

above flattery as the use of it is beneath every honest, every sincere man. Flattery to men of power is analogous with hypocrisy to God, and both are alike mean and contemptible; nor is the one more an instance of respect than the other is a proof of devotion. I perceive I am growing serious, and that is the first step to dulness; but I believe you won't think that in the least extraordinary, to find me dull in a letter, since you have known me so often dull out of a letter.

As for poetry, I own, my sentiments of it are very different from the vulgar taste. There is hardly anywhere to be found (says Shaftesbury) a more insipid race of mortals than those whom the moderns are contented to call poets²—but methinks the true legitimate poet is as rare to be found as Tully's orator, *qualis adhuc nemo fortasse fuerit*.³ Truly, I am extremely to blame to talk to you at this rate of what you know much better than myself; but your letter gave me the hint, and I hope you will excuse my impertinence in pursuing it. It is a difficult matter to account why, but certain it is that all people, from the duke's coronet to the thresher's flail,⁴ are desirous to be poets; Penelope herself had not more suitors, though every man is not Ulysses enough to bend the bow. The poetical world, like the terraqueous, has its several degrees of heat from the line to the pole—only differing in this, that whereas the temperate zone is most esteemed in the terraqueous, in the poetical it is the most despised. Parnassus is divisible in the same manner as the mountain chimæra,

—mediis in partibus hircum,
Pectus et ora leæ, caudam serpentis habebat.⁵

The medium between the rampant lion and the creeping serpent is the filthy goat—the justest picture of a middling poet, who is generally very

2. Anthony Ashley Cooper (1671–1713), 3d E. of Shaftesbury, in 'Soliloquy: or, Advice to an Author' (the third treatise in *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*): 'I must confess there is hardly anywhere to be found a more insipid race of mortals than those whom we moderns are contented to call poets, for having attained the chiming faculty of a language, with an injudicious random use of wit and fancy' (*Characteristics*, edn 1711, i. 207).

3. 'Atque ego in summo oratore fingendo talem informabo qualis fortasse nemo fuit' (Cicero, *Orator* 7).

4. Stephen Duck (1705–56). In the fron-

tispiece to his *Poems on Several Subjects*, 2d edn, 1730, he is represented with a flail in the left hand and a copy of Milton in the right. The title-page explains that he was 'lately a poor thresher in a barn in the county of Wilts, at the wages of four shillings and sixpence per week.' *A Full and Authentic Account of Stephen Duck*, 1731, by Joseph Spence, had been prefixed to Duck's *Poems on Several Occasions*, 1736, of which extracts appeared in *GM* 1736, vi. 317–19.

5. Ovid, *Met.* ix. 646–7: modern texts read 'ignem' for 'hircum.'