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Remarks On The Life and Writings Of Dr. Jonathan Swift, Dean of St. Patrick's, Dublin

Orrery, John Boyle of

London, 1752

Of Milton.

[urn:nbn:de:hbz:466:1-49109](https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:hbz:466:1-49109)

AND WRITINGS OF DR. SWIFT. 151

His seeming arrogance gained him more favour, than the humility and affected benevolence of others. His railery and freedom of censure, are conveyed in a manner more prevalent, and perhaps often more agreeable than flattery. He seldom praised, but where merit was conspicuous. A single stroke of his pen pleased more, and gave more honour, than a long flattering dedication from any other author. His style was masterly, correct, and strong: never diffusive, yet always clear; and, if we consider it in comparison with his predecessors, he has outdone them all, and is one, perhaps the chief, of those few select English writers, who have excelled in elegance and propriety of language.

Lord BACON is the first author, who has attempted any style that can be relishable to the present age, for I must own to you, that I think SWIFT, and his contemporaries, have brought our language to the utmost degree of perfection, without the help of a LONGINUS, a QUINTILIAN, or even of a dictionary, or a grammar. Lord BACON has written with an infinite fund of knowledge: every science that he treats upon, is discussed by him with the greatest learning and dignity, and he shews himself at once a philosopher, an historian, a politician, and a divine: but his dialect (for, that demands our present attention) is quibbling and pedantic; and never more so than when he condescends to flatter his royal master, and the minions of that court.

Consider the prosaical works of MILTON, you will find them more nervous than elegant; more distinguished by the strength of reason, than by the rules of rhetoric;

toric; his diction is harsh, his periods tedious; and when he becomes a prose-writer, the majesty, that attends his poetry, vanishes, and is entirely lost: yet, with all his faults, and exclusive of his character as a poet, he must ever remain the only learned author of that tasteless age in which he flourished: and it is probable, that his great attention to the Latin language, might have rendered him less correct, than he otherwise would have been, in his native tongue.

HARRINGTON has his admirers, he may possibly have his merits, but they *flow not* in his style. A later writer, of the same republican principles, has far excelled him; I mean ALGERNON SYDNEY, whose discourses concerning government are admirably written, and contain great historical knowledge, and a remarkable propriety of diction; so that his name, in my opinion, ought to be much higher established in the temple of literature, than I have hitherto found it placed.

LORD CLARENDON, is an historian whose dignity of expression has justly given him the preference to any of our biographical authors. But his periods are the *periods of a mile*. His parentheses embarrass the sense of his narration, and certain inaccuracies, appearing throughout his works, are delivered with a formality that renders them still more conspicuous.

Among our English writers, few men have gained a greater character for elegance and correctness, than SPRAT, Bishop of *Rocheſter*, and few men have deserved it less. When I have read his works, I have always

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