

sensible than I am of its merits. The works of her great poets and prose writers have delighted my youthful days, afforded a pleasing relaxation from the labours of my maturer years, and at this moment are the solace of my old age. I hope we shall never cease to read, study and admire their immortal works, and that our writers will strive to catch some sparks at least of their genius and of their spirit, without descending to a servile imitation of their language or of their manner.

There is, after all, nothing so difficult for nations who speak the same language, as to imitate the literary productions of each other; imitation here degenerates into plagiarism, for you can hardly adopt the ideas of a writer without adopting also the language in which he has clothed them; and if you endeavour to express them in other words, you weaken the force of the expression, and produce only a faint copy of a bright original. It is not so when you borrow the ideas of an author who has written in a language different from your own. This kind of imitation has been allowed among all nations and in all ages. Thus Virgil imitated Homer, and Terence imitated Menander. We love to see Catullus imitated with so much success by Ariosto and Tasso.* To imitation we owe some of the noblest flights of the British muse. Spenser imitated Petrarch; Milton drank deep at the fount of the Italian Muse. Pope imitated Horace and Boileau; Johnson imitated Juvenal.† The charming love elegies of Hammond are little more than a translation of Tibullus. All this is considered fair and legitimate; but let any one try to clothe those or any other English poems in another English dress, he will find a miserable result, and will be called a plagiarist for his pains.

* I allude here to the beautiful simile of the Latin poet.

Ut flos in septis secretus nascitur hortis, &c.

Catul. lxii. Carmen Nupt.

Imitated by Ariosto, in *Orl. Fur.* Canto i. st. 42.

La verginella e simile alla rosa, &c.

And by Tasso, in *Gerus. Lib.* Canto xvi. st. 14.

Deh! mira, (egli cantò,) spuntar la rosa, &c.

Which Gay has indelicately parodied in the *Beggar's Opera*, Act. i.

Virgins are like the fair flow'r in its lustre, &c.

† In his poem called *London*.