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Ignotis errare locis, ignota videre , ^{Ignotis}
Flumina gaudebat; studio minuente laborem. Ovid.

Thursday, July 3, 1712.

The Pleasures of the Imagination are not wholly confined to such particular Authors as are conversant in material Objects, but are often to be met with among the Polite Masters of Morality, Criticism, and other Speculations abstracted from Matter, who, tho' they do not directly treat of the visible Parts of Nature, often draw from them their Similitudes, Metaphors, and Allegories. By these Allusions a Truth in the Understanding is as it were reflected by the Imagination; we are able to see something like Colour and Shape in a Notion, and to discover a Scheme of Thoughts traced out upon Matter. And here the Mind receives a great deal of Satisfaction, and has two of its Faculties gratified at the same time, while the Fancy is busie in copying after the Understanding, and transcribing Ideas out of the Intellectual World into the Material.

The Great Art of a Writer shews it self in the Choice of pleasing Allusions, which are generally to be taken from the *great* or *beautiful* Works of Art or Nature; for though whatever is New or Uncommon is apt to delight the Imagination, the chief Design of an Allusion being to illustrate and explain the Passages of an Author, it should be always borrowed from what is more known and common, than the Passages which are to be explained.

Allegories, when well chosen, are like so many Tracks of Light in a Discourse, that make every thing about them clear and beautiful. A noble Metaphor, when it is placed to an Advantage, casts a kind of Glory round it, and darts a Lustre through a whole Sentence: These different Kinds of Allusion are but so many different Manners of Similitude, and, that they may please the Imagination, the Likeness ought to be very exact, or very agreeable, as we love to see a Picture where the Resemblance is just, or the Posture and Air graceful. But we often find eminent Writers very faulty in this respect; great Scholars are apt to fetch their Comparisons and Allusions from the Sciences in which they are most conversant, so that a Man may see the Compass of their Learning in a Treatise on the most indifferent Subject. I have read a Discourse upon Love, which none but a profound Chymist could understand, and have heard many a Sermon that should only have been preached before a Congregation of Cartesians. On the contrary, your Men of Business usually have recourse to such Instances as are too mean and familiar. They are for drawing the Reader into a Game of Chess or Tennis, or for leading him from Shop to Shop, in the Cant of particular Trades and Employments. It is certain, there may be found an infinite Variety of very agreeable Allusions in both these kinds, but for

the generality, the most entertaining ones lie in the Works of Nature, which are obvious to all Capacities, and more delightful than what is to be found in Arts and Sciences.

It is this Talent of affecting the Imagination, that gives an Embellishment to good Sense, and makes one Man's Compositions more agreeable than another's. It sets off all Writings in general, but is the very Life and highest Perfection of Poetry: Where it shines in an Eminent Degree, it has preserved several Poems for many Ages, that have nothing else to recommend them; and where all the other Beauties are present, the Work appears dry and insipid, if this single one be wanting. It has something in it like Creation; It bestows a kind of Existence, and draws up to the Reader's View several Objects which are not to be found in Being. It makes Additions to Nature, and gives a greater Variety to God's Works. In a Word, it is able to beautifie and adorn the most illustrious Scenes in the Universe, or to fill the Mind with more glorious Shows and Apparitions, than can be found in any Part of it.

We have now discovered the several Originals of those Pleasures that gratify the Fancy; and here, perhaps, it would not be very difficult to cast under their proper Heads those contrary Objects, which are apt to fill it with Distaste and Terrour; for the Imagination is as liable to Pain as Pleasure. When the Brain is hurt by any Accident, or the Mind disordered by Dreams or Sickness, the Fancy is over-run with wild dismal Ideas, and terrified with a thousand hideous Monsters of its own framing.

Eumenidum veluti demens videt Agmina Pentheus, , [Eumenidum](#)
Et solem geminum, et duplices se ostendere Thebas.
Aut Agamemnonius scenis agitatus Orestes,
Armatam facibus matrem et serpentibus atris
Cum videt, ultricesque sedent in limine Diræ. Vir.

There is not a Sight in Nature so mortifying as that of a Distracted Person, when his Imagination is troubled, and his whole Soul disordered and confused. Babylon in Ruins is not so melancholy a Spectacle. But to quit so disagreeable a Subject, I shall only consider, by way of Conclusion, what an infinite Advantage this Faculty gives an Almighty Being over the Soul of Man, and how great a measure of Happiness or Misery we are capable of receiving from the Imagination only.

We have already seen the Influence that one Man has over the Fancy of another, and with what Ease he conveys into it a Variety of Imagery; how great a Power then may we suppose lodged in him, who knows all the ways of affecting the Imagination, who can infuse what Ideas he pleases, and fill those Ideas with Terror and Delight to what Degree he thinks fit? He can excite Images in the Mind, without the help of Words, and make Scenes rise up before us and seem present to the Eye without the Assistance of Bodies or Exterior Objects. He can transport the Imagination with such beautiful and glorious Visions, as cannot

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possibly enter into our present Conceptions, or haunt it with such ghastly Spectres and Apparitions, as would make us hope for Annihilation, and think Existence no better than a Curse. In short, he can so exquisitely ravish or torture the Soul through this single Faculty, as might suffice to make up the whole Heaven or Hell of any finite Being.

This Essay on the Pleasures of the Imagination having been published in separate Papers, I shall conclude it with a Table of the principal Contents in each Paper.

The CONTENTS

PAPER I.

The Perfection of our Sight above our other Senses. The Pleasures of the Imagination arise originally from Sight. The Pleasures of the Imagination divided under two Heads. The Pleasures of the Imagination in some Respects equal to those of the Understanding. The Extent of the Pleasures of the Imagination. The Advantages a Man receives from a Relish of these Pleasures. In what Respect they are preferable to those of the Understanding.

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The Works of Nature more pleasant to the Imagination than those of Art. The Works of Nature still more pleasant, the more they resemble those of Art. The Works of Art more pleasant, the more they resemble those of Nature. Our English Plantations and Gardens considered in the foregoing Light.

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PAPER VI.

The Secondary Pleasures of the Imagination. The several Sources of these Pleasures (Statuary, Painting, Description and Musick) compared together. The Final Cause of our receiving Pleasure from these several Sources. Of Descriptions in particular. The Power of Words over the Imagination. Why one Reader more pleased with Descriptions than another.

PAPER VII.

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Imagining what is Great; Virgil in Imagining what is Beautiful; Ovid in imagining what is New. Our own Country-man Milton very perfect in all three respects.

PAPER VIII.

Why any thing that is unpleasant to behold, pleases the Imagination when well described. Why the Imagination receives a more Exquisite Pleasure from the Description of what is Great, New, or Beautiful. The Pleasure still heightned, if—what is described raises Passion in the Mind. Disagreeable Passions pleasing when raised by apt Descriptions. Why Terror and Grief are pleasing to the Mind when excited by Descriptions. A particular Advantage the Writers in Poetry and Fiction have to please the Imagination. What Liberties are allowed them.

PAPER IX.

Of that kind of Poetry which Mr. Dryden calls the Fairy Way of Writing. How a Poet should be Qualified for it. The Pleasures of the Imagination that arise from it. In this respect why the Moderns excell the Ancients. Why the English excell the Moderns. Who the Best among the English. Of Emblematical Persons.

PAPER X.

What Authors please the Imagination who have nothing to do with Fiction. How History pleases the Imagination. How the Authors of the new Philosophy please the Imagination. The Bounds and Defects of the Imagination. Whether these Defects are Essential to the Imagination.

PAPER XI.

How those please the Imagination who treat of Subjects abstracted from Matter, by Allusions taken from it. What Allusions most pleasing to the Imagination. Great Writers how Faulty in this Respect. Of the Art of Imagining in General. The Imagination capable of Pain as well as Pleasure. In what Degree the Imagination is capable either of Pain or Pleasure.

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Footnotes

- Ignotis "Delighting to wander in unknown lands and to see strange rivers, his eagerness making light of toil." from the *Metamorphoses* of the Roman poet Ovid. Loeb Classical Library translation.
- Eumenides Thus frantic Pentheus flees the stern array of the Eumenides, and thinks to see two noonday lights blaze on his doubled Thebes; or murdered Agamemnon's haunted son, Orestes, flees his mother's phantom scourge of flames and serpents foul, while at his door avenging horrors wait." from book IV of Virgil's *Aeneid*. Perseus Classical Library translation.