

John Dryden



TO THE EARL OF ROSCOMON, ON HIS EXCELLENT ESSAY
ON TRANSLATED VERSE

Whether the fruitful Nile, or Tyrian Shore,
The seeds of Arts and Infant Science bore,
'Tis sure the noble Plant, translated first,
Advanc'd its head in Grecian Gardens nurst.
The Grecians added Verse, their tuneful Tongue
Made Nature first, and Nature's God their song.
Nor stopt Translation here: For conquering Rome
With Grecian Spoils, brought Grecian Numbers home;
Enrich'd by those Athenian Muses more,
Than all the vanquish'd World cou'd yeild before.

'Till barb'rous Nations and more barb'rous Times
Debas'd the Majesty of Verse to Rhimes;
Those rude at first: a kind of hobbling Prose:
That limp'd a long, and tinckl'd in the close:
But Italy reviving from the trance
Of Vandal, Goth, and Monkish ignorance,
With pauses, cadence, and well vowell'd words,
And all the Graces a good Ear affords,

TO THE EARL OF ROSCOMON

Made Rhyme an Art, and Dante's polish'd page
Restor'd a silver, not a golden Age:

Then Petrarch follow'd, and in him we see,
What Rhyme improv'd in all its height can be;
At best a pleasing sound, and fair barbarity:
The French pursu'd their steps; and Brittain, last
In Manly sweetness all the rest surpass'd.
The Wit of Greece, the Gravity of Rome
Appear exalted in the British Loome;
The Muses Empire is restor'd agen,
In Charles his Reign, and by Roscomon's Pen.
Yet modestly he does his Work survey,

And calls a finish'd Poem an ESSAY;
For all the needful Rules are scatter'd here;
Truth smoothly told, and pleasantly severe;
(So well is Art disguis'd, for Nature to appear.)
Nor need those Rules, to give Translation light;
His own example is a flame so bright;
That he, who but arrives to copy well,
Unguided will advance; unknowing will excel.
Scarce his own Horace cou'd such Rules ordain;
Or his own Virgil sing a nobler strain.

How much in him may rising Ireland boast,
How much in gaining him has Britain lost!
Their Island in revenge has ours reclaim'd,
The more instructed we, the more we still are sham'd.

TO THE EARL OF ROSCOMON

'Tis well for us his generous blood did flow
Deriv'd from British Channels long ago,
That here his conquering Ancestors were nurst;
And Ireland but translated England first:
By this Reprisal we regain our right,
Else must the two contending Nations fight,

A nobler quarrel for his Native earth,
Than what divided Greece for Homer's birth.
To what perfection will our Tongue arrive,
How will Invention and Translation thrive
When Authors nobly born will bear their part,
And not disdain th'inglorious praise of Art!
Great Generals thus descending from command,
With their own toil provoke the Souldiers hand.
How will sweet Ovid's Ghost be pleas'd to hear
His Fame augmented by an English Peer,

How he embellishes His Helen's loves,
Out does his softness, and his sense improves?
When these translate, and teach Translators too,
Nor Firstling Kid, nor any vulgar vow
Shou'd at Apollo's grateful Altar stand;
Roscomon writes, to that auspicious hand,
Muse feed the Bull that spurns the yellow sand.
Roscomon, whom both Court and Camps commend,
True to his Prince, and faithful to his friend;
Roscomon first in Fields of Honour known,

TO THE EARL OF ROSCOMON

First in the peaceful Triumphs of the Gown;
Who both Minerva's justly makes his own.
Now let the few belov'd by Jove, and they,
Whom infus'd Titan form'd of better Clay,
On equal terms with ancient Wit ingage,
Nor mighty Homer fear, nor sacred Virgil's page:
Our English Palace opens wide in state;
And without stooping they may pass the Gate.

Source: Dryden, John. "To the Earl of Roscomon, on his Excellent Essay on Translated Verse." *The Penn State Archive of Samuel Johnson's Lives of the Poets*. Ed. Kathleen Nulton Kemmerer. 1 September 2000.

<http://www.hn.psu.edu/faculty/kkemmerer/poets/dryden/roscommon.htm>