

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'erlook'd each Line.
 To learn hence for Ancient Rules a just Esteem;
 To copy Nature is to copy Them.
 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,
 May boldly deviate from the common Track.
 Great Wits sometimes may *gloriously offend*,
 And rise to *Faults* true Critics *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 *Prectipice*.
 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:
 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,

138. *Stagyrite*: Aristotle, born at Stagira in 384 B.C.141. *declare*: make clear.142. *Happiness*: luckiness or felicity of expression (cf. l. 148)168. *Seizes*: in the legal sense, "to take possession of."170. *Feathers*: rhymed with *thoughts* in Pope's day.

Conceal his Force, nay seem sometimes to Fly.
 Those oft are *Stratagems* which *Errors* seem,
 Nor is it *Homer Nods*, but *We* that *Dream*.
 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 *Citine* the Learn'd their Incense bring;
 Hear, in *all Tongues* consenting *Pezans* ring!
 In Praise so just, let ev'ry Voice be join'd,
 And fill the *Gen'ral Chorus* of *Mankind!*
 Hail *Eards Triumphant!* born in *happier Days*;
Immortal Hears of *Universal* Praise!
 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 *Celestial Fire*
 The last, the meanest of your Sons inspire,
 (That on weak Wings, from far, pursues your Flights,
Glow while he *reads*, but *trembles* as he *writes*)
 To teach vain Wits a Science *little known*,
 T' *admire* Superior Sense, and *doubt* their owl

Or 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!*
 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*.

183-4. "The four great causes of the ravage amongst ancient writings are here alluded to: The destruction of the *Alexandrine* and *Palatine* libraries by fire; the fiercer rage of *Zoflus* and *Masius* [types of bad critics and writers] and their followers against Wit; the irruption of the *Barbarians* into the empire; and the long reign of Ignorance and Superstition in the cloisters" [Warburton].186. *consenting*: harmonizing, agreeing.187. *join'd*: rhymed with *kind* in Pope's day.206. *Recruits*: supplies.

207-10. The lines recall nature's abhorrence of a vacuum. For "Spirits," see l. 77a.

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,
 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 towering 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,
 Th' increasing Prospect thro' 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,
 That strutting Faults, one quiet Tenour keep;
 We cannot blame indeed — but we may sleep.
 In Wit, as Nature, what affects our Hearts
 Is not 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;
 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.

216. Pierian Spring: the Muses' fountain.

219. tempt: attempt.

240. regularly low: according to the rules (regular), but insipid.

247. Dome: any domed building, but here probably St. Peter's.

As Men of Breeding, sometimes Men of Wit,
 T' avoid great Errors, must the less commit,
 Neglect the Rules each Verbal Crittick 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;
 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 *Combat* in the Lists left out.
What! Leave the Combat out? Exclaims the Knight;
 Yes, or we must renounce the *Stagyrite*.
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 *Nevv*, 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 gitt'ring Thoughts struck out at ev'ry Line;
 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*.

261. Verbal Critick: one who devotes himself to mere details and sacrifices the spirit to the letter of the rules.

267-84. Pope found this story about Don Quixote de la Mancha in a spurious novel to Cervantes' work.

270. Dennis: John Dennis (1657-1734), a writer and critic much concerned with Greek drama. Though a critic of real merit, he was extremely irascible and inflexible of temperament (cf. 1. 585n.).

272. nice: finical, fastidious.

272. Unities: the Aristotelian dramatic unity of action, and the supposed Aristotelian unities of time and place.

282. Curious: overly careful.

282. Conceit: farfetched thought or expression.

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True Wit is Nature to Advantage drest,
 What oft was Thought, but ne'er so well Express'd,
 Something, whose Truth convinc'd at Sight we find,
 That gives us back the Image of our Mind:
 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.
False Eloquence, like the *Prismatic Glass*,
 Its gawdy Colours spreads on every place;
 The Face of Nature we no more Survey,
 All glares alike, without *Distinction* gay:
 But true Expression, like th' unchanging Sun,
 Clears, and improves what'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 express'd,
 Is like a Clown in regal Purple dress'd;
 For different Styles with different Subjects sort,
 As several Garbs with Country, Town, and Court.
 Some by Old Words to Fame have made Pretence;
 Ancients in Phrase, mear 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 awkward Vanity display
 What the Fine Gentleman wore Yesterday!
 And but so mimic ancient Wits at best,
 As Apes our Grandires 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.

308. take upon Content: accept without question.

318. decent: fitting, becoming.

321. Clown: peasant.

322-3. The subjects appropriate to "Country, Town, and Court" are probably pastoral, satire or comedy, and epic respectively.

324-5. Pope possibly glances here at Ambrose Philips (1674-1749), who had used archaic or Spenserian dialect in his *Pastorals* and whose practice Pope satirized in *Guardian* 40.

328. *Fungoso*: a character who unsuccessfully aped the fashionable in Jonson's *Every Man out of his Humour*.

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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,
 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'er you find the cooling Western Breeze,

In the next Line, it whisp'ers 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,
 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 Echo 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 Rock's vast Weight to throw,
 The Line too labours, and the Words move slow;

337. Numbers: versification.

344. Equal Syllables: mechanically placed and regular accents.

345. Pope illustrates the faults he describes in this and the following lines. Open vowels occur when a word ending in a vowel is followed by one beginning with a vowel, as in *Tho' oft, the Ear, etc.*

346. Expletives: filler words, like *do* in this line. *Join* was pronounced to rhyme with *line*.

347. A monosyllabic line (cf. ll. 107 and 226).

357. An Alexandrine, or six-foot line. Contrast the Alexandrine at l. 373.

361. Strength . . . Sweetness: Sir John Denham (1615-69) and Edmund Waller (1606-87) were commonly thought to have imparted these qualities to the closed couplet.

368-83. Lines designed as illustrations of the precept that sound should echo sense in poetry.

370-1. Cf. *The Episode of Serpedon*, ll. 97ff.

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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 *Lycian 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,
And the *World's Victor* stood subdu'd by Sound!
The Pow'r of Musick all our Hearts allow;
And what *Timotheus* was, is *Dryden* now.

Avoid *Extraneous*; 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,
For Fools *Admire*, but Men of Sense *Approve*;
As things seem large which we thro' Mists descry,
Duiness 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* sublines,
But ripens Spirits in cold *Northern Climes*;
Which from the first has shone on *Ages past*,
Enlightens 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;

372. *Camilla*: a warrior-maid in Virgil's *Aeneid* (see especially Book VII, ll. 808ff.)

374. See Alexander's Feast, or the Power of Music; an Ode by Mr. Dryden.

P. 376. *Timotheus* was a Theban musician of the time of Alexander the Great.

376. *See*: When Alexander visited the oracle of Zeus Ammon in Libya, he was proclaimed son of the god.

380. Turns of Nature: alternations of feeling.

380. *gay Turns*: felicitous turn of phrase.

398-9. Cf. Matthew 5:45: "He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust."

400. *sublines*: exalts or ripens. Pope here rejects the idea that climate imposed limitations on the minds of men.

They reason and conclude by *Precedent*,
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 Duiness* joins with *Quality*,
A constant Critick at the Great-man's Board,
To *fetch and carry Nonsense* for my Lord.

What *useful stuff* this Madrigal wou'd be,
In some starv'd Hackney Sonneteer, or me!

But let a Lord once own the *happy Lines*,
How the *Wit brightens!* How the *Style refined*
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;
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;
Who knew most *Sentences* was *deepest read*;
Faith, Gospel, All, seem'd made to be *disputed*,
And none had *Sense enough* to be *Confuted*.

Scottists and *Thomists*, now, in Peace remain,
Amidst their *kindred Cobwebs* in *Duck-Lane*.

If *Faith* it self has *different Dresses* worn,
What wonder *Modes* in *Wit* shou'd take their Turn?

418. Quality: the nobility.

419. *Hackney*: hireling.

440. *School-Divines*: medieval scholastic theologians.

441. *Sentences*: maxims (*sententiae*) of the great theologians.

444. *Scottists* and *Thomists*: followers of the Franciscan *Duns Scotus* (from whose name the word "dunce" derives) were often in intellectual conflict with the followers of the Dominican *Thomas Aquinas*.

445. *Kindred Cobwebs*: the arguments of medieval schoolmen were frequently compared to cobwebs because they seemed to be so very fine and subtle and to be spun out of themselves. *Duck-Lane*: A place where old and second-hand books were sold formerly, near *Smithfield*. P