JULIAN'S FAREWELL TO THE MUSES

(Summer, 1685)

On May 31, 1684, “Captain” Robert Julian was charged with writing and publishing a libel on King Charles II entitled “Old Rowley the King.” He was convicted on November 12 and sentenced to stand in the pillory and to pay a fine of one hundred marks—£66 13s 4d. Unable to pay the fine, he sat in the King’s Bench prison until June, 1685, when the judges took pity on his age and decrepitude and released him. His imprisonment drew the attention of the Court poets, who honored him with “A Letter to Julian in Prison” (Dyce MS. 43, II, 637) and the following satire, in which, of course, Julian is the persona, not the author. Essentially the poem is a short shotgun libel aimed at six Court poets and five well-known courtesans. The probable date is summer, 1685.

The copy text, dated 1685, is Harleian MS. 7319, p. 389. The satire is dated 1685 in Dyce MS. 43, II, 482; MS. Firth c. 15, p. 169; and “A Choyce Collection,” p. 158.

Mine and the poets’ plague consume you all,
And all the fools that at your altar fall.
May all the crowd that worship that false flame
Reap nothing thence but penury and shame.
May you all be adorned with bays like me, No laurel crown you, but a pillory!
Was’t not hard measure, say, my Whiggish peers,
Vending your nonsense to expose my ears?
My pocket stuffed with scandal long has been
The house of office to vend out your spleen,
The common sink o’th’ town, wherein you shit
To carry off your excrements of wit.
Such gallantry has not of late been shown;
To save your ears, poor Julian lost his own;
But if you ever catch me at that strain—
To vend your scurrilous scoundrel stuff again—
May infamy and scandal be my bane.
Though Howe's envenomed pen, whose poison kills,
Should libel all the tribe at Man's and Will's,
Let him his unlicked brat ere it come forth,
To save a kicking, stifle in the birth.
Let fluxing George his sharp mercurial wit,
Squeezed out in physic, spend again at shit.
Let Eland, one poor thought to bring to life,
First beat his brains, and after that his wife.
Let haughty Mulgrave own the laureate's rhymes,
And Dryden's back answer for his own crimes.
Poor Julian's off the lay; though every line
Were cudgel proof, it's no concern of mine.
Nay, though inspired with more than Delphic flame,
My great Maecenas, awful Dorset, came,
And as a mark of his censorious wit
Paid double fees for what himself had writ.
Let Cleveland to sham Alexander stick,
And Portsmouth pine for want of royal prick.
Let Richmond rub on still with page and groom,
And Mazarin lodge stallions in her room.
Let Gr[e]y and Exeter win all at play,
And Orrery have not one groat to pay.
Let 'em fuck on and still pursue their game;
I'll be no more the trumpet of their fame.
Scandal, farewell; I'll take up a new trade,
And safer far by pimping get my bread.

1. the poet's plague. The pox? Only the first six lines of the satire are directed to the Nine Muses.
10. house of office. A privy, usually indoors.
14. ears. There is no evidence that Julian lost his ears. Ear-cropping, as punishment for libel, had gone out of style.
19. Man’s. Man’s Coffee-house, behind Charing Cross, near Scotland Yard, was kept by Alexander Man. Will’s. Will’s Coffee-house, at the corner of Bow and Russell Streets, was kept by Will Urwin.
20. unlicked. Shapeless.
22. fluxing George. Apparently Sir George Etherege suffered from “the pox.” (The Restoration doctors were not aware that there were two venereal diseases.) The usual treatment was sweating, purging with calomel (mercurous chloride), and the application of pure mercury.
24. Eland. Henry Savile, Lord Eland (1661–87). His relations with his wife Esther (de Gouvernet) were not happy.
26. Mulgrave. The fact that Lord Mulgrave’s An Essay upon Satire (1679) was thought to be by Dryden, is usually accepted as the cause of Dryden’s beating in Rose Street, on December 18, 1679. But see J. H. Wilson, “Rochester, Dryden, and the Rose-Street Affair,” RES, XV, July, 1939.
31. Dorset. Charles Sackville, Earl of Dorset (1643–1706) wrote a number of little satirical lyrics and probably some longer libels. He was also a “Maecenas,” a patron of poets.
34. Cleveland. Barbara (Villiers), Duchess of Cleveland (1649–1709), formerly mistress to King Charles II, now had as her paramour an actor, Cardell Goodman, famous for his performances as Alexander the Great in Lee’s The Rival Queens. See J. H. Wilson, Mr. Goodman, the Player, 1964, pp. 86 ff.
35. Portsmouth. Louise Keroualle, Duchess of Portsmouth (1649–1734), mistress to King Charles II until his death, February 6, 1685, returned to France in August, 1685.
36. Richmond. Frances (Stuart), widowed Duchess of Richmond (1647–1702).
37. Mazarin. Hortense (Mancini), Duchess Mazarin (1646–99), was considered the most beautiful woman in Europe. Besides King Charles II, she had a legion of lovers.
38. Grey. Since Ford, Lord Grey of Werke, was involved in Monmouth’s rebellion, and was in the Tower from July to mid-November, 1685, this must have been Henry Yelverton, Lord Grey of Ruthin (c. 1664–1704). Exeter. John Cecil (1648–1700) succeeded as fifth Earl of Exeter in February, 1678.
39. Orrery. Mary (Sackville), 1647–1710, widow of Roger Boyle, second Earl of Orrery, was a compulsive gambler. The poet suggests that she paid her gambling losses to Grey and Exeter in bed.