



The Works Of Alexander Pope Esq.

In Nine Volumes Complete. With His Last Corrections, Additions, And Improvements; As they were delivered to the Editor a little before his Death

Containing The First of his Letters

Pope, Alexander

London, 1751

V. From Mr. Walsh. Of mechanical critics; of wit and conceit, a request concerning on of his pastorals.

Nutzungsbedingungen

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L E T T E R V.

From Mr. WALSH.

Sept. 9, 1706.

AT my return from the North I receiv'd the favour of your letter, which had lain there till then. Having been absent about six weeks, I read over your Pastorals again, with a great deal of pleasure, and to judge the better read Virgil's Eclogues, and Spenser's Calendar, at the same time; and, I assure you, I continue the same opinion I had always of them. By the little hints you take upon all occasions to improve them, 'tis probable you will make them yet better against winter; tho' there is a mean to be kept even in that too, and a man may correct his verses till he takes away the true spirit of them; especially if he submits to the correction of some who pass for great Critics, by mechanical rules, and never enter into the true design and Genius of an author. I have seen some of these, that would hardly allow any one good Ode in Horace, who cry Virgil wants fancy, and that Homer is very incorrect. While they talk at this rate, one would think them above the common rate of mortals: but generally they are great admirers of Ovid and Lucan; and when they write themselves, we find out all the mystery. They
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scan their verses upon their fingers; run after Conceits and glaring thoughts; their poems are all made up of Couplets, of which the first may be last, or the last first, without any sort of prejudice to their works; in which there is no design, or method, or any thing natural or just. For you are certainly in the right, that in all writings whatsoever (not poetry only) nature is to be follow'd; and we should be jealous of ourselves for being fond of Similies, Conceits, and what they call saying fine Things. When we were in the North, my Lord Wharton shew'd me a letter he had receiv'd from a certain great General in Spain^a; I told him I would by all means have that General recall'd, and set to writing here at home, for it was impossible that a man with so much Wit as he shew'd, could be fit to command an Army, or do any other business^b. As for what you say of Expression: 'tis indeed the same thing to Wit, as Dress is to Beauty: I have seen many women over-dress'd, and several look better in a careless night-gown, with their hair about their ears, than Mademoiselle Spanheim dress'd for a ball. I do not design to be in London till

^a The Earl of Peterborow.

^b Mr. Walsh's Remark will be thought very innocent, when the reader is informed that it was made on

the Earl of Peterborow, just before the glorious campaigns of Barcelona and Valentia. P.

towards the parliament: then I shall certainly be there; and hope by that time you will have finish'd your Pastorals as you would have them appear in the world, and particularly the third, of Autumn, which I have not yet seen. Your last Eclogue being upon the same subject as that of mine on Mrs. Tempest's Death, I shou'd take it very kindly in you to give it a little turn, as if it were to the Memory of the same Lady, if they were not written for some particular Woman whom you would make immortal. You may take occasion to shew the difference between Poets Mistresses, and other mens. I only hint this, which you may either do, or let alone just as you think fit. I shall be very much pleas'd to see you again in Town, and to hear from you in the mean time. I am, with very much esteem,

Your, &c.

L E T T E R V I.

Oct. 22, 1706.

AFTER the thoughts I have already sent you on the subject of English Versification, you desire my opinion as to some farther particulars. There are indeed certain Niceties, which, tho' not much observed even by correct versifiers, I cannot but think, deserve to be better regarded.

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