

An Allusion to Horace

This poem is an “imitation” of the tenth poem in Horace’s first book of *Satires*, which was written in the first century B. C. E. Neoclassical poets like Rochester often did this kind of thing, a free translation of a Latin poem that updated all the references to contemporary people and events. Here, Rochester adapts Horace’s poem, originally talking about Roman satire and literature, to assess the state of contemporary English poetry, weighing the quality of some poets against others. This is Rochester acting as a maker of taste, passing judgement on contemporaries—all of them his social inferiors, of course—to in effect rank them. The poem was first written in late 1675 or 1676, and may have been a prompt to Dryden’s “Mac Flecknoe” in the way that it seems to describe Dryden as a dull if earnest writer compared to up and coming wits like Thomas Shadwell, George Etherege, and William Wycherley.

The poem circulated in numerous manuscript copies, each of which differs slightly from the others. It was first printed just after Rochester’s death in 1680 in a volume called *Poems on Several Occasions*, an edition of Rochester’s works (that included many poems *not* by him) whose title page says that it was printed in Antwerp, but that was almost certainly not; the printers, who are not named on the title page, were trying to disguise their identities. It was digitized by the Text Creation Partnership, and forms the basis of the text we print here. But it is always worth remembering that Rochester’s texts are particularly tricky, because the poems only circulated in manuscript versions, and there’s a great deal of variation between them. The 1680 printed text leaves many blanks in the space of the proper names of the poets to whom Rochester is referring, perhaps as a way of avoiding getting into trouble with some of the authors named here, who were all still around and active. Whether it was intentional or not, this also has the effect of turning the poem into a kind of

game or puzzle, as the reader has to figure out the identities of the writers to whom Rochester is referring. Some of the manuscript versions do the same thing; others fill the names in, so it is hard to know exactly what Rochester's original intentions were. Where the authors can reliably be identified, we do so in the pop-up annotations.

The 10th Satyr of the 1st. Book.

Nempe incomposito Dixi pede, &c

Well Sir, 'tis granted, I said *D-* Rhimes,
Were stoln, unequal, nay dull many times:
What *foolish Patron*, is there found of his,
So blindly partial, to deny me this?
But that his *Plays*, embroider'd up, and down,
With *Wit*, and *Learning*, justly pleas'd the *Town*,
In the same *Paper*, I as freely own.
Yet having this allow'd, the heavy *Mass*,
That Stuffs up his loose *Volumns*, must not pass:
For by that Rule, I might as well admit,
Crowns, tedious *Scenes*, for *Poetry*, and *Wit*.
'Tis therefore not enough, when your false sense,
Hits the false Judgment, of an *Audience*:
Of clapping *Fools*, assembled a vast Crowd,
Till the throng'd *Play-house*, crack with the dull load;
Though ev'n that *Talent*, merits in some sort,
That can divert the *Rabble*, and the *Court*.
Which blundring *S-*, never cou'd attain,
And puzzling *O-*, labours at in vain.
But within due proportions circumscribe
What e're you write; that with a flowing Tide,
The *Style* may rise, yet in its rise forbear,
With useless words, t' oppress the weary'd Ear.
Here be your Language lofty, there more light,
Your *Rethorick*, with your *Poetry* unite:
For *Elegance* sake, sometimes allay the force
Of *Epithets*, 'twill soften the discourse;
A jeast in scorn, points out, and hits the thing.

More home, than the *Moros Satyrs* sting.
Shake-spear, and *Johnson*, did herein excell,
And might in this be imitated well;
Whom refin'd *E-*, copy's not at all,
But is himself, a sheer *Original*.
Nor that slow *Drudge*, in swift *Pindarick* strains,
F-, who *C-* imitates with pains,
And rides a jaded *Muse*, whipt with loose Rains.
When *Lee* , makes temp'rate *Scipio*, fret, and rave
And *Hannibal*, a whining Amorous Slave,
I laugh, and wish the hot-brain'd *Fustian Fool*,
In *B-* hands, to be well lasht at *School*.
Of all our *Modern Wits* none seems to me,
Once to have toucht, upon true *Comedy*,
But hasty *Shadwel* , and slow *Wicherley*
Shadwells unfinish'd works do yet impart,
Great proofs of force of *Nature*, none of *Art*;
With just bold strokes he dashes here, and there,
Shewing great *Mastery*, with little *Care*;
And scorns to varnish his good *Touches* o're,
To make the *Fools*, and *Women*, praise'em more.
But *Wicherley*, earns hard, what e're he gains,
He wants no judgment, nor he spares no pains;
He frequently excells, and at the least,
Makes fewer faults, than any of the best.
Waller, by *Nature*, for the *Bays* design'd,
With force, and fire, and fancy unconfin'd,
In *Panegyricks* , does excell *Mankind*.
He best can turn, enforce, and soften things,
To praise great *Conquerors*, or to flatter *Kings*.

For pointed *Satyrs*, I wou'd *Buckhurst* choose,
The best good *Man*, with the worst natur'd *Muse*.
For *Songs*, and *Verses*, mannerly, obscene,
That can stir *Nature* up, by spring unseen,
And without forcing blushes worm the *Queen*.

Sidley, as that prevailing, gentle *Art*,
That can with a resistless *Charm* impart,
The loosest wishes, to the chastest heart.
Raise such a conflict, kindle such a *Fire*,

Betwixt declining *Vertue*, and *Desire*;
Till the poor vanquish't Maid dissolves away,
In Dreams all Night, in Sighs, and Tears, all day.

D-, in vain try'd this nice way of wit,
For he to be a tearing *Blade*, thought fit,
But when he wou'd be sharp; he still was blunt,
To frisk his frollique fancy, he'd cry *C-t*,
Wou'd give the *Ladies*, a *dry Bawdy bob*,
And thus got the name of Poet Squab.
But to be just, 'twill to his praise be found,
His *Excellencies* more than faults abound,
Nor dare I from his sacred Temples tear,
That *Lawrel*, which he best deserves to wear,
But does not *D-*, find ev'n *Johnson* dull?
Fletcher and Beaumont, uncorrect, and full,
Of lewd Lines, as he calls 'em? *Shake-spears* stile
Stiff and affected; to his own the while,
Allowing all the justness that his Pride,
So Arrogantly had to these deny'd?
And may not I, have leave impartially,
To search, and censure *D- Works*, and try,
If those gross faults, his choice *Pen* does commit,
Proceed from want of Judgment, or of Wit?
Or of his lumpish fancy, does refuse,
Spirit and Grace, to his loose slattern *Muse*?
Five hundred Verses, ev'ry *Morning* writ,
Proves you no more a *Poet*, than a *Wit*:
Such scribbling *Authors*, have been seen before
Mustapha, the English Princess, Forty more,
Were things perhaps compos'd in half an hour,
To write what may securely stand the *Test*,
Of being well read over *thrice* at least;
Compare each *Phrase*, examine ev'ry *Line*,
Weigh ev'ry *Word*, and ev'ry *Thought* refine;
Scorn all applause, the vile *Rout* can bestow,
And be content to please those few who know.
Canst thou be such a vain mistaken thing,
To wish thy *Works* might make a *Play-house* ring.
With the unthinking Laughter, and poor praise,
Of *Fops*, and *Ladies*, Factious for thy *Plays*?

Then send a cunning *Friend* to learn thy doom,
From the shrewd Judges of the *drawing Room*.
I've no Ambition on that idle score,
But say with *Betty M-*, heretofore,
When a *Court Lady*, call'd her *B-*, Whore;
I please one *Man* of Wit, am proud on't too,
Let all the *Coxcombs*, dance to Bed to you.
Shou'd I be troubled when the Pur-blind *Knight*,
Who squints more in his Judgment, than his sight,
Picks silly faults, and censures what I write?
Or when the poor-fed *Poets* of the *Town*
For Scraps, and Coach-room cry my Verses down?
I loath the *Rabble*, 'tis enough for me,
If *S-*, *S-*, *S-*, *W-*,
G-, *B-*, *B-*, *B-*,

And some few more, whom I omit to name,
Approve my sense, I count their censure *Fame*.