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The British Academy (1712)

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HARLEY (1712) AND THE BRITISH ACADEMY (1712) ***

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Series Six:
Poetry and Language

No. 1

John Oldmixon, *Reflections on Dr.*
Swift's Letter to Harley (1712);
and
Arthur Mainwaring, *The British*
Academy (1712).

With an Introduction by
Louis A. Landa

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INTRODUCTION

1

The two tracts reprinted here, as well as Swift's *Proposal for correcting, improving and ascertaining the English tongue*, which occasioned them, may be viewed in the context of the many seventeenth- and eighteenth-century suggestions for the formation of a British Academy. They are in part a result of the founding of the French Academy in 1635, although the feeling in England that language needed regulating to prevent its corruption and decline was not purely derivative. By the close of the seventeenth century an informed Englishman might have been familiar with a series of native proposals, ranging from those of Carew of Antony and Edmund Bolton early in the century to that of Defoe at the close. Among the familiar figures who urged the advantages of an Academy were Evelyn, the Earl of Roscommon, and Dryden. Of these Dryden was particularly vocal; but Evelyn's suggestion, associated as it was with the Royal Society, was rather more spectacular. In 1665 he set forth for the Society's Committee for Improving the Language an exhaustive catalogue of the forces tending to the corruption of the English tongue. Those, he declared, are "victories, plantations, frontiers, staples of commerce, pedantry of schools, affectation of travellers, translations, fancy and style of court, vernality and mincing of citizens, pulpits, political remonstrances, theatres, shops, &c." There follows Evelyn's careful formulation of the problems facing those who would refine the language and fix its standards.

This sense of the corruption of the language and of the urgent need for regulation was communicated to the eighteenth century, in which a number of powerful voices called for action. Early in the period Addison advocated "something like an Academy that by the best Authorities and Rules ... shall settle all Controversies between Grammar and Idiom" (*The Spectator*, No. 135). He was followed by Swift, who in turn was followed by such diverse persons as Orator Henlay, the Earl of Orrery, and the Earl of Chesterfield. Curiously, Johnson's appears to be the only weighty voice in opposition: "the edicts of an English Academy," he insisted, "would probably be read by many, only that they might be sure to disobey them."

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But if the two tracts reprinted here may be viewed in this context, they may also be seen from another vantage--as part of the interminable wrangling in the period between Whigs and Tories, even over a matter so apparently non-political as the founding of an Academy. Since it was Swift's "petty treatise on the English Language"--the epithet is Johnson's--which provoked these two replies, we must look briefly at his handiwork. Swift was undoubtedly guilty of pride of authorship with respect to his *Proposal*, which appeared on May 17, 1712, in the form of a *Letter to the Earl of Oxford*. He had touched on the problem earlier in the *Tatler* (No. 230), but this is a more considered effort. In June, 1711, he first broached to Harley the idea of "a society or academy for correcting and settling our language," and with Harley's approval he began to compose the *Letter*. Yet it was eight months before the document reached Harley and another two months, during which it circulated among friends, before Swift retrieved it for the printer. Thus, and this fact has significance, the *Proposal* had its inception and its first consideration in the Tory circles attached to the Harley ministry. A few days before its publication Swift wrote to Stella: "I suffer my name to be put at the End of it, wch I never did before in my Life."

Now this willingness to publish under his own name also has a special significance. It is not merely, as is often assumed, that he cherished the project, though very likely that played a part. He was motivated, I am convinced, by a desire to flaunt the *Proposal* as a party document. It is true that he wrote to Stella two weeks after its publication that "there are 2 Answers come out to it already, tho tis no Politicks, but a harmless Proposall about the Improvement of the Engl. Tongue." "I believe," he added, "If I writt an Essay upon Straw some fool would answer it." But this disclaimer is ingenuous in the light of the political overtones in the *Proposal*; for example, the extended praise of Barley as one who saved his country from ruin "by a foreign war and a domestic faction." In fact, the lengthy panegyric of the Lord Treasurer, as well as other matter, is bluntly and deliberately partisan. It

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could not conceivably have been interpreted otherwise by contemporaries; nor could Swift have been unaware of its provocative impact upon his readers. Oldmixon remarks ironically of this part the *Proposal*--and small wonder that he does--that it is "incomparable, full of the most delicate Eulogy In the World." Furthermore Swift knew, in view of his position as leading writer for the Tory ministry, that to sign his name was to invite attack--even if he wrote, as he says, upon straw.

There is no doubt he thought the formation of an Academy a matter of great importance. Why then did he deliberately introduce controversial elements and thus make impossible a discussion of his proposal wholly on its merits? I suggest as a possible answer that he wished the Whigs to dissociate themselves from the project and that he used the tactics expected to achieve this end, in the desire that entire credit for the founding of the Academy should rest with Harley and Harley's supporters. The partisan approach was therefore shrewdly calculated to provoke opposition and to avoid any leaven of Whiggism in the "institution and patronage" of the Academy. Swift wanted the contemporary prestige, as well as the favorable verdict of posterity, to be unmistakably placed. Nevertheless there was no intention of excluding meritorious Whigs from the original membership--only, as is clear from Swift's attitude, from the "institution and patronage" of the Academy. In a list of Academicians drawn up by Swift and Harley, unhappily not extant, members of both parties were included--so Swift wrote to Archbishop King in Dublin, and there is no reason to doubt it. Even Oldmixon grudgingly reports that Swift had promised "the Whigs that they shall come in if they will." However violent his partisanship at times, Swift could and did respect merit; and Harley was always ready to placate individual members of the Opposition. There is therefore no need to take seriously, as Oldmixon and the authors of *The British Academy* pretend to do, the list of potential members of the Academy printed first in the *Amsterdam Gazette* and quoted in *The British Academy*. It will be seen at a glance that they constitute that dinner group of Tory "Brothers," the Society to which Swift belonged, a group sufficient for its avowed purpose--"to advance conversation and friendship, and to reward deserving persons" -- but of course he would not have accepted them *in toto* for the Academy.

4

The Whig writers began their attack on the *Proposal* immediately. In the *Medley*, founded by Mainwaring and Oldmixon "to provide an Antidote against the Poison of the Examiner," there is a brief reference in the issue of May 19-23, 1712, to "the very extraordinary Letter to a Great Man," followed in the next issue by an extended political attack with the *Proposal* as the point of departure. Thus at the outset Swift's pamphlet was treated as a party document. At the same time the Whig writers were readying two pamphlets in answer, both announced in the *Medley* of May 19-23 as soon to be printed. Apparently neither of these appeared, at least not under the announced titles; but by May 26 Oldmixon's *Reflections* had been published anonymously and was referred to in the *Medley* as "a very ingenious Pamphlet." As any reader of the *Reflections* will observe for himself, the pamphlet opens on a violent political note and sustains it throughout. Although Oldmixon is more concerned to level charges against Swift--a lewd, irreverent cleric, a turncoat, a party scribbler, etc.--than to deny the validity of Swift's views concerning the language, he does directly challenge certain points. And he arrives at a conclusion which may well have been the result of honest conviction rather than mere party opposition: that it is neither desirable nor possible to fix the language forever. In a sense this was the chief issue, and the one where the authoritarian view as represented by Swift and others was most vulnerable. Is it possible, by the edicts of an academy however eminent its members and respected its authority, to negate or control the principle of change inherent in language? Unfortunately Oldmixon did not live long enough to see his attitude aggressively expounded by one of greater stature who also took issue with Swift, both in the *Preface to the Dictionary* and in the life of Swift.

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The British Academy, published May 30, 1712 (advertised in the *Spectator* of that date), is of composite authorship. The one person known to have had a hand in it--"a great Hand," says Oldmixon--is Arthur Mainwaring (*The life and posthumous works of Arthur Maynwaring, Esq.* [London, 1715], p. 324; this is the source of most of our knowledge of Mainwaring.). The identity of Mainwaring's collaborators is a matter of conjecture. Perhaps the most eligible are those who assisted with the *Medley*, as Steele, Anthony Henley, and White Kennett. Among other possibilities are such active Whig writers as Thomas Burnet and George Duckett; and even Oldmixon cannot be ruled out. Doubtless Mainwaring was the inspiring spirit--of this as well as other attacks on the group surrounding Harley. Poet, ardent Jacobite convert to Whiggism, member of the Kit Kat Club, member of Parliament, and Auditor of the Imprest, Mainwaring had a brief but full career. It included a part in the *Whig Examiner* and chief responsibility for the *Medley*. In the course of his political opposition he appears to have developed a genuine hatred of Swift, to whom he always referred, if Oldmixon's word can be trusted, as "one of the wickedest Wretches alive." By May, 1712, when *The British Academy* was published, he was already ill of the disease which ended in his death a few months later; but he seems to have retained his vigor and his clear intelligence to the end. *The British Academy* is shrewdly conceived to cast odium on Swift's proposal for an Academy by identifying its potential members as a Tory faction and the whole project as merely a scheme to provide Harley with a set of pensioners who would be obliged in gratitude "to revere his Virtue and his Memory." Whereas in the *Reflections* Swift is assaulted with hard obvious blows, in *The British Academy* a more subtle intelligence is evident: the attack is oblique and ironic, and a tone of Addisonian urbanity is fairly well maintained. Nevertheless it is not as literature that these two answers to Swift are to be judged. They are minor, though interesting, documents in political warfare which cut athwart a significant cultural controversy.

-- Louis A. Landa
Princeton University

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REFLECTIONS

ON

Dr. *Swift's*

LETTER

TO THE

Earl of *OXFORD*,

ABOUT THE

Englilh Tongue.

LONDON:

Sold by *A. Baldwin* at the *Oxford Arms* in
Warwick-Lane. (Price Six Pence.)

THE

PREFACE

THE Bold Manner of publishing the Letter for correcting, improving, and ascertaining the *English Tongue*, made me conclude there was something very extraordinary in it, and more than any one could expect from Persons that were never thought to trouble themselves much about Fine Language. But upon dipping into it, I found there was nothing worthy the Character the Author acquir'd by other Ingenious Pieces in our Tongue, tho' I confess, it was not so much for the Beauty of his Style as for other Qualities, some of which a Divine need not brag of.

'Tis probable, our late Correspondence with France put such a Whim into some Folks Heads, and because they have an Academy for the same Use at Paris, we forsooth must have one at London. The Foreign News, which sometimes tells us more Truth of our doings here than our own, has the very Names of the Members of the Academy which the Doctor speaks of. I do not find that it is come to any thing more yet than meeting over a Bottle once a Week, and being Merry. At which Times People mind talking much, more than talking well. I shou'd have taken what is printed in the Amsterdam Gazette to have been only a dull Dutch Jest upon those Men, if this Letter had not been written, and some broad Hints given, that we are to be happier than we thought of, and to be surpriz'd with a Society that shall make us as Polite as that of Reformation has made us Godly; and I wish it may answer the Ends of it with all my Heart. But the more I reflected upon this Project and the Projectors, the more I was diffident of it, for the Reasons mention'd in the following Pages.

I know very well the Epistle has but a sorry Reputation, even with the Writer's own Party, that it is looked upon as a silly superficial Performance, and to be design'd only for an Opportunity to shew what a Nack he has at Panegyrick. Be that as it will, after I had consider'd the Subject he writes more leisurely than I was won't to do, I was loth to lose those Considerations; and having put 'em into this Form, I flatter'd my self the Publick would not receive them ill; at least all those whom Faction and Prejudice have not render'd Insensible of Truth and Reason, and to such, a Man must be well set to work that writes a Task suitable to the Integrity and Ability of Abel and his Brethren, among whom I am very unwilling to reckon our Author.

REFLECTIONS

ON

Dr. *Swift's* Letter,

ABOUT

Refining the ENGLISH TONGUE.

I Should be guilty of the greatest Folly in the World, if I should go about to give a Character of Persons of whom I have no manner of Knowledge. To speak well or ill of 'em wou'd be equally Ridiculous and Dangerous: For it must be all Invention, and I might then abuse a Man both in my Praise and Dispraise. It is thus with me with Respect to the Author of the Letter lately publish'd about our Language, and to his Patron. I know neither of them, and if I say a Word more than themselves, or the World have said of them, I must have recourse to Fiction, which I

cannot think of without abhorrence, where Reputation is concern'd.

That good old Church Martyr the Earl of *Strafford* was of Opinion, *Common Fame* was enough to hang a Man, as in the Case of the Duke of *Buckingham*, when he was impeach'd by the Commons for Male Practices in his Ministry; and there were no better Grounds for accusing him, than that every Body said so. I am quite of another Mind, and let the World say what they will of any one, I am for condemning no body but whom the Law Condemns, and therefore in these Reflections I shall not consider so much how to please the Spleen of one Party, as how to expose the Arrogance of another, who would lord it over us in every Thing, and not only force their Principles upon us, but their Language, wherein they endeavour to ape their good Friends the *French*, who for these three or fourscore Years have been attempting to make their Tongue as Imperious as their Power.

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This most Ingenious Writer has so great a Value for his own Judgment in Matters of Stile, that he has put his Name to his Letter, and a Name greater than his own, as if he meant to Bully us into his Methods for pinning down our Language and making it as Criminal to admit Foreign Words as Foreign Trades, tho' our Tongue may be enrich'd by the one, as much as our Traffick by the other. He would have it *corrected, enlarg'd and ascertain'd* and who must do it? He tells you with great Modesty and Discernment in the 27th Page, *The Choice of Hands should be left to him*, and *he would then assign it over to the Women*, because they are softer mouth'd, and are more for *Liquids* than the Men, as he try'd himself in a very notable Experiment. I wonder a grave, serious Divine, who is so well vers'd in College Learning, should in Compliment to a certain Lady, whose Breeding and Conversation must have given her wonderful Opportunities to refine our Tongue, imagine, that the Two Universities would give up so Essential a Branch of their Privileges to the Ladies, and take from them the Standard of *English*. This puts me in mind of *Fontenelle's* way of Learning a Language, which he recommends to be by having an Intrigue with some Fair Foreigner; and beginning with the Verb *I Love, You Love, &c.* It is well enough from Him, a *Papist*, or *Layman*, but for a Protestant Divine to erect an Academy of Women to improve our Stile, is very extraordinary and gallant, and little agrees with the cruel Quotation of the Author of *the Tale of a Tub*, p. 163.

Page 28.

B2

Cunnus Teterimi Belli

Causa

That Excellent Moralist has not been pleas'd to discover himself, nor to Print his Name, but has set his Mark to his Works, which he has Embellish'd with new Flowers of Rhetorick, that shew what a Genius he has for refining Language, and how happily one may use the Figures of Cursing, Swearing, and Bawdy, which before were entirely exploded. Tho' we cannot well suppose the Writer of that *Merry Tale* is any way related to the Author of the Letter, yet out of my great Zeal to promote his Project of polishing Us, I must refer to some shining Passages in that incomparable Treatise, and let the World judge if any Man can be more fit to Preside in a Society for refining the *English* Tongue.

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4

Z---nds where's the wonder of that? By G--- I saw a large House of Lime and Stone travel over Sea and Land. By G--- Gentlemen, I tell you nothing but Truth, and the Devil broil them eternally that will not believe me. If there is any Thing like this in our Language from the lewdest of our Stage-Writers, I give them over to Mr *Collier* and the Reformers to do with them what they please. Yet I am inform'd these Florid Strokes came from the Pen of a Reverend Doctor, who has sollicitated lately for a Deanery, and sets up mightily for a Refiner of our Tongue, which he would adorn with some more such graces of Speech; as, *Lord, what a Filthy Croud is here; Bless me! what Devil has rak'd this Rabble together; Z---nds, what squeezing is this! A Plague confound you for an overgrown Sloven? Who in the Devil's Name, I wonder, helps to make up the Crowd half so much as your self? Don't you consider with a Pox, that you take up more room with that Carcass than any Five here? Bring your own Guts to a reasonable Compass, and be d---d.* I tremble while I repeat such Stuff, which I defy any Man to match in any Language, Dead or Living, *Pagan* or *Christian*; and yet this is the Eloquence, as is pretended, of a sound Orthodox Divine; one of the Champions of our Church, and the design'd Chairman of a new Academy to reform and improve our Stile. I shall only add here another Flower in p. 101. *If you fail hereof G---damn you and yours to all Eternity*, says the same Reverend Author, whose Works on some other Occasion I shall examine, as to their Divinity, Piety, and other Merit, that the World may see on what Foot that Author has establish'd his Fame, and how judiciously a Man of his Cloth made himself first known to the World. Whether the late *Examiner*, the *Miscellanies in Prose and Verse* publish'd by *Morphew*, and some more such Political and Pious Productions, did not come from the same Hand, I shall not determine. They are generally said to be written by the same Person, and how nearly related that Person is to our Letter Writer, is as well known as that he is a Doctor of Divinity, and hopes to make his Fortune by Preferments in that Church of which he is so bright an Ornament, as appears by what has been already quoted; by which one may perceive, how well qualify'd he is to form Schemes, for the *refining of our Tongue*, and the *Advancement of Religion*; of both which he has written. The latter does not come under Consideration so naturally in

Tale of a Tub.
p. 109

Preface, p. 21.

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this Discourse as it will in another, and therefore it shall be deferr'd till such an Opportunity offers. Perhaps Our Elegant Writer will pretend to justify these Innovations in our Speech, for which the best Critick upon him would be my Lord Chief Justice, by the Example of our Modern Poets, and the Oaths and Curies of the Stage, where I never heard any thing so very Lewd, in Defiance of our Religion, Laws, and whatever is held Sacred by Christians, and Protestants. If he had a hand in the *Conduct of the Allies*, the *Remarks*, and other such Factious Papers, as is reported, and he never once thought fit to disown, being more Proud of the Honour done him in it, than asham'd of the Falshood and Scandal of those Libels, it is no strange Matter that a Man of such a Conscience should do or write any Thing; Cursing and Swearing being not so bad as the Robberies that Libeller has committed on the good Name of the best and greatest Men of this Age and Nation.

6

The merriest part of the Project he has been hatching, for an *English Academy* to bring our Tongue to his pitch of Perfection, is that he has assign'd, that Task to the *Tories*, whose Wit have so distinguish'd them in all Times. If there had ever been a Man among 'em who had a right Notion of Letters or Language, who had any relish of Politeness, it had been something. But as there never was one, unless it were two or three Apostate Whigs who had been bred up by the Charity of those Friends they deserted, that had any smattering of Learning, except in Pedantry, nor Tast of any Books but *Eikon Basilike*, and the *Thirtieth of January Sermons*; 'tis amazing that he shou'd be so foolish as to fancy, that Learning which always goes by the Stile of Common-wealth, would submit to the Arbitrary Government of an Ignorant and Tyrannical Faction. Nor is it at all strange, that those, who by their Practices and Principles, have for above Fourscore Years been doing their utmost to Enslave us, shou'd always have a Contempt for Wit and Eloquence, which ever have been the Friends of Reason and Liberty.

7

Whoever reads the Thirty Fifth Chapter of *Longinus* will find, that 'tis impossible for a Tory to succeed in Eloquence, and that if they cannot impose so far on Men's Understandings, as to make Fustian pass for Oratory, their Project of an Academy, will be as Chimerical as if they shou'd flatter us with a Trade and Settlements in the Moon. The Reader will not be displeas'd, to see what the Ancients thought of the Capacity of Men of such Principles in Matters of Eloquence, and let a long Experience among us, prove the right Judgment the *Philosopher* in *Longinus* made of them 1500 Years ago. He is treating of the *Causes of the Decay of Humane Wit*; *I can never enough admire*, said he, *how it came to pass, that there are so many Orators in our Times, and so few of 'em rise very high in the Sublime; so Steril are our Wits now a Days; is it not*, continues he, *because what is generally said of Free Governments, that they nourish and form great Genius's is true? especially, since almost all the Famous Orators that ever flourish'd and liv'd died with them? Indeed, can there be anything that raises the Souls of Great Men more than Liberty; any thing which can more powerfully excite and awaken in us that Sentiment of Nature which provokes us to Emulation, and the glorious desire of seeing our selves advanc'd above others? Add to this, that the Rewards propos'd in such Governments, whet and perfectly Polish the Orators Wit and make 'em cultivate the Talents Nature has given them; insomuch, that we see the Liberty of their Country shine in their Orations.* He goes on, *but as for us, who were early taught to endure the Yoke of Domination, and have been, as it were, wrapt up in the Customs and Ways of Arbitrary Rule; who in a Word, never tasted that living and Flowing Spring of Eloquence and Liberty; we commonly, instead of Orators, become pompous Flatterers, for which reason, I believe a Man Born in Servitude, may be capable of other Sciencies, but no Slave can ever be an Orator, since when the Mind is depress'd and broken by Slavery, it will never dare to think, or say any thing bold. All its Vigour evaporates of it self, and it remains always as in Bonds; in short, to make use of Homer's Expression.*

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*The Day that makes a Free Born Man a Slave,
Robs him of half his Vertue.*

It is observable, that *Boileau* has no manner of remark on all this Passage; it wou'd not have agreed with his Pension, from his Master the *French King*, to have said a Word in praise of it, nor with his Conscience to have condemn'd it; but *Dacier*, who had a *Hugonot* Education, observes speaking of Liberty, shining in the Orations of Orators living in Free States, that as those *Men are their own Masters, their Mind us'd to this Independence, produces nothing but what has the Marks of that Liberty, which is the Principal Aim of all their Actions.*

C

9

Now what a Friend the Letter writer, is to Liberty, we may see in the *Examiner* of the 26th of *April*, 1711, which, tho', it may be he did not Write himself, whatever some People say to the contrary, he and his Party have sufficiently own'd to make them accountable for every Word in that and the rest of them. The reason why *Publick Injuries are so seldom redress'd is for want of Arbitrary Power*, he calls it *Discretionary*; 'tis true, and if I have wrong'd him, by putting Arbitrary in its Place; I ask his Pardon.—

Having said thus much of his Party in general, I might descend to Particulars, and examine the sufficiency of the Characters of his Academicians, a List of them being

handed up and down, in which the Author is not forgot. It is set off with Names that must not be repeated, and amongst the rest are a Doctor or two, two or three Poets and Tell Tales, and that Learned and Facetious Person Mr. *D—ny*, whose very Name gives unspeakable Hopes of the Progress of such a Society, in refining our Language, which he and most of his Brethren are so great Masters of, that if twenty of the List will oblige us with as many Lines of Common Sense and Common Grammar, I will be bound to read every thing that shall be publish'd by this Famous Academy, that is to be or under their Auspices, tho' I had much rather change that Pennance for *Ogilby* and *Blome*. To give us the better *Idea* of his *Scheme*, he has consulted with very *Judicious Persons*; we may judge of what truth there is in his *Panegyricks*, by that of the deceas'd *Examiner* on himself; where he says, *he had written with so much Reputation, and so much to the Confusion of the Whigs, that they themselves have a Value for his Person and Abilities, tho they have an Aversion to his Cause*. Of the same size, I doubt not, are the able and judicious Persons he has consulted about his Design, which must be own'd to be very good in it self, and capable of such Improvement as wou'd make it one of the Glories of Her Majesty's most Glorious Reign. But alas, he will never have the Honour of it. A Noble Lord, on whom he has written *Libels* and *Encomiums*, was the first that thought of such a thing, and some Years since nam'd forty Gentlemen to be Members of an Academy, on a Foundation refining on the *French* of which Number I am very well satisfy'd, not a Man of his most Illustrious Band wou'd ever have been, and that tho' he is so generous as to promise the Whigs that they shall come in if they will, he must look 'em out better Company, or his Academy will have the Glory of this great Work to themselves. Indeed the way is prepar'd for them to *Immortality*, two *English Grammars* having been publish'd within this Twelvemonth, and it remains to him and his Fraternity, to add a *Dictionary* worthy those Immortal Labours; for which, there are not a Set of Men in *England* better qualify'd, and so equal to so honourable a Task.

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C2

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One wou'd think, that towards advancing this Scheme, all the *Literati* of this Kingdom had sent their Powers to Him. That all the Whigs as well as Tories had entrusted him with their Proxies; for he says *I do here in the Name of all the Learned and Polite Persons of the Nation complain, &c.* Whereas whatever has been brag'd by him in other Papers of the Nine in Ten, being on his side for the Land and Church Interest, not nine in a thousand will trust him with that of Wit. And I do here in the Name of all the Whigs, protest against all and every thing done or to be done in it, by him or in his Name; being a Person with whom they will have no manner of Dealings, as he very well knows, or they might now have had him Scribbling for them as well as when that Discourse was written of *the Contests and Dissentions of the Nobles and Commons in Athens and Rome*, wherein it is said, *'tis agreed, that in all Governments there is an absolute unlimited Power which naturally and originally seems to be plac'd in the People in the whole Body; wherever the Executive part lies; again, this unlimited Power plac'd fundamentally in the Body of a People, &c.* and that he wrote better than he has done since is not to be wonder'd at, if there is any truth in what *Longinus's* Philosopher says.

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It would be a poor Triumph to convict him of an Error in History 1700 Years ago, where he tells us, That *Cæsar* never attempted this Island; *no Conquest was ever attempted till the Time of Claudius*, since I do not find that he or his Brethren have any Notion at all that Truth is necessary in History: For they deny what was done Yesterday, as frankly as if it had been in *Julius Cæsar's* Time; yet he himself has been sometimes forc'd to confess the Power of Truth, and pay Allegiance to it; as where he says, the great Reason of the Corruption of the *Roman Tongue was the changing their Government into Tyranny, which ruined the Study of Eloquence*; and because the *Whigs* shall have a Share in it, he adds, and their calling in the *Palatines, their giving several Towns in Germany the Freedom of the City*. A very pleasant Reason that; for when the *Roman Language* was in the height of its Purity in the *Augustan Age*, the Cities of *Asia* and *Africk* were admitted to that Privilege, as much as the *Europeans* were afterwards; and yet it cannot be pretended the *Moors* were naturally more Polite than the *Germans*. It is plain therefore this was a Party Stroke in favour of the *Naturalization Act*, to shew what Inconveniences it hinders by preventing Foreigners coming among us to debauch our Stile, as may be seen by the prodigious Number of *Dutch Words* that *K. William* brought with him into *England*.

Another Instance of the forc'd Homage he pays to Truth, is his blaming *the Slavish Disposition of the Senate and People of Rome, by which the Eloquence of the Age was wholly turn'd into Panegyrick*. Now considering how many Pages he has prodigally bestow'd upon it, in the very Letter I am taking cognizance of is it not very odd he should call Panegyrick a *Slavish Disposition*, and worse still that he should term it the *most barren of all Subjects*; what if I could prove, that above half of his Three Sheets of Paper are of that kind of Panegyrick, which is so fatal to great Men. The *Greeks* said, *Flatterers were like so many Ravens croaking about them, and that they never lifted a Man up but as the Eagle does the Tortoise, in order to get something by the fall of him*.

13

It is a sad Case, when Men get a habit of saying what they please, not caring whether True or False: Who can without pity see our Letter Writer accuse the Famous *La*

Bruyere, for being accessory to the declining of the *French Tongue*, by his Affectation; when it is notorious, that *La Bruyere* is the most masterly Writer of that Nation, and that his Affectation was in the Turn of his Thought, which he did to strike his Readers, who had been too much us'd to dry Lessons to receive any Impression by them. He says, he has many Hundred *New Words, not to be found in the Common Dictionaries before his Time*. I should be glad to know, who are those Lexicographers, whose Knowledge in the *French Tongue* he prefers to *La Bruyere's*; since *Richelet* and the *Academy* are not of his *Æra*, I should rejoyce with him, if a way could be found out to *fix our Language for ever*, that like the *Spanish Cloak*, it might always be in Fashion; but I hope he will come into Temper with the Inconstancy of Peoples Minds, of which he complains, and that we are in no Fear of the Invasion and Conquest he talks of, comforting himself, *that the best Writings may be preserved and esteem'd*, meaning his own and his Friends, which no doubt would fare much better than Mr. *Locks* or Mr. *Hoadly's*; for Conquerors are not us'd to take much Care of those that write against them.

14

I like extremely his rejecting the Old Cant of *Forty One*, and giving the *great Rebellion* its true Name *Forty Two*: But, if I had been he, I would not have named it at all. For there are a great many Men in *England*, who, tho' they were not concern'd in it themselves, yet they do not love to hear of it, for the sake of those that were; and it certainly was an Error in delicacy to touch upon so tender a Part, no Man of Honour caring to have his Father and Grandfather call'd Rogue and Rebel to his Face, especially if such Grandfather or Father had no other Fault in the World but his Rebellion; which after so many Acts of Oblivion, and a Revolution besides, can not be a Crime of that Nature, as to last to the 3d and 4th Generation. He is much to be commended however for his Impartiality, and pleading Guilty to the Charge of the *Whigs*, that the *Licentiousness* which enter'd with the *Rystauration*, infected our Religion and Morals. How it corrupted our Language I can't imagine, when the greatest Master of it Arch-Bishop *Tillotson*, flourish'd all that Time; but I find he is more conversant in the Court Poetry and the Plays, than the other elegant Writings of those Times: Be it as it will, he would lay an Infinite Obligation upon us, if he would recommend us to any Author in the Reign of King *Charles* the Martyr, which he distinguishes as the Golden Age of Politeness; who wrote with the Purity of *Dryden*, *Otway*, and *Etheridge*, and with less Affectation, which in Comick Writings is unavoidable, and in the best never us'd but to be expos'd. Yet the *Poets* he affirms have *contributed very much to the spoiling the Tongue*: And who would he have to restore it? Himself, and his Brethren. Himself a Poet of Renown, and who, if he would once speak his Mind, I make no question is Prouder of his *Elegy upon Patridge*, and his Sonnet on Miss *Biddy Floyd*, than of all His Prose Compositions together, or even that elegant Poem, call'd *The Humble Petition of Frances Harris*, which is the Pink of Simplicity.

15

*Therefore all the Money I have, which God knows is a very small Stock,
I keep in a Pocket ty'd about my middle, next my Smock:
So when I went to put my Purse, as God would have it, my Smock was unript,
And instead of putting it into my Pocket, down it slipt.
Then the Bell rung, and I went down to put my Lady to Bed,
And God knows, I thought my Money was as safe as my Maidenhead.*

16

There is a great deal more of it, all as Easy and Natural as this, in the true Stile of Mrs. *Abigail*, and just as Amphibuous. It is as much Poetry as Prose, Pretty and Innocent, according to the Rules of Criticism; which the Author has taken more care not to break, than the First Commandment; tho' one wou'd think it was his Business to have been mindful of it; and if he had left the Smock to be unript by the Butler, it wou'd have done every whit as well. I cannot help taking notice, that the Clamour he raises about the Poets of King *Charles* the Second's Reign, the only Age of Poetry in *England*, is for their Contractions and leaving out the *Eds* and *Eths*, wherein he offends intollerably in this very Dogrel of his. Who wou'd have said *Smock unript and down it slipt*, and not *unripped* and *slipped*; there is a waggery in it much better than any *Hudibrastick*; for it wou'd have run thus:

*So when I went to put my Purse as God wou'd have it, my Smock was
unripped,
And instead of putting it into my Pocket down it slipped.*

D It will be no Authority with him, that Mr. *Dryden* commonly contracted the Syllables that end in *Ed* or *Eth*. He was a Poet, and tho' certainly in most cases the sound is sweetned by it, yet it offends those who are not for losing a Letter, and were they *Frenchmen*, would doubtless be for pronouncing every one of them, as well as Writing, to the great strengthning of that Enervate Tongue, which languishes in reading for want of the *Ez's* and *Er's*, so barbarously mangled in Pronunciation. A great Lord, and one who wou'd be worthy of a Place, which is deny'd him in this Academy, having written against my Lord *Rochester* in an *Essay upon Poetry*, Mr. *Wolseley*, attacks the *Essayer* in a Preface written on purpose, and printed before *Valentinian*, wherein he has criticis'd on his Lordship's Poem, and on these two Lines in particular.

17

That Author's Name has undeserved Praise,

Who pall'd the Appetite he meant to raise.

Where he observes the Advantage the Verse had in the *Ed*, for without it it must have hobbled on Nine Feet instead of Ten. *What does that Ed*, says he, *in undeserved do there? I know no Business it has, unless it be to crutch a Lame Verse, and each out a scanty Sense; for the Word that is now used is Undeserv'd. I shou'd not take notice of such a Thing as this, but that I have to do with a giver of Rules, and a Magisterial Corrector of other Men; tho' upon the observing such little Niceties, does all the Musick of Numbers defend. But the Refinement of our Versication is a sort of Criticism, which the Essayer, if we may judge of his Knowledge by his Practice, seems yet to learn; for never was there such a Pack of Stiff ill sounding Rhimes put together as his Essay is stuff'd with: To add therefore to his other Collections, let him remember hereafter, that Verses have Feet given 'em either to walk gracefully and smooth, and sometimes with Majesty and State like Virgils, or to run light and easy like Ovid's, not to stand stockstill like Dr. Donne's, or to hobble like indigested Prose: That the counting of the Syllables is the least Part of the Poets Work, in the turning either of a soft or a Sonorous Line; that the Ed's went away with the ^AFor to's, and the Until's in that general^A Rout that fell on the whole Body of the thereon's, the therein's, and thereby's, when those useful Expletives, the altho's and the Unto's, and those most convenient Synalæpha's 'midst, 'mongst, 'gainst, and 'twixt, were every one cut off; which dismal Slaughter was follow'd with the utter Extirpation of the ancient House of the hereof's and the therefrom's, &c. Nor is this Reformation the Arbitrary Fancy of a Few, who would impose their own Private Opinions and Practices upon the rest of their Countrymen, but grounded on the Authority of Horace, who tells us in his Epistle de arte Poetica, that Present Use is the final Judge of Language, (the Verse is too well known to need quoting)^B and on the common Reason of Mankind, which forbids us those antiquated Words and obsolete Idioms of Speech, whose worth Time has worn out, how well soever they may seem to stop a Gap in Verse, and suit our shapeless Immature Conceptions; for what is grown Pedantick and unbecoming when 'tis spoke, will not have a jot the better grace for being writ down. This Gentleman's Opinion, and that of others, which agrees with his, justify'd by the Example of all the Polite Writers in King Charles the Second's Reign, which probably may be the Augustan Age of English Poetry, is not to warrant the Affectation of such as are for the *Can'ts*, the *Don'ts*, the *Won'ts*, the *Shan'ts*, &c. but to refer to the Ear the cutting off those useless Syllables the *Ed's* and *Eth's* both in Verse and Prose; and I question whether any one wou'd not be better pleas'd to hear *disturb'd* read than *disturbed*, and *rebuk'd* than *rebuked*, tho' the Doctor wonders how it can be endur'd.*

How intolerable must those two Lines of *Hudibras* be to him then, on more Accounts than one.

*Hence 'tis that 'cause y' 'ave gain'd o' th' College
A quarter Share at most of Knowledge.*

Where there are almost as many Abbreviations as there are Words, and I question whether the being an *Hudibrastick* is sufficient to excuse it, if it is, otherwise inexcusable; perhaps the Reader may not be displeas'd to see the Lines that follow, which are no great Digression from our Subject.

*Y' assume a Pow'r as absolute,
To judge and censure and controul,
As if you were the sole, Sir Poll;
And sawcily pretend to know
More than your Dividend comes to.
You'll find the Thing will not be done
With Ignorance and Face Alone:
No, tho' y' have purchas'd to your Name,
In History so great a Fame,
That now your Talent's so well known
For having all belief out grown
That every strange prodigious Tale
Is measur'd by your German Scale,
By which the Virtuosi try
The Magnitude of every Lye, &c.*

Which may very well be introduc'd as often as one has occasion to speak of the late *Examiner*, or any one that belongs to him. Let this Learned Doctor and his new Academy do their utmost to furnish our Language with what the *French* call *Chevilles*, with his *Thoroughs*, *Althoughs*, and the whole Army of antiquated Words before-mention'd; I can't imagine Mr. *Dryden's* Poetry will be in any Danger of becoming unintelligible, tho' he has us'd Abbreviations as much as any Polite Writer; and will preserve that Character when the Doctor's is forgotten, unless we should return to our Original Barbarity, as he says we incline to do. He complains the Refinement of our Language has hitherto been trusted to *illiterate Court Fops*, *Half-witted Poets*, and *University Boys*. He would have a thin Society, if he should exclude all such from his own Academy: And if the Choice be in himself, as he seems to insinuate, I believe the Reformation of our Language would have just as much

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success as the Reformation of our Manners, which, 'tis said, none have more corrupted than the very Reformers. He gives us his Word, That *the Style of some great Ministers very much exceed that of any other Productions*. Where I wonder are the Instances of this Excellence? In Speeches in Parliament, for themselves or others, or what Works of theirs has been communicated to him, that he should know more than all Mankind? One would think he was their Master by what he says, in the next Page, *What I have most at Heart, is some Method for ascertaining and fixing our Language for ever*. Now you must know, that this Reverend Author, who is so concern'd for the Fixing our Language, has himself a Style of a very deficient Character; in which the Reader will perceive how much we shou'd be *improv'd*, by having his manner *ascertained and fixed*; for doubtless he thinks his own the best, and his Friends know no better than to be of his Mind. *He would be more comprehensive*, says an Author of Note, *if he would alter and correct his Style, which is too loose and diffus'd in all Conscience. So that when I read him sometimes for a good while together, tho' I go on very evenly and smoothly, I find it difficult to recollect what I have been doing, and whether I have been reading or sleeping. My present Advice to him therefore is, that he would study Tacitus, and such other Politicians as say much in few Words: And if he obstinately persists in the same Childish fondness for his Style, I shall be obliged to shew in how small a Compass the whole Substance of what he says, may be contained. All this vile Drudgery will I submit to for his sake, &c.* But so little likelihood there is of his mending his Style by reading *Tacitus*, that he defies him and charges him with the Corruption of the *Roman Tongue*, by saying that in Two or Three Words, about which such a Genius as he is might have employ'd Twenty or Thirty. This Brevity he calls Affectation, and assures us, it brought Barbarisms into the *Latin Tongue*, even before the *Goths* invaded *Italy*. However he exposes his own Ignorance, he should have been careful not to have discover'd his Friends: Does the *Translation* of the *Bible* teach us to understand *Fairfax*? Are that and the *Common-Prayer* the Standard of Language? Yet he affirms, that without them one cou'd not understand any thing written a hundred Years ago. Whereas the *Jerusalem* of *Fairfax* is older than that, and whoever reads it will find the Language as new as any can be expected from the New Academy these Fifty Years. For our Tongue is not so variable in the best Authors as the Doctor represents it, and the difference between the present *English* and the *English* a Hundred Years ago, is not so great as between the Old and Modern *French* in that Term. Of all the Parts of Learning, that is surely the least ally'd to Politeness that deals in Old Musty Manuscripts, and affects a Knowledge in Tongues which have not one Polite Book to recommend them. How such a Quality can be serviceable to the Advancement of Wit and *Eloquence*, I cannot conceive; but there are some Characters in the World, that encroach upon all others, and some Men that for their Interest will say any thing that comes uppermost, either for or against another. The Knowledge of Tongues is certainly very useful; but if a Person knows a great many Ancient and Modern, and can hardly speak intelligibly in his own, He shou'd be no Orator for me. I would no more value his Learning than Sir *Hudibras's*, of which the Doctor puts me in mind more than once by his Compliments, especially of this Passage in the first Canto.

*We grant, altho' he had much Wit,
He was very shy of using it,
As being loth to wear it out.
And therefore bore it not about,
Unless on Holydays or so,
As Men their best Apparel do.
Besides, 'tis known he could speak Greek
As naturally as Pigs squeak:
That Latin was no more difficile
Than to a Blackbird 'tis to whistle;
Being rich in both he never scanted
His Bounty unto such as wanted;
But much of either wou'd afford,
To many that had not one Word:
For Hebrew Roots altho they're found
To flourish but in barren Ground,
He had such Plenty as suffic'd
To make some think him circumcis'd.*

The rest of Sir *Hudibras's* Merit in Letters is of a Piece, and set off with a Puritanical Air, that renders the whole truly Ridiculous, and makes a good Comment on several Pages of the Doctor's Epistle, which is most valuable for the great Judgment and Sincerity that he has shewn in it.

It has already been observ'd, that *Horace* asserts *Osse* to be the only Rule of Language; and the Letter-Writer repeats what he says, *of Words going off and perishing like Leaves, and new ones coming in their Places*,^C which he tells us did not approve of *Horace*, notwithstanding his own Law of paying Obedience to usage. For if that were necessary, what, according to our Author, would become of his *Monumentum Ære perennius*? Did not the *Roman Tongue* even by his own

confession, change as much as ours has done. *The Latin Three Hundred Years before Tully was as unintelligible in his Time as the English and French of the same Period are now.* And the Corruptions afterwards by the *Barbarians* made it as different from *Cicero's* as *Ennius's*; yet amidst all those variations, *Horace's Works* are still *Monumentum ære perennius*. When a Tongue is come to any degree of Perfection, whoever writes well in it will Live; there's a Thirst after Wit in all Ages, and those that have a Taste of it will distinguish the Thought from the Diction. *Chaucer* will, no doubt, be admir'd as long as the *English Tongue* has a Being; and the Changes that have happen'd to our Language have not hinder'd his Works out living their Contemporary Monuments of Brass or Marble.

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The Doctor may as well set up a Society to find out the *Grand Elixir*, the *Perpetual Motion*, the *Longitude*, and other such Discoveries, as to fix our Language beyond their own Times. The Test of their Successors will vary with the Age, and their Rules grow obsolete as well as their Words. He would make us believe, that the *French Academy* have not been able to preserve their Language from Decay, and who are the Men in *Britain* who pretend to greater Genius for Eloquence than the most Polite of the Politest Nation in *Europe*. Mr. *Waller* Elegantly complains of the Change which necessarily happens to Stile, and does it however in Language which shews, that the Doctor need not be afraid of People's forgetting his Patron a Hundred Years hence, if he can write as good *English* upon him now, as Mr. *Waller* did on this Subject Threescore Years ago.

*But who can hope his Lines should long
Last, in a daily changing Tongue,
While they are new, Envy prevails,
And as that dies, our Language fails.*

*When Architects have done their Part,
The Matter may betray their Art,
Time, if we use ill Chosen Stone,
Soon brings a well-built Palace down.*

*Poets that Lasting Marble seek,
Must carve in Latin or in Greek,
We write in Sand, our Language grows,
And like our Tide, Ours overflows.*

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Our Author sees *no necessity of this Changing our Language*. What has been the Fate of all Tongues Ancient and Modern, and for the same Reasons will Eternally be so, he wou'd defend ours from, because the Chinese *have Books in their Tongue above 2000 Years Old*; And a History of 30000 Years Period with a Succession of Kings, 20000 Years before *Adam*. It wou'd be a Discovery worthy those Men who have lately been reconciling Contradictions, and building Arguments upon Nonsense, to find out that *certain Standard for our Tongue, to which, if it were refin'd, he assures us, it might be fixt for Ever*. This wou'd be doing what was never done before, what neither *Roman* nor *Greek*, which lasted the longest of any in its Purity, could pretend to. And this would not be the only strange thing that has lately happen'd to us, which never happen'd to a Nation before. It will be in vain to pretend to *ascertain* Language, unless they had the Secret of setting Rules for Thinking, and could bring Thought to a Standard too. For every Age, as well as every Nation, has its different manner of Thinking, of which the Expression and Words will always have a Relish, and be Barbarous or Polite, according as the Times take their Turn. If from the abundance of good Sense which appears lately in every thing we do, The Doctor can demonstrate, that we never were in a better way towards the Perfection of Thought and Language, let him set about his Academy as soon as he pleases. But if the contrary is apparent, it may not be improper to wait for some more propitious Opportunity. Besides, there will in all times be irregular Genius's, who out of Humour will prefer Affectation to Nature, and mistake Novelty for Beauty. *Boileau* in his Reflections upon *Longinus*, has several Observations of this kind, which will shew the difference between true and false Judgment, by comparing what he writes with several Passages in the Doctor's Letter; he is speaking of the Famous *Ronsard* and his Imitators, *Du-Bellai*, *Du Bartas*, *Desportes*, and other *French Poets* in the Reigns of *Henry III.* and *IV.* who were in great Fame for a long while, and when he wrote, sunk into the last Contempt. *The same among the Romans*, says he, *was the Fate of Nævius, Livius, and Ennius,*

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who in *Horace's* time had a great many Admirers as that Poet informs us, but at last they were entirely decry'd. And it must not be imagin'd that the Fall of these Authors, as well *French* as *Latin*, was owing to the Change of their Languages. The true Reason was, they did not know how to hit the Point of Solidity and Perfection in those Languages, which is necessary to make a Work last, and set a Value upon it for ever. In effect, the *Latin Tongue*, as it was written by *Cicero* and *Virgil*, was very much chang'd in *Quintilian's* Time, and still more in the Time of *Aulus Gellus*. However *Cicero* and *Virgil* were then more esteem'd than even in their own Time, because they attain'd the height of Perfection, of which I have spoken. It is not therefore on account of the antiquated Words and Expressions in *Ronsard*, that *Ronsard* has lost the Reputation he once had, but because the

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Beauties which were thought to be in him, appear'd all at once to be no Beauties at all.

Thus we see, that in order to bring us to the degree of Perfection with which the Doctor flatters us by means of his new Academy, they must teach us first to think justly, to distinguish false Beauty from true, and glaring from Brightness, to banish those that write by Humour, and receive only such as aim at Solidity in their Writings. How the Celebrated *Tale* of a Tub will come off then with the best Judges, I can easily guess, that excellent Treatise being much of the same nature as *Rabelais*, of whom *La Bruyere* says, *Rabelais is incomprehensible: His Book is an inexplicable Enigma, a meer Chimera; It has a Woman's Face, with the Feet and Tail of a Serpent, or some Beast more deform'd. 'Tis a Monstrous Collection of Political and Ingenious Morality, with a Mixture of Beastliness; where 'tis bad 'tis abominable, and fit for the Diversion of the Rabble, and where 'tis good 'tis exquisite, and may entertain the most delicate.*

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People very often apply those Faults to the Expression and Words which are originally in the thought. The Merit of such as write by Humour, Changes with the Mode, and their Language savouring of their Sentiments, must of course grow out of Fashion. *Ronsard* the *French* Poet was so far from writing ill *French*, that *Pasquier* thought the *French* Tongue in its Perfection in his Writings and yet upon the Appearance of *Malherb* and *Bacan*, he was no more read nor talk'd of; Whereas there were Authors before him, whose Writings are now in general Esteem, as *Marot* and *St. Galais*, for the kind of Poetry in which they excell'd, and their Stile is imitated for its Simplicity, by which *la Fountain* acquir'd his Fame.

Instances of this kind may be given in our own Tongue, which has improv'd in Refinement as much as the *French*. Our *Shakespear* shone on the Stage, with all the Qualities of a Dramatick Poet, and *Diction* in particular, when the *French* Stage was Barbarous. His Style has its Beauties now, and is newer than many who have since Writ, and for a while with Reputation.

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Among all the various ways in which we of late have endeavour'd to endear our selves to the *French*, and make 'em forgive us for beating them so, nothing certainly will oblige 'em more than our affecting to imitate them in our Political Style. Of this Nature is that Novelty the Reverend Author has introduc'd into our Language, where the Term *Prime Minister* has no more a Place than *Will and Pleasure*. Pray who among the many Ministers Her Majesty is so happily serv'd by, does she Honour with that Name, and how comes it that *Prime* does not go with Precedence? What Law of ours Impowers any body to order our Language to be *Inspected*, and who is there that wou'd think himself oblig'd to obey him in it? Is there no difference between the Ministers of a Despotick Monarchy, and the Servants of a limited one, who have no Rule but the Law, and are as accountable to it as the vilest of their Flatterers. We see how our Tongue would be improv'd and enlarg'd, had the Doctor and his Brethren the ordering of it. He has already impos'd on us the Court Style of *France*, and their Politicks wou'd soon come after it. He pastes a particular Compliment on our Tongue and his Patron, that they have not Merit enough to subsist a Hundred Years without mending. As bad as our *English* is, I'll engage it will subsist in the History of another great Man of this Nation, as long as the Names of *Edward* the III. or *Henry* V. shall be remembered in *Britain*. There being some Characters so illustrious that without the Ornaments of Stile or the Beauties of Wit, they Shine in their Native Dress, and make every thing look Glorious about them. Others there are which require all the Advantages of Language and Invention, and darken every Thing that comes near them. The best of it is, the Contempt with which he treats the *English* Tongue, is not like to do it any harm, for whatever becomes of any ones History a Hundred Years hence, the Doctor's will certainly be of much shorter Date, unless his Censurers should preserve the Memory of him, or he thinks fit to own at last some other of his Productions, when 'tis probable Fortune has done her best or her worst for him.

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I have several very good Reasons why, if I were to be of this Academy, I would banish the word Dozen out of our Dictionary, and the Doctor has no doubt his to be fond of it, and fixing it there for ever. The *French* King says *he has given about half a dozen Pensions to Learned Men in several Parts of Europe, and perhaps a dozen in his own Kingdom*; which, he said, purely out of Affection to the Word Dozen, because he knew full well the *French* King bestows Pensions on a Hundred Men in several Parts of *Europe*; and on a Thousand in his own Kingdom, who excel in Arts and Literature, *which, including the whole, do not amount to half the Income of many a Private Commoner in England*. Whereas I will engage to name Him a Hundred Pensions in *France* that have been given to Men of Letters, every one of which shall amount to more than half the Income of a dozen Lords, let me have the naming of them too. The History of his Reign, which has been so long Writing, has cost him near threescore Thousand Pounds Sterling. *Boileau* himself, after he had liv'd a Life of Affluence and Pleasure, keeping a Country-House and City-House, dy'd worth above Five or Six Thousand Pounds, which he had wholly from the King. Not to mention the Rewards *Racine*, *Valincourt*, and other Poets and Historians had, who were employ'd about his History; Nor those to all Academies of Sciences founded by him, and the great Pensions he allow'd the Professors. The prodigious Expences he has been at in

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Printing only at the *Louvre*, would perhaps amount to a Sum equal to the whole Income of several Dozens that might be thought of above the Rank of Commoners.

The last Pages of the Doctor's Book are incomparable, full of most delicate Eulogy in the World, which I cannot read without calling to mind that Verse of *Despreaux* to Monsieur *Seignelai*.

F *Tout Eloge imposteur blesse une ame sincere.*

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To paint a *Mecænas* like a *Mars*, and confound Men's Qualities, is a Stale Practice of sordid Flatterers, which Men of Merit reject with Disdain.

*Un Cœur Noble est content de ce qu'il trouve en lui.
Et ne Supplaudit point de Qualitez d'autrui.*

A great Soul scorns to usurp another's worth, and is always content with its own.

The Doctor seems to have an Opinion, that every body loves Flattery as well as himself, and will take any Thing kindly that is said in their Favour. A little more Sincerity would not be amiss in the Composition of a Clergy-man and if this is the way to get the *Medal* he talks of, it will be dearly purchas'd.

I shall be heartily glad to see some of those Productions from Men above Money, that shall deserve the Laurel he has prepar'd for them. People, I doubt not, will crowd to get their Scripions in, as they do to get Money into the Lottery; but certainly, the Society will take care of themselves, and if there's any thing to be got have the Forestalling of the Market. The Design itself is useful, and cannot meet with too much Encouragement, Her Majesty, always willing to promote the Good of our Country, will, it is hop'd, hearken to it in due time; but if it *be defer'd till Peace* there will be no great Harm in it, tho' he is pleas'd to rally one of the late M——rs, as much above his Satyr as his Panagyrick, for being so silly as to prefer Necessity to Convenience.

34

The want of a *Grammar* and *Dictionary* has been long complain'd of; and we cannot expect our Tongue will ever spread abroad, unless Foreigners are put into a more regular Method of learning it. To distribute Rewards to Merit, is the Duty of a good Ministry, and nothing contributes more to the Glory of a Country than Works of *Eloquence* and *Wit*; but he has assum'd a Post that will not be allow'd him. He has set himself in the Director's Chair of an *English Academy*; before he has past Examination whether he is fit for a Place at the Board; Members are nam'd that have no Right to such Honour, unless it is a Privilege that is Inseperable from their Posts and Peerage; and he has given us Assurance of fine Pieces of *Wit* and *Eloquence* from a Quarter it never yet came.

Projectors, like Quacks, promise Wonders but 'tis always the Labour of the Mountain—I might enlarge on this Head if I had not run my Reflections too far already.

I shall therefore conclude with a Discription of one of those Quacks and Pretenders, as I find it in the Speech of the famous *Alexander Bendo*, who, as much a Quack as he was, understood our Tongue and our Constitution as well as the Doctor and his Master.

35

Reflect a little, says he, *what a kind of Creature a Quack is*. Mind what follows. *He is one who is fain to supply some higher Ability he pretends to with Craft. He draws great Companies to him by undertaking strange Things which can never be effected.* The rest is so valuable, that tho I digress'd in it Ten times more than I do, I would present the Doctor with it, and leave it to his serious Consideration.

The Politician by his Example, no doubt, finding how the People are taken with specious, miraculous Impossibilities, plays the same Game, protests, declares, promises, I know not what things, which he is sure can ne'er be brought about. The People believe, are deluded, and pleased; the Expectation of a future Good, which shall never befall them, draws their Eyes off of a present Evil. Thus they are kept and establish'd in Subjection, Peace and Obedience, and he in Greatness, Wealth, and Power: So you see the Politician is, and must be a Quack in State Affairs and the Quack (no doubt if he thrives) is an Errant Politician in Physick.

FINIS.

THE
BRITISH
ACADEMY:
BEING A
New-Erected SOCIETY

FOR THE
Advancement of Wit
and Learning:
WITH
Some few OBSERVATIONS
upon it.

—*Hæ Tibi erunt Artes: Pacisq; imponere
Morem. Virgil.*

LONDON:
Printed in the Year MDCCXII.

Price Two-pence.

A2

THE

1

British Academy, &c.

SUCH is our Case at present, that if we have a Mind to be agreeably entertain'd with the State of our own Affairs, we must look into Foreign Papers, rather than into those that are publish'd here by Authority; and therefore I often read the *Dutch* Prints with the same Eagerness and Pleasure, as the *French* at *Paris* read the *Post Boy*. If we have no good News for Our selves here, we may sometimes find some from *Holland*; and what is good, is so rare, that I had rather have it from any Place, than not at all. I was so delighted with the following Paragraph in the *Amsterdam Gazette* of the 20th of *May* 1712. *N.S.* that I cou'd not help transcribing, and turning it into *English*, that such Comfortable Tidings to *Men of Obscure Merit*, might be convey'd all over the Nation. And I shall endeavour to prove, that the Design there mention'd, is much likelier to succeed in *England*, than ever it was in *France*.

The Words of the *Dutch Gazette* are as follows, ^D in the Article from *London*.

Il s'est formé ici depuis peu une Societé pour recompenser & encourager le Mérite, par report aux beaux Arts. Elle doit être composée de 21 Membres, dont il y en a déjà 19 d'Arretez savoir les Ducs de Beaufort & d'Ormond; les Comites d'Arran & d'Orrery: les Lords Duplin, Gendre du Grand Tresorier; Harley, Fils dudit Tresorier; Lansdowne, Secetaire des Guerres; Masham & Bathurst: les Chevalier Windham: Messieurs St. Jean, Secetaire d'Etat: Harcourt Fils du Garde des Seaux; Raymond Solliciteur-General; les Colonels Hill & Desney; Swif, Docteur en Theologie; Prior Arbuthnott, Medicin de la Reine; & Friend, Medicin du Duc d'Ormond. Ces Messieurs, qui ont reservé de Nommer les Deux autre, Membres lors qu'ils le jugeront à propos, s'assemblant tous les Jeudis, & ont déjà fait des gratifications à quelques Auteurs dont les ouvrages ont été goûtez, & recommandé d'autres aux Ministres d'Etat pour avoir quelque Etablissement.

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There has been lately form'd here a *Society to Reward and Encourage Merit, with respect to the Liberal Arts and Sciences*. It is to be composed of 21 Members, of which Number there are already 19 chosen: That is to say, The Dukes of *Beaufort* and *Ormond*; the Earls of *Arran* and *Orrory*; the Lords *Duplin*, Son-in-Law of the Great Treasurer; *Harley*, Son of the said Treasurer; *Lansdown*, Secretary of War; *Masham* and *Bathurst*; Sir *W. Windham*; Mr. *St. John*, Secretary of State; *Harcourt*, Son of the Lord Keeper; and *Raymond*, Sollicitor-General: The Colonels *Hill* and *Desney*; *Swift*, Doctor of Divinity; *Prior*, *Arbuthnott* the Queen's Physician; and *Friend*, Physician to the Duke of *Ormond*. These Gentlemen who have deferr'd naming the other Two Members till such time as they think fit, do now assemble every *Thursday*, and have already given Rewards to some Authors, whose Works have been approved of, and have recommended Others to the Ministers of State, that they may have some Establishment.

This Fact being thus fairly related, the Reader is desired to observe, That it was in the Year 1629, under the single Ministry of Cardinal *Richlieu*, when a Society of such great Wits was first form'd at *Paris*; which was soon after establish'd, by an Edict of the King, with the Style and Title of the *French Academy*. And it is left to be determin'd by all Judicious Readers, whether this *British Seminary* of Wit and Learning is not a Copy of that Renown'd Society in *France*; and whether the Design and Model of it has not been approved of there, since our happy Correspondence with that Ingenious Nation.

The *French Society* consisted only at their first Meeting, of Seven or Eight Men of Letters, who met together to talk about their Books and Writings: And it was some time before Monsieur *Servien*, Secretary of State, and other Persons, distinguish'd by their Condition, as well as by their Merit, were added to the Company. But here we see the *British Society*, at the very first Formation of it, is compos'd of no less than Two Dukes, not only capable of *Rewarding*, but of Judging, as well as of Writing: And likewise of Two Earls; Five Lords; One Knight; One Secretary of State; Two Colonels of Foot, and One Squire: Not to mention the Lawyer; the Doctors; the

A4

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Religious Priest; and the Poet. What therefore may we not expect from the future Progress of this Society, which sets out with so much greater Lustre, than that of its Original at *Paris*; so famous now all over *Europe*.

The Great End and Business of the *French Academy*, was to correct and refine their Language, as may be seen at large in the History of that Academy, written by Monsieur *Pelisson*: And we have already a Proposal, publish'd the 17th of *May* 1712, for *Correcting, Improving, and Ascertaining the English Tongue*, in a Letter to the most Honourable Robert Earl of Oxford and Mortimer, Lord High Treasurer of Great Britain: By Jonathan Swift, D.D.

Louis, King of France, by Letters Patents, in the Year 1635, having mention'd the Great Things done for the Glory and Embellishment of *France*, by his dearly belov'd Cousin the Cardinal *Richlieu*, His Principal Minister of State, gives that Minister Power and Authority to call himself the Chief, and the Protector of the *French Academy*: And doubtless the Scheme of this *British Academy* is form'd with a View no less Glorious; That the Great and Memorable Actions of this *Minister*; the mighty Things perform'd for the Allies and the Common Cause; the vast Successes against the Enemy; and, above all, the Restoring of Credit, and Paying the Publick Debts, may be fairly transmitted to Posterity.

That this is the chief Design of our *new Erected Society*, is plainly insinuated by the Author of the Letter before mentioned; for which the Reader may please to see his own Words: *If Things go on*, says he, *at the present Rate*, (that is, if our Language be not corrected, improved, and ascertain'd,) *all I can promise your Lordship, is, That about Two hundred Years hence some painful Compiler, who will be at the Trouble of studying old Language, may inform the World, that in the Reign of Queen ANNE, ROBERT Earl of OXFORD, a very Wise and Excellent Man, was made High Treasurer, and saved his Country.* [Mark those last Words, pray, as you go along.] *Thus much he may be able to pick out, and willing to transfer into his New History; but the rest of your Character which I, or any other Writer, may value our selves by drawing: And the Particular Account of the great Things, done under your Ministry, for which you are already so Celebrated in most Parts of Europe, will probably be dropt.* So far that Author: But I cannot help differing with him in one Particular: For I am firmly of Opinion, that altho our Language should happen not to be *improved* or *ascertain'd*, yet the *great Things* done by that *very Wise and Excellent Man*, will not so easily be forgotten; nor the *rest* of his Character be *dropt*, for which he is already *so celebrated in most Parts of Europe*.

Besides, as there seems to be an Exact Agreement between the intended Protector of this Society, and that of the *French Academy* in its Infancy, there can be no Doubt but the great Work will be carried on after much the same Manner, and under the same Statutes and Regulations. And it appears in Monsieur *Pelisson's* History of the *French Academy*, That every Member of it, both Present and Future, Friend or Foe, was oblig'd in Gratitude to their Protector, to *revere his Virtue and his Memory*. The *British Academicians* being therefore under the same Obligation, how is it possible that their *Protector's Vertue or Memory* should ever be forgotten?

And there is one considerable Advantage, which our New Academy will have above the *French*. For it appears by the History just mention'd, that after the *French King* had given his Consent, that his dear Cousin should be Chief of the Academy, the Parliament could not for a long while be brought to confirm the Patent. And Monsieur *Pelisson* gives the Reasons of it. *Cardinal Richlieu*, says he, *having carried the Royal Authority a great deal higher than any one had done before him; tho belov'd by some, was envy'd by others, hated and detested by many, fear'd and dreaded by all.* His Creatures, continues he, *talk'd of this Design with excessive Encomiums.* Never, said they, *were the past Ages possess'd of so much Eloquence as ours is like to be. We shall out-do all that went before us, and all that shall come after. And the greatest Share of the Glory will redound to the Academy and the Cardinal.* Others, on the contrary, *treated this Design as ridiculous. They accused the Academy as aiming to give Laws to Things not susceptible of them, and were perpetually falling upon them with Jests and Satyrs. Distrustful People could not tell but there might be a Snake in the Grass; and were afraid the establishing this Society would be a new Support of his Domination, that they were only his Pensioners, maintain'd by him to justify all his Actions, and make Observations on those of others.* These were the Difficulties in France: But our New Society need fear no such Opposition as the *Frenchmen* found from their Parliament of *Paris*. Our *Parl—t* will most certainly be as forward to pass an Act in Favour of them and their Protector, as they have been to do so many great Things already for him and the Nation, and even to pass a Vote in his Praise. Besides, there is no Body can pretend that *he has ever carried the Royal Authority higher than any one had done before him*; nor can it be imagin'd that he has a thousandth Part of the Enemies that Cardinal *Richlieu* had: And I am fully persuaded, that all Things being consider'd, both at Home and Abroad, there is not a Man in the World that *envies* him. And tho he has been suspected to *maintain Pensioners to justify his own Actions, and make Observations on those of others*; yet, whoever will look carefully over the List of the Members, must needs acquit him of that Calumny, and confess, that he who pick'd out such a Set of *Wits and Patrons*, could have no such base Thoughts in his Head.

When the *French Academy* had settled their Statutes, the next Thing they did was to get a Seal. And what was the Impression? Why, only their Protectors Picture; not engrav'd like a *Seneca's* Head, but drawn at length with a modest Word on the Reverse. *To Immortality*. Something like this may be very easily done here. But I am not for putting on the Reverse, *the Bill for the Protestant Succession*; tho it may be seen in the Protector's Hand at Sir *G. Kneller's*: For that is too gross, even for a common Picture. But what think you of his own Head on one Side and Twelve Lords on the Reverse? Or since all other Societies have taken their *Motto's* from the Old World, suppose he fetch'd one from the New; and clapp'd his own Face upon the Frontispiece,

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with this Word on the Reverse, written in Cyphers, *THE SOUTH-SEA*.

I have but one or two Objections to the Statutes in *France*, which I cannot get over. One is, they must not meddle with Matters of Religion. This might have very ill Consequences, and hinder their Top Wit from shewing his Talents: I mean that Orthodox Divine, who it is well known was never half so witty upon any other Subject, as upon that of Religion. Another Law of theirs that gives me Offence, is, The Law by which they are oblig'd to judge of no-body's Works but their own. For perhaps our Academy may not be in a Humour to write any Thing these Hundred Years, except a Trifle now and then, as an *Examiner*, a *Conduct*, a *John Bull*, or so. All which Works are allowable, because the *French* Statute says, *Political Matters may be treated of conformably to the Authority of the State*.

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There was one Rule more among the *French* Academicians, that will never do in *England* which is their forbidding the Academy's Certificate to be printed before the Writings of the Members, and allowing 'em only to put, *Par un tel de l'Academie Francoise*; As if one should say, *By such a Person of the British Academy*. This would make mad Work here: Every little *Grubstreet* Scribler would presently be publishing his Trash, with the stolen Title of *My Lord such a one, or Brigadier such a one, of the British Academy*. And how should we be able to distinguish the Right from the Wrong, unless their License be printed before in Form, like a Privilege Royal, *To our Trusty and Well-beloved Abel Roper, of London, Bookseller*.

Having just mention'd *Abel*, it puts me in Mind of a certain Officer belonging to the *French* Academy, call'd a Library-Keeper. This was given to one *Camusat*, the most Eminent Bookseller then in *Paris*: And I presume no body will say that Trusty *Abel* is not the fittest Man in *England* for that Office: He being supposed not only to have printed, but even to have father'd some considerable Works of the most Elegant of all our Academicians.

12

There's nothing else very remarkable in the Laws of the *French Academy*, except their forbidding any Member to write in their Defence, which it is probable will be thought worth observing here. For if our Society should pretend to answer every impertinent Thing that will be written against them, they would be finely set to Work. If therefore they should happen to be daily pelted at, the shortest way will be to despise their Opponents, and to consider themselves as Persons above the Reach of Malice; incorporated under a glorious Protector for some good End or other; and in daily Expectation of having a Charter and an Act of Parliament to back them; and of being made Wits by the Laws of the Land.

I cannot conclude without observing how pat every Thing happens: The *French* Society met on *Thursdays*. So the News tells us, the *English* do; with this good difference: The *French* met after they had din'd. The *English*, they say, dine together, and drink a chearful Glass afterwards; which has great Efficacy in Matters of Wit and Eloquence, as well for those that are to *write*, as those that are to *reward*. Wine is therefore call'd *Generous*, and is as nearly ally'd to Wit, as Wit is to Madness. How much wittier are some Men over the third Bottle than over the first! A strong Reason that the Meeting should be at a Tavern, and not any private House, which the *French* Academy found very inconvenient; for whenever the Members, at whose Houses they met, took a Fancy to Marry, their Wives turn'd the Wits out of Doors; as it happen'd in the Case of Monsieur *Conrart* and some others. Thus they were driven from one place to another, till their Protector got them a Room in the King's own Palace; which cannot conveniently be done in *England* whilst Lodgings are so scarce: And therefore I hope they will drink on as they do, till *Whitehall* is rebuilt. And here I will leave them for the present: When their two other Members are chosen, it may perhaps be not unseasonable to acquaint the Publick with the further Progress of this hopeful Society; and to shew all the World how far we not only imitate or copy, but even excel our Friends the *French*. In the mean time, I hope, some of their best Writers will be order'd to give us a short Touch or Essay of their Eloquence, upon *our late Glorious Enterprize against the French, on Tuesday the 20th of this present May, under the Command of his Grace the D. of Orm—d*.

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FINIS.

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Transcriber's Notes

The word "tho'" appears both with and without final apostrophe.

Italics

In this section, the Italic (body text) and Roman (emphatic) types are garbled. As printed:

*that the Ed's went away
with the For to's. and the Until's in that
general Rout that fell on the whole Body of*

... that the Ed's went away with the For to's. and the Until's in that general Rout that fell on the whole Body of ...

Corrected in e-text to:

... that the Ed's went away with the For to's, and the Until's in that general Rout ...

Horace, *Ars Poetica* (or *De Arte Poetica*), ll. 52-61

B. Horace, who tells us in his *Epistle de arte Poetica*, that Present Use is the final Judge of Language, (the Verse is too well known to need quoting)

C. what he says, of Words going off and perishing like Leaves, and new ones coming in their Places

et nova fictaque nuper habebunt verba fidem si
Graeco fonte cadent, parce detorta. quid autem
Caecilio Plautoque dabit Romanus ademptum
Vergilio Varioque? ego cur, acquirere pauca [55]
si possum, invideor, cum lingua Catonis et Enni
sermonem patrium ditaverit et nova rerum
signatum praesente nota producere nomen.
ut silvae foliis privos mutantur in annos,
prima cadunt ita verborum vetus interit aetas [60]
et iuvenum ritu florent modo nata vigentque.

Il s'est formé ...

Except for clear typographical errors, the French text was left unchanged because it is impossible to know where the errors originated. All accents are as printed.

les Comites: Modern form is *Comtes*.

les Chevalier Windham : Error for *le Chevalier ...*

Fils du Garde des Seaux: Possible error for *Sceaux*. In modern French, *seau* is a coal scuttle while *sceau* is a seal (here, Lord Keeper of the Seal).

Swif: Error for *Swift*.

Prior Arbuthnott: Missing punctuation such as , or ; between names.

Medicin du Duc: Spelling *Medicin* unchanged.

les Deux autre: Error for *autres*.

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