OCEAN.

AN

ODE.

OCCASION'D
By His Majesty's late Royal Encouragement of the Sea-Service.

To which is prefix'd,

An Ode to the KING: And a Discourse on Ode.

By the Author of the Universal Passion.

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ON

Lyrick POETRY.

HOW imperfect soever my own Composition may be, yet am I willing to speak a word or two, of the Nature of Lyrick Poetry; to shew that I have, at least, some Idea of Perfection in that kind of Poem in which I am engaged; and that I do not think myself Poet enough entirely to rely on Inspiration for my Success in it.

To our having, or not having this Idea of Perfection in the Poem we undertake, is chiefly owing the Merit, or Demerit of our Performances, as also the Modesty, or Vanity of our Opinions concerning them.
And in speaking of it, I shall show how it unavoidably comes to pass, that bad Poets, that is, Poets in general, are esteem'd, and really are the most vain, the most irritable, and most ridiculous set of men upon earth. But Poetry in its own nature is certainly...
ting; and because more refin'd, therefore
more difficult; and because more difficult,
therefore more rarely attain'd; and the non-
attainment of it, is, (as I have said) the
Source of our Vanity. Hence the Poes-
tick Clan are more obnoxious to vanity than
Others. And from Vanity consequentially
flows that great sensibility of disrespect,
that quick resentment, that tinder of the Mind,
that kindles at every spark, and justly marks
them out for the Genus Irritabile among
mankind. And from this combustible
temper, this serious anger for no very serious
Things, Things look'd on by most as for-
reign to the Important Points of Life, as
consequentially flows that Inheritance of
Ridicule, which devolves on them, from
Generation to Generation. As soon as
they become Authors, they become like
Ben. Johnson's angry Boy, and learn the Art
of Quarrel.

— Conocrates
But to return. He that has this Idea of Perfection in the Work he undertakes, however successful he is, will yet be modest; because to rise up to that Idea, which he proposed for his model, is almost, if not absolutely, impossible.

These two Observations account for what may seem as strange, as it is infallibly true:
true; I mean, they shew us why good writers have the lowest, and bad writers the highest opinion of their own performances. They who have only a partial Idea of this perfection, as their portion of Ignorance, or Knowledge of it, is greater or less, have proportionable degrees of Modesty, or Conceit.

Nor, (tho' natural good Understanding makes a tolerably just judgment in things of this nature,) will the Reader judge the worse, for forming to himself a notion of what he ought to expect from the Piece he has in hand, before he begins his perusal of it.

The Ode, as it is the Eldest kind of Poetry, so is it more Spirituous, and more remote from Prose than any other, in Sense, Sound, Expression, and Conduct. It's thoughts should be uncommon, Sublime, and moral;
Its numbers full, easy, and most harmonious; its expression pure, strong, delicate, yet unaffected; and of a curious felicity beyond other Poems; its conduct should be rapturous, somewhat abrupt, and immethodical to a vulgar Eye. That apparent order, and connection, which gives form, and life to same compositions, takes away the very Soul of this. Fine, elevation, and select thought, are indispensable; an humble, tame, and vulgar Ode is the most pitiful error a pen can commit.

*Musa dedit Fidibus Divos, puerosque Deorum.*

And as its subjects are sublime, its writers' genius should be so too; Otherwise it becomes the meanest thing in writing, (viz.) an involuntary Burlesque.

It is the genuine character, and true merit of the Ode, a little to startle some apprehensions.
apprehensions. Men of cold Complexions are very apt to mistake a want of vigour in their Imaginations; for a Delicacy of taste in their Judgements; and, like persons of a tender sight, they look on bright objects in their natural lustre, as too glaring; what is most delightful to a stronger eye, is painful to them. Thus Pindar, who has as much Logick at the bottom, as Aristotle, or Eschylus, to some Critics has appear'd as mad; and must appear so to all, who enjoy no portion of his own divine Spirit. Dwarf understandings, measuring Others by their own Standard, are apt to think they see a Monster, when they see a Man.

And indeed it seems to be the Amends which Nature makes to those whom she has not bless'd with an elevation of mind, to indulge them in the comfortable mistake, that all is wrong, which falls not within the narrow
narrow limits of their own comprehensions, and relish.

Judgment, indeed, that masculine power of the mind, in Ode, as in all compositions, should bear the Supreme Swaby; and a beautiful Imagination, as its Mistress, should be subdued to its dominion. Hence, and hence only, can proceed the fairest Offspring of the human mind.

But then in Ode, there is this difference from other kinds of Poetry: That, there, the Imagination, like a very beautiful Mistress, is indulged in the appearance of dominating; tho' the Judgment, like an Artful Lover, in reality carries its point; and the less it is suspected of it, the more worthyly conducts, and deserves the greater commendation.

It holds true in this Province of writing, as in war, "The more danger, the more honour."
"honour." It must be very Enterprizing, it must (in Shakespeare's Style) have hair-breadth 'Scapes; and often tread the very brink of Error: Nor can it ever deserve the applause of the real Judge, unless it renders itself Obnoxious to the misapprehensions of the Contrary.

Such is Casimire's Strain among the Moderns, whose lively Wit, and happy Fire is an Honour to them. And Buchanan might justly be much admir'd, if any thing more than the Sweetness of his Numbers, and the purity of his Diction, was his own: His Original, from which I have taken my Motto, thro' all the Disadvantages of a northern Ptole Translation, is still admirable, and Cowley says, as preferable in Beauty to Buchanan, as Judea is to Scotland.

Bindari, Anacreon, Sappho, and Horace, are the great Masters of Lyric poetry among Heathen
Heathen writers. Pindar's muse, like Sacocharis, is a stately, imperious, and accomplished Beauty; equally disdainful of the use of Art, and the fear of any Rival; to intoxicating that it was the highest commendation that could be given an Antient, that he was not afraid to taste of her charms.

Pindarici fontis qui non expalluit haustus.

A danger which Horace declares he durst not run.

Anacreon's Muse is like Amoret, most Sweet, Natural, and Delicate; all over Flowers, Graces, and Charms; inspiring Complacency, not Awe; and she seems to have good nature enough to admit a Rival, which she cannot find.

Sapho's Muse like Lady — is passionately tender, and glowing; like Oyl set on
on fire, she is soft, and warm, in excess.
Sappho has left us a few fragments only;
Time has swallowed the rest; but that little
which remains, like the remaining Jewel of
Cleopatra, after the other was dissolved at
her banquet, may be esteem'd (as was that
Jewel) a sufficient Ornament for the God-
ness of Beauty herself.

*Horace's muse,* (like One I shall not pre-
sume to name,) is Correct, Solid, and
Moral; she joins all the Sweetness, and
Majesty, all the Sense and the Fire of the
former, in the justest proportions, and de-
grees; superadding a felicity of dress en-
tirely her own. She moreover is distin-
guishable by this particularity, That she
abounds in hidden graces, and secret charms,
which none but the Discerning can disco-
very; nor are any capable of doing full ju-
stice, in their opinion, to her Excellency's;
without giving the World, at the same
time,
time, an incontestable proof of refinement in their own understandings.

But after all, to the Honour of our own Country I must add, that I think Mr. Dryden's Ode on St. Cecilia's day inferior to no composition of this kind. Its chief beauty consists in adapting the numbers most happily to the variety of the Occasion; Those by which He has chosen to express Majesty, (Viz.)

Assumes the God,
Affects to nod,
And seems to make the Spheres.

are chosen in the following Ode, because the Subject of it is Great.

For the more Harmony likewise, I chose the frequent return of Rhyme; which laid me under great Difficulties. But Difficulties

E overcome
overcome give Grace, and Pleasure. Nor can I account for the Pleasure of Rhyme in general, (of which the Moderns are too fond) but from this Truth.

But then the Writer must take care that the Difficulty is overcome. That is, He must make Rhyme consistent with as perfect Sense, and Expression, as could be expected, if He was free from that Shackle. Otherwise, it gives neither Grace to the Work, nor Pleasure to the Reader, nor, consequently, reputation to the Poet.

To sum the Whole. Ode should be peculiar, but not strain'd; moral, but not flat; natural, but not obvious; delicate, but not affected; noble, but not ambitious; full, but not obscure; fiery, but not mad; thick, but not loaded in its Numbers, which should be most Harmonious, without the least sacrifice of expression, or of Sense. Above all, in this,
this, as in every work of Genius, somewhat of an Original Spirit should be, at least, attempted; otherwise the Poet's whole Character disclaims Mediocrity, makes a secondary praise his ultimate ambition; which has something of a contradiction in it. Originals only have true Life; and differ as much from the best Imitations, as Men from the most animated Pictures of them. Nor is what I say at all inconsistent with a due deference for the great Standards of Antiquity; nay, that very deference is an argument for it, for doubtless their Example is on my side in this matter. And we should rather imitate their Example in the general motives, and fundamental methods of their working, than in their works themselves. This is a distinction, I think, not hitherto made, and a distinction of consequence. For the first, may make us their Equals; the second must pronounce us their Inferiors even in our utmost Success.

E 2

But
But the first of these Prizes is not so readily taken by the Moderns; as Valuables too much for easy carriage are not so liable to the Theft.

The Antients had a particular regard to the choice of their Subjects; which were generally National, and Great. My Subject is, in its own nature, Noble; most proper for an Englishman; never more proper than on this Occasion; and (what is strange) hitherto unsung.

If I stand not absolutely condemned by my own Rules; if I have hit the Spirit of Ode in general; if I cannot think with Mr. Cowley, that Musick alone, sometimes, makes an excellent Ode.

\( Versus \ inops \ xerum, \ nugaque \ canora; \)

If there is any thought, enthusiasm, and picture, which are as the body, soul, and robe.
robe of poetry; in a word, if in any degree, I have provided rather food for men than air for Wits; I hope smaller faults will meet indulgence for the sake of the Design, which is the glory of my Country, and my King.

And indeed, this may be said, in general, That great Subjects are above being nice; That Dignity, and Spirit ever suffer from scrupulous Exactness; and That the minuter cares effeminate a Composition. Great masters of Poetry, Painting, and Statuary, in their nobler works, have even affected the contrary. And truly; for a truly-masculine Air partakes more of the negligent, than of the neat, both in Writings, and in Life.

Grandior oratio habet Majestatis sua pondus.

PETRON.

A poem, like a criminal, under too severe Correction, may lose all its spirit, and expire. We know it was Faber imus, that was
was such an artist as a Hair, or a Nail. And we know the cause was

Qua pueri totum
Necesse — Hor.

To close, if a Piece of this nature wants an Apology, I must own, that those who have strength of mind sufficient profitably to devote the whole of their time to the severer Studies, I despair of imitating. I can only envy and admire. The mind is relieved, and strengthened by Variety; and he that sometimes is sporting with his pen, is only taking the most effectual means of giving a general importance to it. This truth is clear from the Knowledge of human Nature, and of History, from which I could cite very celebrated Instances, did I not fear, That by citing them, I should condemn myself, who am so little qualify’d to follow their example in its full extent.

O C E A N.