

The Maimed Debauchee

This poem, also known as "The Disabled Debauchee," was widely circulated in manuscript in Rochester's lifetime, and has been popular ever since. Slyly mocking the braggadocio of some contemporary poems, it also undercuts the swaggering persona that Rochester had built up for himself.

As some brave *Admiral*, in former *War*
Deprived of force, but pressed with courage still,
Two *Rival-Fleets* appearing from a far,
Crawls to the top of an adjacent *Hill*;

From whence (with thoughts full of concern) he views
The wise and daring Conduct of the fight,
Whilst each bold action to his *Mind* renews
His present glory and his past delight;

From his fierce *Eyes*, flashes of fire he throws,
As from black *Clouds* when *Lightning* breaks away;
Transported, thinks himself amidst his *Foes*,
And absent, yet enjoys the *Bloody Day*;

So, when my *Days* of Impotence approach,
And I'm by *Pox* and *Wine's* unlucky chance
Forced from the pleasing *Billows* of debauch,
On the dull *Shore* of lazy temperance,

My pains at least some respite shall afford
While I behold the *Battails* you maintain
When *Fleets* of *Glasses*, sail about the *Board*,
From whose *Broad-sides* *Volleys* of *Wit* shall rain.

Nor let the sight of *Honorable Scars*,
Which my too forward *Valour* did procure,
Frighten new-listed *Souldiers* from the wars:
Past joys have more than paid what I endure.

Shou'd any *Youth* (worth being drunk) prove nice,
And from his fair *Inviter* meanly shrink,
'Twill please the *Ghost* of my departed *Vice*
If, at my *Council*, he repent and drink.

Or shou,d some cold-complexioned *Sot* forbid,
With his dull *Morals*, our *Nights* brisk *Alarmes*,
I'll fire his *Blood* by telling what I did,
When I was strong, and able to bear *Armes*.

I'll tell of *Whores* attacked, their *Lords* at home;
Bawds Quarters beaten up, and *Fortress* won;
Windows demolished, *Watches* overcome;
And handsome *ills*, by my contrivance done.

Nor shall our *Love-fits*, *Chloris*, be forgot,
When each the well-looked *Link-boy* strove t' enjoy,
And the best *Kiss* was the deciding *Lot*
Whether the *Boy* fucked you, or I the *Boy*.

With *Tales* like these, I will such thoughts inspire
As to important mischief shall incline:
I'll make him long some *Ancient Church* to fire,
And fear no lewdness he's called to by *Wine*.

Thus, *States-man*-like, I'll saucily impose,
And safe from *Action* valiantly advise;
Sheltered in impotence, urge you to blows,
And being good for nothing else, be wise.