; Bel boweth down, Nebo stoopeth, says Isaiah. And what a noble Description has the same Prophet of the Fall of Lucifer? Nor can I see why it may not be as convenient and agreeable, as 'tis lawful to transplant 'em from Hebrew Poetry to our own, if we use 'em as they did. And then for Angels, Prophets, and Oracles, it wou'd be strange, if they shou'd not strike the Mind as agreeably when real and true, as the Daemons, or Oracles, or Prophets of the Heathens, form'd, as has been said, partly from mistaken Fragments, or Traditions of sacred Story, partly indeed from the Juggles of the Heathen Priests, and crafty Ambitious Daemons. On the whole, we have all the Advantages they had, and yet more than they, for Heroic Poetry in these matters. As for that Question of Boileau's, "What Pleasure can it be to hear the howlings of repining Lucifer?" I think 'tis easier to answer than to find out what shew of Reason he had for asking it, or why Lucifer mayn't howl as pleasantly as either Cerberus, or Enceladus. And let any one read but his Speech, in Milton's Paradise, almost equal'd in Mr. Dryden's State of Innocence, and I'm mistaken if he's not of the same Mind; or if he be not, and it gives him no pleasure, I dare affirm 'tis for want of a true taste of what's really admirable.

But Boileau comes to a stronger Objection, both against the Names and use of these Daemons, by way of Machine, I mean, in Christian Poetry;

The Mysteries we Christians must believe  
Disdain such shifting Pageants to receive.

Thus has his Translator turn'd him; and taking it in that Sence, the meaning must be, that it disgraces Christianity, to mix its Mysteries with Stories of Daemons, Angels, &c. But sure it can never be any disgrace, to represent it really as it is, with the frequent Intervention of those invisible and powerful Agents, both good and evil, in the Affairs of Mankind, which our Saviour has both asserted and demonstrated in his Gospel, both by Theory and Practice: Whence we learn, that there are really vast numbers of these Spirits, some tempting, or tormenting, others guarding and protecting Mortals: Nay, a subordination too among them, and that they are always vigilant, some for our Destruction, others for our Preservation, and that, as it seems, of every individual Man; and if this be true in general, I'm sure 'tis probable In particular: Nor can it be any disgrace to Christianity, to apply general Probabilities to particular Cases, or to mention these Daemons in Poetry any more than in Divinity.

But indeed the Translator has here mended Boileau's Thought, or at least made it more plausible and defensible, tho he has miss'd his Sence; for these are his Lines:

De la foi d'une Christien les Mysteres terribles  
D' Ornemens egayes ne sont point susceptibles.



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The plain English of which, I think is, "That the terrible Mysteries of the Christian Faith, are not at all susceptible of these gayer Ornaments." I'll not be too Critical here, tho' methinks its but an odd sort of Gayety that's to be found in Tales of Hell; agreeable, I own, the most dreadful thing may be, if well manag'd in Poetry, but he can hardly ever make 'em gay without a very strong Catachresis. But tho' we let that pass, so must not what follows, wherein he further explains his Notion. L'Evangile, &c.

The Gospel offers nothing to our Thoughts  
But Penitence and Punishment for Faults.

To which it may be first said, that supposing this true, and the Gospel did present nothing else, yet why mayn't Angels be us'd in it, to warn Sinners to that Repentance which we know they so much rejoyce in; or Devils, to punish and torment the Guilty and Impious; as in the Case of Sceva's Son, and others. But yet further, as to the assertion it self, I know not what their Gospel offers, nor I believe are they better acquainted with what ours does; but we are sure 'tis far enough from being such a dismal melancholy thing as they represent it, since Immortality and Life are brought to light therein. We know that it gives us the noblest Examples, the most divine Law, the strongest, yet justest Passions, the most glorious Combats, and Friendships, and Sufferings, such as neither History or Fable cou'd ever yet equal. It shews us a God really Descending, disrob'd indeed of all his more dazzling and insupportable Glories, as our Divine Herbert; but yet clothed with what has more of true Divinity, with Humility, and Charity, and Patience, and Meekness, and Innocence. Here's War, here's Love indeed; such as never was besides, or will be more. He lov'd our Dust and Clay, and even for us, single encounter'd all the Powers of Darkness, and yet more, his Almighty Father's anger. But I'll go no farther, lest the Reader should think I forget where I am. I must return to Boileau, whose strongest Objection is yet behind; Et de vos Fictions, &c.

And mingling Falshood with those Mysteries  
Wou'd make our sacred Truths appear like Lies.

But I hope the Critic knew, that there is a fair difference between a mere Fiction, or Falshood, and an Instructive Parable or Fable, on one side, or a few more lively Poetical Colours on the other. To mingle Falshoods, or dull Legendary Fictions, without either Life or Soul in 'em, with our Saviour's Blessed Gospel, may make 'em, in some Sence, superiour to it: This wou'd indeed incline an Italian to be of the same Faith with his Countryman, that 'twas all Fabula Christi, in the worst Sence of the Word: But certainly expressing the Truth in Parables, and mingling these with the Mysteries of the Gospel, can't be thought to give it an Air of Fiction: nor dare any affirm it does so, without Blasphemy, since our Saviour has so often done it. Nor only these but deeper Allegories



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are thought to be made use of in the Christian Religion; for Example, the Throne and Temple of God in the Revelations, and the Description of the New Jerusalem, with all its Gates and Foundations of Sapphires and Emeralds, and that lovely Scheme of Trees and Rivers, worthy a Paradise: All this, I say, will scarcely be granted literal, and consequently must be all an Allegory; alluding partly to the Old Jewish Church and Temple, partly to Ezekiel's Visionary Representation and Prophetical Paradise. Nor can it, I think, be justly reckoned more criminal, where we have any great instructive Example, which has been real matter of Fact, to expatiate thereon; adding suitable and proper Circumstances and Colours to the whole, especially when the History it self is but succinctly Related, and the Heads of things only left us. And this some great Man have thought was the Method of the Holy Pen-man himself, whoever he were, in that lovely antient Poem of Job; which, that 't was at the bottom a real History, few but Atheists deny; and yet 'tis thought some Circumstances might be amplified in the account we have left us, particularly the long Speeches between that Great Man and his Friends; tho' the main hinges of the Relation, his Person, Character, and Losses, the malice of the Devil, the behaviour of his Wife and Friends, nay even the Substance of their Discourses, as well as of that between God and him, and the wonderful Turn of his Affairs soon after: All this might, and did, truly happen. Or, if any amplification should be here deny'd, does not the Divine however every day, Paraphrase and Expatriate upon the Words of his Text, inverting their Method as he sees occasion, and yet is still thought unblameable. All the difference is, that he delivers what's probable, as only probable; whereas the Nature of Poetry requires, that such probable Amplifications as these, be wrought into the main Action, in such a manner, as if they had really happen'd; and without this, a Man might Ryme long enough, but ne'er cou'd make a Poem, any more than this would have been one, had I begun with, Abraham begat Isaac, and so tagg'd on to the end of all the fourteen Generations, much as Nonnus has done with St. John, and yet often miss'd his Sence too, as Heinsius judges.

But enough of Fable, and of those who would either reduce all Heroic Poetry unto it, or absolutely banish it thence.

Next the Fable of Epics, the Poem is to be considered; which, after Bossu, is the other part of its general Nature, and shews the manner of handling it, comprehending Thoughts, Expressions and Verses; of which there need not much be said, since they are obvious to every Reader. The Thoughts must be clear and just, and noble, and the Diction or Expression suited to them. The chief Difficulty, as Rapin observes, is to keep up the Sublime, which Virgil has done admirably, even in the meanest Subjects; and which Aristotle thinks may be best done by the judicious use of Metaphors. There ought to meet, according to him, Proportion in the Design, Justness in the Thoughts, and Exactness in the Expression, to constitute an accomplish'd Heroic Poem; and the great Art of Thought and Expression lies in this, that they be natural and proper without Meanness, and sublime without a vitious Swelling and Affectation.

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The Matter is next in an Heroic Poem, which must be one important Action; it must be important, *Res gestae Regumque Ducumque*, with Horace. "It only speaks of Kings and Princes," says Rapin, by which he must mean that it chiefly and principally turns upon them: for both Virgil and Homer have occasion for Traitors, and Cryers, and Beggars, nay even Swineherds (in the *Odysses*), and yet still more, of whole Armies, which can't be all compos'd of Kings and Princes. However, the more there is of these lower Walks in the Plan of a Design, the less Heroic it must appear, even in the Hands of the greatest Genius in Nature. Such a Genius, I think, was Homer's, and yet the Truth of this Assertion will be plain to any who compares his *Odysses* with his *Iliads*; where he'll find, if 'tis not for want of Judgment, in the latter a very different Air from the former, in many places much more dead and languishing, and this which I have given, seems one probable Reason on't; not excluding that of Longinus, that Homer was then grown old, and besides too much of the Work was spent in Narration; to which may be added, that he here design'd a wise and prudent rather than a brave and fighting Hero, having wrought off most of the Edg and Fury of his Youthful Spirit and Fury in Achilles, as in Ulysses he express'd more of Age and Judgment.

This Action must be one and uniform: the Painture of one Heroic Action, says Rapin from Aristotle. It must be, as Bossu from Horace, *simplex duntaxat & unum*, that is, the principal Action on which the whole Work moves ought to be one, otherwise the whole will be confus'd; tho' there may be many Episodic Actions without making what Aristotle calls an Episodic Poem, which is, where the Actions are not necessarily or not probably link'd to each other, and of such an irregular multiplication of Actions and Incidents. Bossu instances very pleasantly in Statius's *Achilleid*; but he tells us there's also a regular and just Multiplication, without which 'twere impossible to find matter for so large a Poem, when as before it's so ordered that the Unity of the whole is not broken, and consequently divers Incidents it has bound together are not to be accounted different Actions and Fables, but only different Parts not finish'd, or entire of one Action or Fable entire or finished: and, agreeable to this Doctrine, Rapin blames Lucan's Episodes as too far-fetch'd, over-scholastic, and consisting purely of speculative Disputes on natural Causes whenever they came in his way, not being link'd with the main Action, nor flowing naturally from it, nor tending to its Perfection.



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And in this Action, the Poet ought, as Rapin tells us, to invert the natural Order of things, not to begin with his Hero in the Cradle, and write his Annals instead of an Epic Poem, as Statius in his Achilleid, the Reason of which seems plain, because this would look more like History than Poetry. It's more agreeable, more natural, in some Sence, to be here unnatural; to bring in, by way of Recitation or Narration, what was first in order of time, at some distance from that time when it really happened, which makes the whole look unlike a dull formal Story, and gives more scope for handsome Turns and the Art of the writer. Another Reason why a whole Life is not ordinarily a proper Subject for Epics, is, because many trivial Accidents must be therein recited; but if a Life can be found in which is nothing but what's diverting and wonderful, tending besides to the perfecting the main Action, and the Order of time revers'd in the whole, the Case would be so much altered, that I think their Rules would not hold.

For the Form of Epic, which comes next in view, 'tis agreed on all Hands to be Recitation or Narration. Bossu says, The Persons are not at all to be introduced before the Eyes of the Spectators, acting by themselves without the Poet; not that he'd hereby exclude the Poet from introducing the persons telling their own Story, or some one of them that of the principal Hero: for great part of Epic is thus far Dramatic. And thus Virgil manages his second and third Books by way of Recitation, and that by his Hero himself, making him give Dido a long account of the Wars of Troy, and his own Actions, tho' thereby he falls into the Impropriety of commending himself, with a—sum pius Aeneas. Vida takes the same way of Recitation, wherein he employs two or three of his six Books; and Milton follows them both, tho' less naturally than either; for he introduces our Saviour, in his Paradise regain'd, repeating a great part of his own Life in Soliloquy, which way of Discourse includes, in a Wise Man especially, so much of Calmness and deep Reflection, that it seems improper for the great and noble Turn required in such a Work, unless in describing a Passion, where it may be more lively. All that they mean by not introducing the Parties, is not doing it as in a Tragedy: they are not to be brought in abruptly to tell their own Tale from the beginning, without the appearing Help of the Poet, as Actors in a true and proper Drama. And this Narration, says Rapin, should be simple and natural; but the greatest difficulty is, not to let its Simplicity appear, lest it thence grow disagreeable, and the chiefest Art in this, consists in its Transitions, and all the delicate surprising Turns, which lead the Reader from one thing to another without his thinking whither he's going, or perceiving any Breach or so much as a passage between 'em; after all, the more Action there is in Epic, still the more Life there will be. A Poet may, I find, easily fall

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into Poorness of Thought by aiming too much at the Probability and neglecting the Admirable; whereby he loses that agreeableness which is a mixture of both. He ought then to take more care than some have done, not to keep himself too long behind the Scenes, and trust the Narration with another, which, without a great deal of Art and Pains, will take off much of the Life of the Work, as Longinus has already formerly observed.

And here come in the Qualities of Narration, mentioned in our Definition, that it ought to be done in a manner probable, agreeable, and admirable; 'tis rendered probable by its Simplicity and Singularity, and admirable by the Grandeur of the Subject, the Figures and Machines, or [Greek: theoi apo mechanēs], much more lawful here than in the Drama's; and lastly agreeable, as has been said, by a mixture of both.

The last thing in our Definition, is, the End of Epic, indeed the first and principal which ought to be intended, and that's Instruction, not only, as Rapin thinks, of great Men, but of all, as in Virgil's Scheme, which we have already described; and, this either by the principal Moral aim'd at in the whole, or the Manners of particular Persons. Of Fable and Moral, I've already discours'd, and whether be the more lively and probable way to instruct, by that or History. But here it may be worth the while to enquire, whether the principal Hero in Epic ought to be virtuous? Bossu thinks not, the manners being formed as well by seeing Errors as Beauties in the chief Actors; but yet methinks it seems too much to form a Hero that's a perfect Almanzor, with not one spark of Vertue, and only remarkable for his extraordinary Strength and little Brains; such was certainly Homer's Achilles, of whom I think the Father was in the right when he observes, the Poet makes him not do one brave or virtuous Action, all the while he lies before the Town: whereas Virgil's Hero, is, to tell truth, an indifferent good Heathen, and, bating one or two slips, comes up pretty well to his own good word. The same however may be said for Homer, which our present Dramatists plead for their Excuse; that he copied his Hero from those who were esteemed such in the barbarous Age in which he liv'd,

Impiger, iracundus, inexorabilis, acer,  
Jura neget sibi nata, &c.

Made up of Lewdness, Love, and Fighting: who, had he liv'd in our Days, would have made an excellent Town Bully, I wish there were not too much reason to say a modish Gentleman. But tho' old Homer took this way, Virgil, who writes with much more Judgment and Exactness, and follows him in many things, here thought fit to leave him; making his Hero, as I've said, not only brave and prudent, but for the most part virtuous. Which would much better form the manners of his Reader, than if they were set to spell out Instruction from contraries, as Homer has done. Whence it follows, the more virtuous a Hero is, the better; since he more effectually



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answers the true end of Epics. After all, Rapin says, the chief Excellency of an Heroic Poem consists in the just proportion of the Parts; that perfect Union, just Agreement, and admirable Relation, which the Parts of this great Work bear one towards another; and blames Tasso for mingling all the Sweetness and Delicacy of Eclogues and Lyricks, with the Force of an Heroic Poem. But I should think him mistaken here, and that this is not the meaning of Aristotles [Greek: analogon]. For if we allow not such a pleasing Variety, how shall we excuse even Virgil himself, who has his Dido, as well a Tasso his Armida and Erminia? nay, how shall we manage Love? which is usually one great Episode of Heroic, if not with something of Delicacy. I grant Love ought to have a different Air in different sorts of Poems; but still if it be natural it must have something of Softness; and for his Enchanted Forrest, which this severe Critic also blames, I believe there's few who read that part of his Work, who would willingly have it omitted, for the sake of a fancied Regularity, any more than they would part with Mr. Dryden's Improvement on't in his King Arthur. However, if it be a fault, 'tis strange so many who have been Masters of the greatest Genius should unanimously fall into it; as Ovid in his Palace of Circe, Ariosto in that of Alcina, and Spencer in his Acasia's Bower of Bliss, and several others, who have taken the same Method. I should therefore rather think that this beautiful and marvellous Analogy which Aristotle requires as the best thing in Epic, relates rather to the Harmony and Agreement of the Parts with the Whole; so that there appears no Fracture or Contradiction, the different Parts, tho' much unlike, yet all together making one beautiful Figure and uniform Variety.

And thus much of the Definition of Epic, containing the main Rules thereof, by which the Reader may be able to form a Judgment of this, or any other Heroic Poem: Especially if to these Rules be added some Examples to render them more plain. In order to which, I desire to express my Thoughts freely of other Poems, as I must expect every one will do of mine, always observing that piece of Justice, never to find fault, without taking notice of some Beauty to ballance it, and giving, where I can find it, the better Judgment of other Persons as well as my own. Concluding all with a brief Account of my own Work.

To begin then with Grandsire Homer, this may be added to the particular Remarks that have been already made. I think none will deny but the Disposition of his Iliads, is so truly admirable, so regular, and exact, that one would be apt to think he wrote his Poem by Aristotle's Rules, and not Aristotle his Rules by his Poem. I confess, I once thought that he had been oblig'd to his Commentators for most of the Beauties they celebrated in him; but I am now, on a nearer view, so well satisfied to the contrary, that I can ne'er think his Poem writ by piece-meal,



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without any Connexion or Dependance: wherein Dionysius the Halicarnassian very justly praises the Order and Management of the Design, as well as the Grandeur and Magnificence of the Expression, and the sweet and passionate Movements. Nor is it without Reason that Horace, Longinus, and all Antiquity have given him, as the Model of just and noble Sentiments and Expressions. I must confess there's something in his Numbers that strikes me more than even Virgil's, his Thoughts and Expressions appear stronger than his, tho' it cannot be denied but that Virgil's Design is much more regular. Rapin says a great deal of that Prince of the Latin Poets, tho' indeed he can never say enough, "He had an admirable Taste, says he, of what's natural, an excellent Judgment for the Order, and an incomparable Delicacy for the Number and Harmony of his Versification." And adds, "That the Design of the Poem is, if we consider it in all its Circumstances, the most judicious and best-laid that ever was or ever will be." There is indeed a prodigious Variety in Virgil, and yet the same Soul visible in every Line. His own great Spirit informs his Poetical World, and like that he speaks of,

—— totos infusa per Artus  
Mens agitat Molem, & magno se corpora miscet.

He's soft with the height of Majesty, his Marcellus, his Dido, and, I think, above all, his Elegy on Pallas is very noble and tender. The joints so strong and exactly wrought, the Parts so proportionable, the Thoughts and Expression so great, the Complements so fine and just, that I could ne'er endure to read Statius, or any of the rest of the Antient Latins after him; with whom therefore I shan't concern my self nor trouble my Reader. Ariosto was the first of the Moderns who attempted any thing like an Heroic Poem, and has many great and beautiful Thoughts; but at the same time, 'tis true, as Balzac observes, that you can hardly tell whether he's a Christian or an Heathen, making God swear by Styx, and using all the Pagan Ornaments; his Fancy very often runs away with his Judgment, his Action is neither one nor simple, nor can you imagine what he drives at; he has an hundred Hero's but you can't tell which he designs should be chief: Orlando indeed seems a wild Imitation of Homer's Achilles, but his Character is not bright enough to make him the Principal; and besides he orders it so, that he does more great Actions when he's mad then when sober. Agreeable to this are Rapin's thoughts of him, which, in few words, are "That he's elevated and admirable in his Expressions, his Descriptions fine, but that he wants Judgment; and speaks well, but thinks ill, and that tho' the Parts are handsome enough, yet the whole Work can by no means pass for an Epic Poem, he having never seen the Rules of Aristotle;" which he thinks Tasso had, and therefore wrote much better, whom he commends as more correct in his Design, more regular in the ordering his Fable, and more accomplish'd in all parts



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of his Poem than any other of the Italians, whom yet he justly blames, because he has two Hero's Godfredo and Rinaldo, of whom Godfredo seems the principal, and yet Rinaldo performs the greatest part of the notable Actions. He seems to imitate Agamemnon and Achilles, but then he raises his Agamemnon too high, or keeps him too low, for he hardly lets him do one great Action through the whole Work. He further criticises upon him as mingling too much Gallantry with his Poem, which, he thinks, is unbecoming the Gravity of his Subject. But whether this Censure be just, I know not, for Love and Gallantry runs through all Virgil's Aeneids, in the Instances of Helen, Dido, and Lavinia, and indeed it gives so great a Life to Epic, that it hardly can be agreeable without it, and I question whether ever it has been so. Nor is he more just, I think, against Tasso's Episodes, which he blames as not proper to circumstantiate his principal Action, not entering into the Causes and Effects thereof, but seeking too much to please, tho' I think this Charge is unjust, for 'tis in his Episodes, if any where, that Tasso is admirable. I might here give several Instances, but shall, at present, only refer my Reader to that of Tancred and Erminia, and I'm mistaken if he does not dissent from Rapin in this particular. Sannazarius and Vida were the next who did any thing remarkable in Epic; they both writ in Latin on the same Subject, both Christian Heroics; Rapin says they both had a good Genius for Latin, the Purity of their Style being admirable, but that their ordering of the Fable has nothing in't of Delicacy, nor is the manner of their Writing proportionable to the dignity of the Subject. For Sannazarius he's indeed so faulty, that one can hardly with Patience read him, the whole Structure of his imperfect Piece, de partu, being built on Heathen Fable; yet he has great and vigorous Thoughts and very Poetical Expressions, tho' therein Vida far excels him, whose Thoughts are so noble, and the Air of his Stile so great, that the Elogy Balzac gives his Countryman Tasso, wou'd as well or rather better have fitted him; "That Virgil is the Cause, Vida is not the first; and Vida, that Virgil is not alone." It is true, as Rapin observes, that his Fable is very simple, and perhaps so much the better, considering the Subject; tho' he forgets not Poetical Ornaments, where there's occasion, if he does not lean a little to Sannazarius's Error; for he talks of the Gorgons and Sphinxes, the Centaurs and Hydra's and Chimera's, though much more sparingly and modestly than the other. He has the happiest beginning that perhaps is to be found in any Poem, and by mingling his Proposition and Invocation, has the advantage of placing one of the noblest Thoughts in the World in the first Line, without danger of falling into the absurdity of Horace's Author with his Fortunam Priami: For thus he sings,

Qui mare, qui terras, qul coelum numine comples  
Spiritus alme, &c.



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After the Invocation, in the very beginning of the Poem, he's preparing the Incidents for his Hero's Death; he brings him to Jerusalem at the Passover with Hosanna's; then raises his Machines, and falls to the Description of Hell. He through the whole, uses his Figures very gracefully; few have been more happy in Comparisons, more moving in Passion, succinct, yet full in Narration: Yet is he not without Faults; or in the second Book he brings him to his last Supper in the Garden, from thence before Caiaphas and Pilate; which too much precipitates the main Action: Besides, it seems harsh and improbable to bring in S. John, and Joseph, our Saviour's reputed Father, as he does in the Third and Fourth Book, giving Pilate an account of his Life; not to insist on the general Opinion, that Joseph was not then alive. But notwithstanding these few failures, it can't be deny'd, that his Description of our Saviour's Passion in the Fourth Book, is incomparably fine; the disturbance among the Angels on that occasion; his Character of Michael, and the Virgins Lamentation under the Cross, and at the Sepulchre, are inimitable. And thus much for Vida, on whom I've been more large because I've often made use of his Thoughts in this following Work; his Poem being the most complete on that Subject I've ever seen or expect to see. And here han't the English more reason to complain of Rapin, that he takes no notice of their Heroic Poems, than Lupez Viga of Tasso, for not mentioning the Spaniards at the Siege of Jerusalem: but since he has been so partial, as not to take any notice of our Writers, who sure as much deserve it as their Dubartas and Ronsard; we may have liberty to speak of our own, and to do 'em Justice: To begin with Spencer, who I think comes the nearest Ariosto of any other; he's almost as Irregular, but much more Natural and Lovely: But he's not only Irregular but Imperfect too, I mean, as to what he intended; and therefore we can't well imagine what it wou'd have been, had he liv'd to complete it. If Fable be the Essence of Epic, his Fairy Queen had certainly enough of that to give it that Name. He seems, by the account he gives of it to Sir Walter Rawleigh, to have design'd one Principal Hero King Arthur, and one main important Action bringing him to his Throne; but neither of these appear sufficiently distinct, or well defin'd, being both lost in the vast Seas of Matter which compose those Books which are finish'd. This however must be granted, the Design was Noble, and required such a comprehensive Genius as his, but to draw the first Sketch of it: And as the Design, so the Thoughts are also very great, the Expressions flowing natural and easie, with such a prodigious Poetical Copia as never any other must expect to enjoy. Gondibert methinks wants Life; the Style is rather stiff than Heroic, and has more of Statius than Virgil; one may see every where a great deal of Art, and Pains, and Regularity, even to a fault; nor is a Genius wanting,



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but it's so unnatural, that an ingenious Person may find much more pleasure in reading a worse Poet. Besides, his Stanza's often cramp the Sence, and injure many a noble Thought and Passion. But Mr. Cowley's Davideis is the Medium between both; it has Gondibert's Majesty without his stiffness, and something of Spencer's Sweetness and Variety, without his Irregularity: Indeed all his Works are so admirable, that another Cowley might well be employ'd in giving them their just Elogy. His Hero is according to the ancient Model, truly Poetical, a mixture of some Faults and greater Virtues. He had the advantage of both Love and Honour for his Episodes, nay, and Friendship too, and that the noblest in History. He had all the sacred History before him, and liberty to chuse where he pleased, either by Narration or Prophecy; nor has he, as far as he has gone, neglected any advantage the Subject gave him. Its a great Loss to the World that he left the Work unfinish'd, since now he's dead, its always like to continue so. As for Milton's Paradise Lost its an Original, and indeed he seems rather above the common Rules of Epic than ignorant of them. Its I'm sure a very lovely Poem, by what ever Name it's call'd, and in it he has many Thoughts and Images, greater than perhaps any either in Virgil or Homer. The Foundation is true History, but the turn is Fable: The Action is very Important, but not uniform; for one can't tell which is the Principal in the Poem, the Wars of the Angels or the Fall of Man, nor which is the Chief Person Michael or Adam. Its true, the former comes in as an Episode to the latter, but it takes up too great a part thereof, because its link'd to it. His Discourse of Light is incomparable; and I think 'twas worth the while to be blind to be its Author. His Description of Adam and Eve, their Persons and Love, is almost too lively to bear reading: Not but that he has his inequalities and repetitions, the latter pretty often, as have, more or less, all other Poets but Virgil. For his antique Words I'm not like to blame him whoever does: And for his blank Verse, I'm of a different mind from most others, and think they rather excuse his uncorrectness than the contraries; for I find its easier to run into it, in that sort of Verse, than in Rhyming Works where the Thought is oftner turned; whereas here the Fancy flows on, without check or controul. As for his Paradise Regain'd, I nothing wonder that it has not near the Life of his former Poem, any more than the Odysses fell short of the Iliads. Milton, when he writ this, was grown Older, probably poorer: He had not that scope for Fable, was confin'd to a lower Walk, and draws out that in four Books which might have been well compriz'd in one: Notwithstanding all this, there are many strokes which appear truly his; as the Mustring of the Parthian Troops, the Description of Rome by the Devil to our Saviour, and several other places.

And now I've done with all the rest, I may take liberty to say something of my own.



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For the Subject I dare stand by it, that 'tis fit for a better Heroic Poem than any ever was, or will be made; and that if a good Poem cou'd not be made on't, it must be either from the weakness of the Art itself, or for want of a good Artist. I don't say the Subject with all its Circumstances is the best for Epic, but considered in it self, or with a prudent choice out of the vast Field of Matter which it affords.

The Action is Important, if ever any was, being no less than the Redemption of the World, which was not accomplish'd till after our Saviours Death and Resurrection. The Ascension I confess should be left out, according to the common Rules of Heroick Poetry, but I had not the same reason of omitting it, as others have for not coming to the End of their History, a little short of which they generally stop, because after the main Business is over, nothing great remains, or however not greater than has already past. And if any thing mean followed, the Reader wou'd leave off dissatisfied. But I've as great and remarkable an Action, as any in the whole story, yet upon my Hands, and which if I had omitted, I had lost many very moving Incidents that follow'd the Resurrection; and besides, Vida before me, has carry'd it yet further, to the actual Descent of the Holy Ghost on the Disciples, and the spreading the Christian Name all the World over; which I have done only in Prophecy.

The Action is I think uniform, because all the Episodes are part of the main Action, the Redemption of the World; to which his Incarnation, and Divine Conception were absolutely necessary, and so were his Holy Life, Doctrine, Miracles, and especially his Sufferings and Agonies. My principal Hero was perfect, yet imitable, and that both in active and contemplative Life. He leaves his own Kingdom to save and conquer another, endures the greatest hardships, is reduc'd to the lowest ebb, nay is at last forc'd to suffer Death it self. Yet after all, he emerges from his Misfortunes, conquers all his Enemies, fixes Laws, establishes Religion, Peace, and his own Empire, and is advanced higher than any Conquerer ever was before him.

The other Persons are Heroical enough, Angels, Kings, High Priests, Governours, Councillors, nay even the Apostles themselves were more than Kings, for they were thought and call'd Gods by the People. The Moral I find not make it, in a true Example, which others are forced to Form in Fable; "That we ought to do Good, to suffer evil, submit to the Divine Will; to venture or lose a Life for a Friend; to forgive our Enemies."

Yet further I desire to recommend the whole of the Christian Religion; all the Articles of Faith; all that System of Divinity and Morality contain'd in the Gospel of the Blessed Jesus, to the Study and Practice of Persons of Ingenuity and Reason; to make his Divine Person, which is already infinitely Amiable, if possible, actually more Ador'd and Lov'd; and to Vindicate his Mission, his Satisfaction, and his Divinity, against all Jews, Turks, Infidels, and Heretics; which sure are the most proper Ends that can be propos'd in a Work of this Nature: Which may be agreeably and admirably done, if 'tis not the Poets fault; for here's all the marvellous that cou'd be wished for, already done to my

Hand, and all sacredly True, Angels and Demons, and Miracles, with Voices from Heaven.



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Now the Subject being so fit for a good Heroic Poem, I shall have the less excuse, if this be a bad one. And here I must ingenuously confess, I had seen none of these Rules given by the Masters of Epic, when I laid the Scheme of this Poem, tho I wish I had, for I might probably then have done it better, or not at all. I knew not the hazard of the undertaking, but greedily embrac'd it, when first propos'd by some Friends, who were ignorant of what they put me upon. Being full of the Design wherein, the earnest desire I had to see it accomplish'd, and either a lucky Chance, or the Happiness of my Subject, may perhaps in some Instances, have supply'd the want both of Rules and Genius. All I will say of my own performance is, that I now know the Faults on't, tho I am not oblig'd to point 'em out to my Reader, who will but too soon find 'em. That I wou'd have mended much that's now amiss, had I lived in an Age where a man might afford to be Nine or Ten Years about a Poem. And in the Mean time this satisfies me, whatever is the success, that I've done all that cou'd be done by one in my Circumstances towards the rendering it more compleat and free from Faults, and only wish that my own Reputation may suffer, by the weakness of the Work, and not the Dignity of the Subject.

I cou'd plead for my self what Longinus says on Works of this Nature, wou'd it not look like Arrogance, "That even the greatest Genius may sometimes sink into meanness, when the force of their Spirits is once exhausted: That its very difficult for height of Thought to sustain it self long in an equal Tenour; and that some Faults ought to be excused when there are more Beauties." But if none of these will pass, I hope it will not much mortifie me, since I think the World and I have no great matter to do with one another. I'm sensible my Poem wou'd have had fewer Enemies, had I left out some Passages in't. But as mean as the worst of this are, I wou'd not buy their good Word at such a rate. I had almost forgot to mention the Gravers Work, which is not without Faults, particularly he has err'd in the Posture of the Disciples at the last Supper, whom he has made Sitting, when they were really Declining, or Discumbent. But its now more than time to conclude my long Preface, which I shall do in few Words. Since the chief Design in this Work, is to advance the Honour of my Hero, and next to that, the entertainment of Pious and ingenious Minds; for the truth of which, I hope I may appeal to the great [Greek: kritikos tes kardias]; I shall not be much concern'd for the success it may meet with in the World.