

# An Essay on Criticism

By Alexander Pope

Edited by [Jack Lynch](#)

'Tis hard to say, if greater Want of Skill  
Appear in *Writing* or in *Judging* ill,  
But, of the two, less dang'rous is th' Offence,  
To tire our *Patience*, than mis-lead our *Sense*:  
Some few in *that*, but Numbers err in *this*,  
Ten Censure wrong for one who Writes amiss;  
A *Fool* might once *himself* alone expose,  
Now *One* in *Verse* makes many more in *Prose*.

'Tis with our *Judgments* as our *Watches*, none  
Go just *alike*, yet each believes his own. [10]  
In *Poets* as true *Genius* is but rare,  
True *Taste* as seldom is the *Critick's* Share;  
Both must alike from Heav'n derive their Light,  
These *born* to Judge, as well as those to Write.  
Let such teach others who themselves excell,  
And *censure freely* who have *written well*.  
*Authors* are partial to their *Wit*, 'tis true,  
But are not *Criticks* to their *Judgment* too?

Yet if we look more closely, we shall find  
Most have the *Seeds* of Judgment in their Mind; [20]  
Nature affords at least a *glimm'ring Light*;  
The *Lines*, tho' touch'd but faintly, are drawn right.  
But as the slightest Sketch, if justly trac'd,  
Is by ill *Colouring* but the more disgrac'd,  
So by *false Learning* is *good Sense* defac'd.  
Some are bewilder'd in the Maze of Schools,  
And some made *Coxcombs* Nature meant but *Fools*.  
In search of *Wit* these lose their *common Sense*,  
And then turn Criticks in their own Defence.  
Each burns alike, who can, or cannot write, [30]  
Or with a *Rival's* or an *Eunuch's* spite.  
All *Fools* have still an Itching to deride,  
And fain *wou'd* be upon the *Laughing Side*;  
If *Maevius* Scribble in *Apollo's* spight,  
There are, who judge still worse than he can *write*

Some have at first for *Wits*, then *Poets* past,  
Turn'd *Criticks* next, and prov'd plain *Fools* at last;  
Some neither can for *Wits* nor *Criticks* pass,  
As heavy Mules are neither *Horse* or *Ass*.  
Those half-learn'd Witlings, num'rous in our Isle, [40]  
As half-form'd Insects on the Banks of *Nile*:  
Unfinish'd Things, one knows now what to call,  
Their Generation's so *equivocal*:  
To tell 'em, wou'd a *hundred Tongues* require,  
Or *one vain Wit's*, that might a hundred tire.

But you who seek to *give* and *merit* Fame,  
And justly bear a Critick's noble Name,  
Be sure *your self* and your own *Reach* to know.  
How far your *Genius*, *Taste*, and *Learning* go;  
Launch not beyond your Depth, but be discreet, [50]  
And mark *that Point* where Sense and Dulness *meet*.

Nature to all things fix'd the Limits fit,  
And wisely curb'd proud Man's pretending Wit:  
As on the *Land* while *here* the *Ocean* gains,  
In *other Parts* it leaves wide sandy Plains;  
Thus in the *Soul* while *Memory* prevails,  
The solid Pow'r of *Understanding* fails;  
Where Beams of warm *Imagination* play,  
The *Memory's* soft Figures melt away.  
One *Science* only will one *Genius* fit; [60]  
So *vast* is Art, so *narrow* Human Wit;  
Not only bounded to *peculiar Arts*,  
But oft in *those*, confin'd to *single Parts*.  
Like Kings we lose the Conquests gain'd before,  
By vain Ambition still to make them more:  
Each might his *sev'ral Province* well command,  
Wou'd all but stoop to what they *understand*.

First follow NATURE, and your Judgment frame

By her just Standard, which is still the same:  
*Unerring Nature*, still divinely bright, [70]  
 One *clear, unchang'd* and *Universal Light*,  
 Life, Force, and Beauty, must to all impart,  
 At once the *Source*, and *End*, and *Test of Art*.  
 Art from that Fund each *just Supply* provides,  
 Works *without Show*, and *without Pomp* presides:  
 In some fair Body thus th' informing Soul  
 With Spirits feeds, with Vigour fills the whole,  
 Each Motion guides, and ev'ry Nerve sustains;  
*It self unseen*, but in th' *Effects*, remains.  
 Some, to whom Heav'n in Wit has been profuse. [80]  
 Want as much more, to turn it to its use,  
 For *Wit* and *Judgment* often are at strife,  
 Tho' meant each other's Aid, like *Man* and *Wife*.  
 'Tis more to *guide* than *spur* the Muse's Steed;  
 Restrain his Fury, than provoke his Speed;  
 The winged Courser, like a gen'rous Horse,  
 Shows most true Mettle when you *check* his Course.

Those RULES of old *discover'd*, not *devis'd*,  
 Are *Nature* still, but *Nature Methodiz'd*;  
*Nature*, like *Liberty*, is but restrain'd [90]  
 By the same Laws which first *herself* ordain'd.

Hear how learn'd *Greece* her useful Rules indites,  
 When to repress, and when indulge our Flights:  
 High on *Parnassus'* Top her Sons she show'd,  
 And pointed out those arduous Paths they trod,  
 Held from afar, aloft, th' Immortal Prize,  
 And urg'd the rest by equal Steps to rise;  
 Just *Precepts* thus from great *Examples* giv'n,  
 She drew from them what they deriv'd from *Heav'n*  
 The gen'rous Critick *fann'd* the *Poet's Fire*, [100]  
 And taught the World, *with Reason* to *Admire*.  
 Then Criticism the Muse's Handmaid prov'd,  
 To dress her Charms, and make her more below'd;  
 But following Wits from that Intention stray'd;  
 Who cou'd not win the Mistress, woo'd the Maid;  
 Against the Poets *their own Arms* they turn'd,  
 Sure to hate most the Men from whom they *learn'd*.  
 So modern *Pothecaries*, taught the Art  
 By *Doctor's Bills* to play the *Doctor's Part*,  
 Bold in the Practice of *mistaken Rules*, [110]  
 Prescribe, apply, and call their *Masters Fools*.  
 Some on the Leaves of ancient Authors prey,  
 Nor Time nor Moths e'er spoil'd so much as they:  
 Some dryly plain, without Invention's Aid,  
 Write dull *Receipts* how Poems may be made:  
 These leave the Sense, their Learning to display,  
 And theme explain the Meaning quite away

*You* then whose Judgment the right Course wou'd steer,  
 Know well each ANCIENT's proper *Character*,  
 His *Fable*, *Subject*, *Scope* in ev'ry Page, [120]  
*Religion*, *Country*, *Genius* of his *Age*:  
 Without all these at once before your Eyes,  
*Cavil* you may, but never *Criticize*.  
 Be *Homer's* Works your *Study*, and *Delight*,  
 Read them by Day, and meditate by Night,  
 Thence form your Judgment, thence your Maxims bring,  
 And trace the Muses *upward* to their *Spring*;  
 Still with *It self compar'd*, his *Text* peruse;  
 And let your *Comment* be the *Mantuan Muse*.

When first young *Maro* in his boundless Mind [130]  
 A Work t' outlast Immortal *Rome* design'd,  
 Perhaps he seem'd *above* the Critick's Law,  
 And but from *Nature's Fountains* scorn'd to draw:  
 But when t'examine ev'ry Part he came,  
*Nature* and *Homer* were, he found, the *same*:  
 Convinc'd, amaz'd, he checks the bold Design,  
 And Rules as strict his labour'd Work confine,  
 As if the *Stagyrite* o'er looked each Line.  
 Learn hence for Ancient *Rules* a just Esteem;  
 To copy *Nature* is to copy *Them*. [140]

Some Beauties yet, no Precepts can declare,  
 For there's a *Happiness* as well as *Care*.  
*Musick* resembles *Poetry*, in each  
 Are *nameless Graces* which no Methods teach,  
 And which a *Master-Hand* alone can reach.  
 If, where the *Rules* not far enough extend,  
 (Since Rules were made but to promote their End)  
 Some Lucky LICENCE answers to the full

Th' Intent propos'd, *that Licence* is a *Rule*.  
 Thus *Pegasus*, a nearer way to take, [150]  
 May boldly deviate from the common Track.  
 Great Wits sometimes may *gloriously offend*,  
 And rise to *Faults* true Criticks *dare not mend*;  
 From *vulgar Bounds* with *brave Disorder* part,  
 And *snatch a Grace* beyond the Reach of Art,  
 Which, without passing thro' the *Judgment*, gains  
 The *Heart*, and all its End *at once* attains.  
 In *Prospects*, thus, some *Objects* please our Eyes,  
 Which out of Nature's *common Order* rise,  
 The shapeless *Rock*, or hanging *Precipice*. [160]  
 But tho' the *Ancients* thus their *Rules* invade,  
 (As *Kings* dispense with *Laws* Themselves have made)  
*Moderns*, beware! Or if you must offend  
 Against the *Precept*, ne'er transgress its *End*,  
 Let it be *seldom*, and *compell'd by Need*,  
 And have, at least, *Their Precedent* to plead.  
 The Critick else proceeds without Remorse,  
 Seizes your Fame, and puts his *Laws* in force.

I know there are, to whose presumptuous Thoughts  
 Those *Freer Beauties*, ev'n in *Them*, seem *Faults*: [170]  
 Some Figures *monstrous* and *mis-shap'd* appear,  
 Consider'd *singly*, or beheld too *near*,  
 Which, but *proportion'd* to their *Light*, or *Place*,  
 Due Distance *reconciles* to Form and Grace.  
 A prudent Chief not always must display  
 His Pow'rs in *equal Ranks*, and *fair Array*,  
 But with th' *Occasion* and the *Place* comply,  
*Conceal* his Force, nay seem sometimes to *Fly*.  
 Those oft are *Stratagems* which *Errors* seem,  
 Nor is it *Homer Nods*, but *We* that *Dream*. [180]

Still green with Bays each *ancient Altar* stands,  
 Above the reach of *Sacrilegious Hands*,  
 Secure from *Flames*, from *Envy's* fiercer Rage,  
 Destructive *War*, and all-involving *Age*.  
 See, from *each Clime* the Learn'd their Incense bring;  
 Hear, in *all Tongues* consenting *Paeans* ring!  
 In Praise so just, let ev'ry Voice be join'd,  
 And fill the *Gen'ral Chorus* of *Mankind*!  
 Hail *Bards Triumphant!* born in *happier Days*;  
*Immortal Heirs* of *Universal Praise!* [190]  
 Whose Honours with Increase of Ages *grow*,  
 As streams roll down, *enlarging* as they flow!  
 Nations *unborn* your mighty Names shall sound,  
 And Worlds applaud that must not yet be *found*!  
 Oh may some Spark of *your* Coelestial Fire  
 The last, the meanest of your Sons inspire,  
 (That on weak Wings, from far, pursues your Flights;  
*Glows* while he *reads*, but *trembles* as he *writes*)  
 To teach vain Wits a Science *little known*,  
 T' *admire* Superior Sense, and *doubt* their own! [200]

Of all the Causes which conspire to blind  
 Man's erring Judgment, and misguide the Mind,  
 What the weak Head with strongest Byass rules,  
 Is *Pride*, the *never-failing Vice* of *Fools*.  
 Whatever Nature has in *Worth* deny'd,  
 She gives in large Recruits of *needful Pride*;  
 For as in *Bodies*, thus in *Souls*, we find  
 What wants in *Blood* and *Spirits*, swell'd with *Wind*;  
 Pride, where Wit fails, steps in to our Defence,  
 And fills up all the *mighty Void* of *Sense!* [210]  
 If once right Reason drives *that Cloud* away,  
*Truth* breaks upon us with *resistless Day*;  
 Trust not your self; but your Defects to know,  
 Make use of ev'ry *Friend* — and ev'ry *Foe*.

A *little Learning* is a dang'rous Thing;  
 Drink deep, or taste not the *Pierian Spring*:  
 There *shallow Draughts* intoxicate the Brain,  
 And drinking *largely* sobers us again.  
 Fir'd at first Sight with what the *Muse* imparts,  
 In *fearless Youth* we tempt the Heights of Arts, [220]  
 While from the bounded *Level* of our Mind,  
*Short Views* we take, nor see the lengths behind,  
 But *more advanc'd*, behold with strange Surprise  
 New, distant Scenes of *endless Science* rise!  
 So pleas'd at first, the trowning *Alps* we try,  
 Mount o'er the Vales, and seem to tread the Sky;  
 Th' Eternal Snows appear already past,  
 And the first *Clouds* and *Mountains* seem the last:  
 But *those attain'd*, we tremble to survey

The growing Labours of the lengthen'd Way, [230]  
 Th' *increasing* Prospect *tires* our wandering Eyes,  
 Hills peep o'er Hills, and *Alps* on *Alps* arise!

A perfect Judge will *read* each Work of Wit  
 With the same Spirit that its Author *writ*,  
 Survey the *Whole*, nor seek slight Faults to find,  
 Where *Nature moves*, and *Rapture warms* the Mind;  
 Nor lose, for that malignant dull Delight,  
 The *gen'rous Pleasure* to be charm'd with Wit.  
 But in such Lays as neither *ebb*, nor flow,  
*Correctly cold*, and *regularly low*, [240]  
 That shunning Faults, one quiet *Tenour* keep;  
 We cannot *blame* indeed — but we may *sleep*.  
 In Wit, as Nature, what affects our Hearts  
 Is nor th' Exactness of peculiar Parts;  
 'Tis not a *Lip*, or *Eye*, we Beauty call,  
 But the joint Force and full *Result* of *all*.  
 Thus when we view some well-proportion'd Dome,  
 The *World's* just Wonder, and ev'n *thine* O Rome!)  
 No single Parts unequally surprize;  
 All comes *united* to th' admiring Eyes; [250]  
 No monstrous Height, or Breadth, or Length appear;  
 The *Whole* at once is *Bold*, and *Regular*.

Whoever thinks a faultless Piece to see,  
 Thinks what ne'er was, nor is, nor e'er shall be.  
 In ev'ry Work regard the *Writer's End*,  
 Since none can compass more than they *Intend*;  
 And if the *Means* be just, the *Conduct* true,  
 Applause, in spite of trivial Faults, is due.  
 As Men of Breeding, sometimes Men of Wit,  
 T' avoid *great Errors*, must the *less* commit, [260]  
 Neglect the Rules each *Verbal Critick* lays,  
 For *not* to know some Trifles, is a Praise.  
 Most Criticks, fond of some subservient Art,  
 Still make the *Whole* depend upon a *Part*,  
 They talk of *Principles*, but Notions prize,  
 And All to one lov'd Folly Sacrifice.

Once on a time, *La Mancha's* Knight, they say,  
 A certain *Bard* encountering on the Way,  
 Discours'd in Terms as just, with Looks as Sage,  
 As e'er cou'd *Dennis*, of the *Grecian* Stage; [270]  
 Concluding all were desp'rate Sots and Fools,  
 Who durst depart from *Aristotle's* Rules.  
 Our Author, happy in a Judge so nice,  
 Produc'd his Play, and beg'd the Knight's Advice,  
 Made him observe the *Subject* and the *Plot*,  
 The *Manners*, *Passions*, *Unities*, what not?  
 All which, exact to Rule were brought about,  
 Were but a *Combate in the Lists* left out.  
*What! Leave the Combate out?* Exclaims the Knight;  
 Yes, or we must renounce the Stagyrite. [280]  
*Not so by Heav'n* (he answers in a Rage)  
*Knights, Squires, and Steeds, must enter on the Stage.*  
 So vast a Throng the Stage can ne'er contain.  
*Then build a New, or act it in a Plain.*

Thus Criticks, of less *Judgment* than *Caprice*,  
*Curious*, not *Knowing*, not *exact*, but *nice*,  
 Form *short Ideas*; and offend in *Arts*  
 (As most in *Manners*) by a *Love to Parts*.

Some to *Conceit* alone their Taste confine,  
 And glitt'ring Thoughts struck out at ev'ry Line; [290]  
 Pleas'd with a Work where nothing's just or fit;  
 One *glaring Chaos* and *wild Heap* of *Wit*;  
 Poets like Painters, thus, unskill'd to trace  
 The *naked Nature* and the *living Grace*,  
 With *Gold* and *Jewels* cover ev'ry Part,  
 And hide with *Ornaments* their *Want of Art*.  
*True Wit* is *Nature* to Advantage dress't,  
 What oft was *Thought*, but ne'er so well *Exprest*,  
*Something*, whose Truth convinc'd at Sight we find,  
 That gives us back the Image of our Mind: [300]  
 As Shades more sweetly recommend the Light,  
 So modest Plainness sets off sprightly Wit:  
 For *Works* may have more *Wit* than does 'em good,  
 As *Bodies* perish through Excess of *Blood*.

Others for *Language* all their Care express,  
 And value *Books*, as Women *Men*, for *Dress*:  
 Their Praise is still — *The Stile is excellent*:  
 The *Sense*, they humbly take upon Content.

Words are like *Leaves*; and where they most abound,  
 Much *Fruit of Sense* beneath is rarely found. [310]  
*False Eloquence*, like the *Prismatic Glass*,  
 Its gawdy Colours spreads on *ev'ry place*;  
 The Face of Nature was no more Survey,  
 All glares *alike*, without *Distinction* gay:  
 But true *Expression*, like th' unchanging *Sun*,  
*Clears*, and *improves* whate'er it shines upon,  
 It *gilds* all Objects, but it *alters* none.  
 Expression is the *Dress of Thought*, and still  
 Appears more *decent* as more *suitable*;  
 A vile Conceit in pompous Words exprest, [320]  
 Is like a Clown in regal Purple drest;  
 For diff'rent *Styles* with diff'rent *Subjects* sort,  
 As several Garbs with Country, Town, and Court.  
 Some by *Old Words* to Fame have made Pretence;  
 Ancients in *Phrase*, meer Moderns in their *Sense*!  
 Such *labour'd Nothings*, in so *strange* a Style,  
*Amaze* th'unlearn'd, and make the Learned *Smile*.  
 Unlucky, as *Fungoso* in the Play,  
 These Sparks with aukward Vanity display  
 What the Fine Gentleman wore *Yesterday*! [330]  
 And but so mimick ancient Wits at best,  
 As Apes our Grandsires in their Doublets drest.  
 In *Words*, as *Fashions*, the same Rule will hold;  
 Alike Fantastick, if *too New*, or *Old*;  
 Be not the *first* by whom the *New* are try'd,  
 Nor yet the *last* to lay the *Old* aside.

But most by *Numbers* judge a Poet's Song,  
 And *smooth* or *rough*, with them, is *right* or *wrong*;  
 In the bright *Muse* tho' thousand *Charms* conspire,  
 Her *Voice* is all these tuneful Fools admire, [340]  
 Who haunt *Parnassus* but to please their Ear,  
 Not mend their Minds; as some to *Church* repair,  
 Not for the *Doctrine*, but the *Musick* there.  
 These *Equal Syllables* alone require,  
 Tho' oft the Ear the *open Vowels* tire,  
 While *Expletives* their feeble Aid *do* join,  
 And ten low Words oft creep in one dull Line,  
 While they ring round the same *unvary'd Chimes*,  
 With sure *Returns* of still *expected Rhymes*.  
 Where-e'er you find the *cooling Western Breeze*, [350]  
 In the next Line, it *whispers thro' the Trees*;  
 If *Chrystal Streams* with *pleasing Murmurs* creep,  
 The Reader's threaten'd (not in vain) with *Sleep*.  
 Then, at the *last*, and *only* Couplet fraught  
 With some *unmeaning* Thing they call a *Thought*,  
 A *needless Alexandrine* ends the Song,  
 That like a wounded Snake, drags its slow length along.  
 Leave such to tune their own dull Rhimes, and know  
 What's *roundly smooth*, or *languishingly slow*;  
 And praise the *Easie Vigor* of a Line, [360]  
 Where Denham's Strength, and *Waller's* Sweetness join.  
 True Ease in Writing comes from Art, not Chance,  
 As those move easiest who have learn'd to dance,  
 'Tis not enough no Harshness gives Offence,  
 The *Sound* must seem an *Eccho* to the *Sense*.  
*Soft* is the Strain when *Zephyr* gently blows,  
 And the *smooth Stream* in *smoother Numbers* flows;  
 But when loud Surges lash the sounding Shore,  
 The *hoarse, rough Verse* shou'd like the *Torrent* roar.  
 When *Ajax* strives, some Rocks' vast Weight to throw, [370]  
 The Line too labours, and the Words move *slow*;  
 Not so, when swift *Camilla* scours the Plain,  
 Flies o'er th'unbending Corn, and skims along the Main.  
 Hear how *Timotheus'* vary'd Lays surprize,  
 And bid Alternate Passions fall and rise!  
 While, at each Change, the Son of *Lybian Jove*  
 Now *burns* with Glory, and then *melts* with Love;  
 Now his *fierce Eyes* with *sparkling Fury* glow;  
 Now *Sighs* steal out, and *Tears* begin to *flow*:  
*Persians* and *Greeks* like *Turns of Nature* found, [380]  
 And the *World's Victor* stood subdu'd by *Sound*!  
 The *Pow'rs of Musick* all our Hearts allow;  
 And what *Timotheus* was, is *Dryden* now.

Avoid *Extreams*; and shun the Fault of such,  
 Who still are pleas'd *too little*, or *too much*.  
 At ev'ry Trifle scorn to take Offence,  
 That always shows *Great Pride*, or *Little Sense*;  
 Those *Heads* as *Stomachs* are not sure the best  
 Which nauseate all, and nothing can digest.  
 Yet let not each gay *Turn* thy Rapture move, [390]

For Fools *Admire*, but Men of Sense *Approve*;  
As things seem *large* which we thro' *Mists* descry,  
*Dulness* is ever apt to *Magnify*.

Some *foreign* Writers, some our *own* despise;  
The *Ancients* only, or the *Moderns* prize:  
(Thus *Wit*, like *Faith* by each Man is apply'd  
To *one small Sect*, and All are *damn'd beside*.)  
Meanly they seek the Blessing to confine,  
And force *that Sun* but on a *Part* to Shine;  
Which not alone the *Southern Wit* sublimes, [400]  
But ripens Spirits in cold Northern Climes;  
Which from the first has shone on *Ages past*,  
Enlights the *present*, and shall warm the *last*:  
(Tho' *each* may feel *Increases* and *Decays*,  
And see now *clearer* and now *darker Days*)  
Regard not then if Wit be *Old* or *New*,  
But blame the *False*, and value still the *True*.

Some ne'er advance a Judgment of their own,  
But *catch* the *spreading Notion* of the Town;  
They reason and conclude by *Precedent*, [410]  
And own *stale Nonsense* which they ne'er invent.  
Some judge of Authors' *Names*, not *Works*, and then  
Nor praise nor blame the *Writings*, but the *Men*.  
Of all this *Servile Herd* the worst is He  
That in *proud Dulness* joins with *Quality*,  
A constant Critick at the Great-man's Board,  
To *fetch* and *carry* Nonsense for my Lord.  
What *woful stuff* this Madrigal wou'd be,  
To some starv'd Hackny Sonneteer, or me?  
But let a *Lord* once own the *happy Lines*, [420]  
How the Wit *brightens!* How the *Style refines!*  
Before *his* sacred Name flies ev'ry Fault,  
And each *exalted Stanza teems* with *Thought!*

The *Vulgar* thus through *Imitation* err;  
As oft the *Learn'd* by being *Singular*;  
So much they scorn the Crowd, that if the Throng  
By *Chance* go right, they *purposely* go wrong;  
So Schismatics the *plain Believers* quit,  
And are but damn'd for having *too much Wit*.

Some praise at Morning what they blame at Night; [430]  
But always think the *last* Opinion *right*.  
A Muse by these is like a Mistress us'd,  
This hour she's *idoliz'd*, the next *abus'd*,  
While their weak Heads, like Towns unfortify'd,  
'Twixt Sense and Nonsense daily change their Side.  
Ask them the Cause; *They're wiser still*, they say;  
And still to Morrow's wiser than to Day.  
We think our *Fathers* Fools, so *wise* we grow;  
Our *wiser Sons*, no doubt, will think us so.  
Once *School-Divines* this zealous Isle o'erspread; [440]  
Who knew most *Sentences* was *deepest read*;  
Faith, Gospel, All, seem'd made to be *disputed*,  
And none had *Sense enough to be Confuted*.  
*Scotists* and *Thomists*, now, in Peace remain,  
Amidst their *kindred Cobwebs* in *Duck-Lane*.  
If *Faith* it self has *diff'rent Dresses* worn,  
What wonder *Modes* in *Wit* shou'd take their Turn?  
Oft, leaving what is Natural and fit,  
The *current Folly* proves the *ready Wit*,  
And Authors think their Reputation safe, [450]  
Which lives as long as *Fools* are pleas'd to *Laugh*.

Some valuing those of their own, *Side* or *Mind*,  
Still make themselves the measure of Mankind;  
Fondly we think we honour Merit then,  
When we but praise *Our selves* in *Other Men*.  
Parties in *Wit* attend on those of *State*,  
And publick Faction doubles private Hate.  
*Pride*, *Malice*, *Folly*, against *Dryden* rose,  
In various Shapes of *Parsons*, *Criticks*, *Beaus*;  
But *Sense* surviv'd, when *merry Jests* were past; [460]  
For rising Merit will *buoy up* at last.  
Might he return, and bless once more our Eyes,  
New *Blackmores* and new *Milbourns* must arise;  
Nay shou'd great *Homer* lift his awful Head,  
*Zoilus* again would start up from the Dead.  
*Envy* will *Merit* as its *Shade* pursue,  
But like a Shadow, proves the *Substance* true;  
For envy'd Wit, like *Sol* Eclips'd, makes known  
Th' *opposing Body's* Grossness, not its *own*.  
When first that Sun too powerful Beams displays, [470]

It draws up Vapours which obscure its Rays;  
But ev'n those Clouds at last adorn its Way,  
Reflect new Glories, and augment the Day.

Be thou the *first* true Merit to befriend;  
*His* Praise is lost, who stays till *All* commend;  
Short is the Date, alas, of *Modern Rhymes*;  
And 'tis but just to let 'em live *betimes*.  
No longer now that Golden Age appears,  
When *Patriarch-Wits* surviv'd *thousand Years*;  
Now Length of *Fame* (our *second* Life) is lost, [480]  
And bare Threescore is all ev'n That can boast:  
Our Sons their Fathers' *failing language* see,  
And such as *Chaucer* is, shall *Dryden* be.  
So when the faithful *Pencil* has design'd  
Some *bright Idea* of the Master's Mind,  
Where a *new World* leaps out at his command,  
And ready Nature waits upon his Hand;  
When the ripe Colours *soften* and *unite*,  
And sweetly *melt* into just Shade and Light,  
When mellowing Years their full Perfection give, [490]  
And each Bold Figure just begins to *Live*;  
The *treach'rous Colours* the fair Art betray,  
And all the bright Creation fades away!

Unhappy *Wit*, like most mistaken Things,  
Attones not for that *Envy* which it brings.  
In *Youth* alone its empty Praise we boast,  
But soon the Short-liv'd Vanity is lost!  
Like some fair *Flow'r* the early *Spring* supplies,  
That gaily Blooms, but ev'n in blooming *Dies*.  
What is this Wit which must our Cares employ? [500]  
The *Owner's Wife*, that *other Men* enjoy,  
Then most our *Trouble* still when most *admir'd*,  
And still the more we *give*, the more *requir'd*;  
Whose Fame with *Pains* we guard, but lose with *Ease*,  
Sure *some* to vex, but never *all* to please;  
'Tis what the *Vicious fear*, the *Virtuous shun*;  
By *Fools 'tis hated*, and by *Knaves undone*!

If *Wit* so much from *Ign'rance* undergo,  
Ah let not *Learning* too commence its Foe!  
*Of old*, those met *Rewards* who cou'd *excel*, [510]  
And such were *Prais'd* who but *endeavour'd* well:  
Tho' *Triumphs* were to *Gen'ral*s only due,  
*Crowns* were reserv'd to grace the *Soldiers* too.  
Now, they who reached *Parnassus'* lofty Crown,  
Employ their Pains to spurn some others down;  
And while Self-Love each jealous Writer rules,  
*Contending Wits* becomes the *Sport of Fools*:  
But still the *Worst* with most Regret commend,  
For each *Ill Author* is as bad a *Friend*.  
To what base Ends, and by what abject Ways, [520]  
Are Mortals urg'd thro' *Sacred Lust of praise*!  
Ah ne'er so *dire* a *Thirst of Glory* boast,  
Nor in the *Critick* let the *Man* be lost!  
*Good-Nature* and *Good-Sense* must ever join;  
To err is *Humane*; to Forgive, *Divine*.

But if in Noble Minds some Dregs remain,  
Not yet purg'd off, of Spleen and sow'r Disdain,  
Discharge that Rage on more Provoking Crimes,  
Nor fear a Dearth in these Flagitious Times.  
No Pardon vile *Obscenity* should find, [530]  
Tho' *Wit* and *Art* conspire to move your Mind;  
But *Dulness* with *Obscenity* must prove  
As Shameful sure as *Impotence* in *Love*.  
In the fat Age of Pleasure, Wealth, and Ease,  
Sprung the rank Weed, and thriv'd with large Increase;  
When *Love* was all an easie Monarch's Care;  
Seldom at *Council*, never in a *War*:  
*Jilts* rul'd the State, and Statesmen *Farces* writ;  
Nay *Wits* had *Pensions*, and young *Lords* had *Wit*:  
The Fair sate panting at a *Courtier's Play*, [540]  
And not a Mask went *un-improv'd* away:  
The modest Fan was lifted up no more,  
And Virgins *smil'd* at what they *blush'd* before —  
The following Licence of a Foreign Reign  
Did all the Dregs of bold *Socinus* drain;  
Then Unbelieving Priests reform'd the Nation,  
And taught more *Pleasant* Methods of Salvation;  
Where Heav'ns Free Subjects might their *Rights* dispute,  
Lest God himself shou'd seem too *Absolute*.  
*Pulpits* their *Sacred Satire* learn'd to spare, [550]  
And Vice *admir'd* to find a *Flatt'rer there*!

Encourag'd thus, Witt's *Titans* brav'd the Skies,  
 And the Press groan'd with Licenc'd *Blasphemies* —  
 These Monsters, Criticks! with your Darts engage,  
 Here point your Thunder, and exhaust your Rage!  
 Yet shun their Fault, who, *Scandalously nice*,  
 Will needs *mistake* an Author *into Vice*;  
 All seems Infected that th' Infected spy,  
 As all looks yellow to the Jaundic'd Eye.

LEARN then what MORALS Criticks ought to show, [560]  
 For 'tis but *half* a *Judge's Task*, to *Know*.  
 'Tis not enough, Taste, Judgment, Learning, join;  
 In all you speak, let Truth and Candor shine:  
 That not alone what to your *Sense* is due,  
 All may allow; but seek your *Friendship* too.

Be *silent* always when you *doubt* your *Sense*;  
 And *speak*, tho' *sure*, with *seeming Diffidence*:  
 Some positive persisting Fops we know,  
 Who, if *once wrong*, will needs be *always* so;  
 But you, with Pleasure own your Errors past, [570]  
 An make each Day a *Critick* on the last.

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

Be Niggards of Advice on no Pretence;  
 For the *worst Avarice* is that of *Sense*:  
 With mean Complacence ne'er betray your Trust, [580]  
 Nor be so *Civil* as to prove *Unjust*;  
 Fear not the Anger of the Wise to raise;  
 Those best can *bear Reproof*, who *merit Praise*.

'Twere well, might Criticks still this Freedom take;  
 But *Appius* reddens at each Word you speak,  
 And *stares, Tremendous!* with a *threatning Eye*  
 Like some *fierce Tyrant* in *Old Tapestry!*  
 Fear most to tax an *Honourable Fool*,  
 Whose Right it is, *uncensur'd* to be dull;  
 Such without *Wit* are Poets when they please. [590]  
 As without *Learning* they can take *Degrees*.  
 Leave dang'rous *Truths* to unsuccessful *Satyrs*,  
 And *Flattery* to fulsome *Dedicators*,  
 Whom, when they *Praise*, the World believes no more,  
 Than when they promise to give *Scribbling* o'er.  
 'Tis best sometimes your Censure to restrain,  
 And *charitably* let the Dull be *vain*:  
 Your Silence there is better than your *Spite*,  
 For who can *rail* so long as they can *write*?  
 Still humming on, their drowzy Course they keep, [600]  
 And *lash'd* so long, like *Tops*, are *lash'd asleep*.  
*False Steps* but help them to renew the Race,  
 As after *Stumbling*, Jades will *mend* their Pace.  
 What Crouds of these, impenitently bold,  
 In *Sounds* and jingling *Syllables* grown old,  
 Still *run on* Poets in a raging Vein,  
 Ev'n to the Dregs and *Squeezings* of the *Brain*;  
 Strain out the last, dull droppings of their Sense,  
 And Rhyme with all the *Rage of Impotence!*

Such shameless *Bards* we have; and yet 'tis true, [610]  
 There are as mad, abandon'd *Criticks* too.  
 The Bookful Blockhead, ignorantly read,  
 With *Loads* of *Learned Lumber* in his Head,  
 With his own Tongue still edifies his Ears,  
 And always *List'ning to Himself* appears.  
 All Books he reads, and all he reads assails,  
 From *Dryden's Fables* down to *Durfey's Tales*.  
 With *him*, most Authors steal their Works, or buy;  
*Garth* did not write his own *Dispensary*.  
 Name a new *Play*, and *he's* the Poet's *Friend*, [620]  
 Nay show'd his Faults — but when wou'd Poets mend?  
 No Place so Sacred from such Fops is barr'd,  
 Nor is *Paul's Church* more safe than *Paul's Church-yard*:  
 Nay, fly to *Altars*; *there* they'll talk you dead;  
 For *Fools* rush in where *Angels* fear to tread.  
 Distrustful *Sense* with modest Caution speaks;  
 It still *looks home*, and *short Excursions* makes;  
 But *ratling Nonsense* in full *Vollies* breaks;  
 And never shock'd, and never turn'd aside,  
*Bursts out*, resistless, with a thundering Tyde! [630]



But where's the Man, who Counsel *can* bestow,  
 Still *pleas'd* to *teach*, and not *proud* to *know*?  
 Unbiass'd, or by *Favour* or by *Spite*;  
 Not *dully prepossess*, nor *blindly right*;  
 Tho' Learn'd well-bred; and tho' well-bred, sincere;  
 Modestly bold, and Humanly severe?  
 Who to a *Friend* his Faults can freely show,  
 And gladly praise the Merit of a *Foe*?  
 Blest with a *Taste* exact, yet unconfin'd;  
 A *Knowledge* both of *Books* and *Humankind*; [640]  
*Gen'rous Converse*; a *Sound* exempt from *Pride*;  
 And *Love to Praise*, with *Reason* on his Side?

Such once were *Criticks*, such the Happy *Few*,  
*Athens* and *Rome* in better Ages knew.  
 The mighty *Stagyrite* first left the Shore,  
 Spread all his Sails, and durst the Deeps explore;  
 He steer'd securely, and discover'd far,  
 Led by the Light of the *Maeonian Star*.  
 Poets, a *Race* long unconfin'd and free,  
 Still fond and proud of *Savage Liberty*, [650]  
 Receiv'd his Laws, and stood convinc'd 'twas fit  
 Who conquer'd *Nature*, shou'd preside o'er *Wit*.

*Horace* still charms with graceful Negligence,  
 And without Method *talks* us into Sense,  
 Will like a *Friend* familiarly convey  
 The *truest Notions* in the *easiest way*.  
 He, who Supream in Judgment, as in Wit,  
 Might boldly censure, as he boldly writ,  
 Yet *judg'd* with *Coolness* tho' he sung with *Fire*;  
 His *Precepts* teach but what his *Works* inspire. [660]  
 Our *Criticks* take a contrary Extream,  
 They *judge* with *Fury*, but they *write* with *Fle'me*:  
 Nor suffers *Horace* more in wrong *Translations*  
 By *Wits*, than *Criticks* in as wrong *Quotations*.

See *Dionysius Homer's* Thoughts refine,  
 And call new Beauties forth from ev'ry Line!

Fancy and Art in gay *Petronius* please,  
 The *Scholar's Learning*, with the *Courtier's Ease*.

In grave *Quintilian's* copious Work we find  
 The justest *Rules*, and clearest *Method* join'd; [670]  
 Thus *useful Arms* in Magazines we place,  
 All rang'd in *Order*, and dispos'd with *Grace*,  
 But less to please the Eye, than arm the Hand,  
 Still fit for Use, and ready at Command.

Thee, bold *Longinus!* all the Nine inspire,  
 And bless *their Critick* with a *Poet's Fire*.  
 An ardent *Judge*, who Zealous in his Trust,  
 With *Warmth* gives Sentence, yet is always *Just*;  
 Whose *own Example* strengthens all his Laws,  
 And *Is himself* that great *Sublime* he draws. [680]

Thus long succeeding Criticks justly reign'd,  
*Licence* repress'd, and *useful Laws* ordain'd;  
*Learning* and *Rome* alike in Empire grew,  
 And *Arts* still follow'd where her *Eagles flew*;  
 From the same Foes, at last, both felt their Doom,  
 And the same Age saw *Learning* fall, and *Rome*.  
 With *Tyranny*, then *Superstition* join'd,  
 As that the *Body*, this enslav'd the *Mind*;  
 Much was *Believ'd*, but little *understood*,  
 And to be *dull* was construd to be *good*; [690]  
 A *second Deluge* Learning thus o'er-run,  
 And the *Monks* finish'd what the *Goths* begun.

At length, *Erasmus*, that *great, injur'd* Name,  
 (The *Glory* of the Priesthood, and the *Shame*!)  
 Stemm'd the *wild Torrent* of a *barb'rous Age*.  
 And drove those *Holy Vandals* off the Stage.

But see! each *Muse*, in *Leo's* Golden Days,  
 Starts from her Trance, and trims her wither'd Bays!  
*Rome's* ancient *Genius*, o'er its *Ruins* spread,  
 Shakes off the *Dust*, and rears his rev'rend Head! [700]  
 Then *Sculpture* and her *Sister-Arts* revive;  
*Stones* leap'd to *Form*, and *Rocks* began to *live*;  
 With *sweeter Notes* each *rising Temple* rung;  
 A *Raphael* painted, and a *Vida* sung!  
 Immortal *Vida!* on whose honour'd Brow  
 The *Poet's Bays* and *Critick's Ivy* grow:

*Cremona* now shall ever boast thy Name,  
As next in Place to *Mantua*, next in Fame!

But soon by Impious Arms from *Latium* chas'd,  
Their *ancient Bounds* the banish'd Muses past: [710]  
Thence Arts o'er all the *Northern World* advance,  
But *Critic Learning* flourish'd most in *France*.  
The *Rules*, a Nation born to serve, obeys,  
And *Boileau* still in Right of *Horace* sways.  
But *we*, brave *Britons*, *Foreign Laws* despis'd,  
And kept *unconquer'd* and *unciviliz'd*,  
Fierce for the *Liberties of Wit*, and bold,  
We still defy'd the *Romans* as *of old*.  
Yet *some* there were, among the *sounder Few*  
Of those who *less presum'd*, and *better knew*, [720]  
Who durst assert the *juster Ancient Cause*,  
And here *restor'd* Wit's *Fundamental Laws*.  
Such was the Muse, whose Rules and Practice tell,  
*Nature's chief Master-piece is writing well*.  
Such was *Roscomon* — not more *learn'd* than *good*,  
With Manners gen'rous as his Noble Blood;  
To him the Wit of *Greece* and *Rome* was known,  
And ev'ry Author's *Merit*, but his own.  
Such late was *Walsh*, — the Muse's Judge and Friend,  
Who justly knew to blame or to commend; [730]  
To Failings *mild*, but *zealous* for Desert;  
The *clearest Head*, and the *sincerest Heart*.  
This humble Praise, lamented *Shade!* receive,  
This Praise at least a grateful Muse may give!  
The Muse, whose early Voice you taught to Sing,  
Prescrib'd her Heights, and prun'd her tender Wing,  
(Her Guide now lost) no more attempts to *rise*,  
But in low Numbers short Excursions tries:  
Content, if hence th' Unlearned their Wants may view,  
The Learn'd reflect on what before they knew: [740]  
Careless of *Censure*, not too fond of *Fame*,  
Still pleas'd to *praise*, yet not afraid to *blame*,  
Averse alike to *Flatter*, or *Offend*,  
Not *free* from Faults, nor yet too vain to *mend*.