

## Democritus

New York Journal, 21 December 17871

*Most sublime, most witty, and most elegant EXAMINER! !*

I bow down before you; I am vanquished by the ascendancy, which your all-powerful, transcendent abilities, have over your obedient, abject slave. Although you have thought fit, in the majesty of your justice, to scourge me with your august displeasure, and severe sarcasms, for presuming to differ from you in opinion; yet, I have such great confidence in your benevolence and compassion, that I hope to be admitted into your favor; which is most earnestly desired by me, when I consider that you are not only an *eminent* writer, but also a most renowned physician, and consequently able to remove the drunkenness, which you say, has attacked your servant.

That you are deeply versed in both surgery and physic, I observe, from the technical terms, with which you have interlarded your third lecture; and which, I cannot read, without praying, that you would, as you profess pity and compassion for me, take away “the *serene gut* which obstructs my optic nerves,” so that I may thoroughly understand your *Solomon Gundy* and other high-flown and learned words.[2](#)

That I may do something to merit your patronage and favor, I will here inform you of divers plans, which (if I enjoy health and live long enough) I intend to execute; and humbly request your sublimity to acquaint me, whether they engage your approbation.

I purpose to collect from your judicious works, a book of similies, and metaphors; as a specimen take the following:

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Like Solomon Gundy.

Nocturnal glare of the antifederal owl.

Bright sun of the federal dove.

Fixing a pearl into a swine’s snout.

Like a diamond thrown into the mud.

Like an elastic ball thrown against the side of a house.

I also purpose to compile a dictionary of Medical terms, from your learned writings; by what follows, you will observe, I have a large stock of them already.

Delicate organs. Gutta serena.

Indigested. Optic nerves.

Foul Stomach. Fever.

Very costive. Uncured.

Six discharges. Infected.

Kindly injections. Disorder.

Eyes anointed.

I furthermore intend, to compose a book of medical observation, and receipt, from your works. For instance,

“Solomon Gundy, composed of raw fish and flesh, is calculated to throw the person who eats it into a fever.”

A man of your extensive reading, must well know, that it is the practice in England, to comprise, the beautiful reflections, and striking excellencies of eminent writers, into small volumes, and style them the Beauties of Shakespear, Blair,<sup>3</sup> Johnson, &c. Now as your performances contain many rare, elegant, and uncommon observations, I mean to publish a book, and entitle it—*The Beauties of the Examiner*. e. g.

*Perfection.*

The works of a finite being cannot be perfect.


EXAMINER, No. III.

*Composition.*

The works of a writer,<sup>4</sup> destitute of both genius and information, must be very dull and insipid, because he has no genius and information.

Idem, something abbreviated.

I hope you will accept these my intentions in good part, and forgive my late impudence, as I have forgiven your severity.

When I revolve in my mind the merits of your writings, I am astonished at your universal knowledge. This is the only exception I have ever known to your profound remark—that *the works of a finite being* [461 ] *cannot be perfect*; for you seem to be a complete master of the whole circle of human learning.

Your works shew that you are

- —A chymist; for you speak of the *absorption of mud*.[5](#)
- —A natural philosopher; for you speak of the *elastic ball*.
- —A logician; for you speak of *analogy, logical justness, argumentative precision, and sophistry*.
- —A metaphysician; for you speak of *evil, infinity, scepticism, perfection, and blind fate*.
- —A mathematician; for you speak of *proportion*.
- —A soothsayer; for you speak of *enchantment and witch craft*.
- —A rhetorician; for you speak of *hodge-podge*.
- —A cook; for you speak of *Solomon Gundy, composed of raw fish and flesh*.
- —A swine-keeper; for you speak of *ringing hogs snouts*.

In short, your productions evince your intimate knowledge of all arts and sciences.

I hope, sir, you will acknowledge I am not so much of a *block head*, but I can perceive your great abilities; your accurate discernment; your exact judgment; your comprehensive understanding; your refined taste; your retentive memory; your vigorous fancy; your lively genius; your noble invention; your elegant wit; your &c. &c.

I have the honor to be,

Most mighty,

Most tremendous writer,

With the utmost devotion, respect,

esteem, gratitude, and affection,

Your most obedient, most humble,

most devoted, and most

profound servant,

DEMOCRITUS.

19th December, 1787.

P. S. Pardon my presumption, in suggesting, that you might cool the fire of Brutus, Cato, &c, by the application of Clysters. I were on the point of knocking a fellow down, for asserting, that you are better qualified to handle a clysterpipe than a pen.

I am, as above, DEMOCRITUS.

[1](#)

On 20 December the *New York Journal* announced that it would print the reply to “Examiner” by “Democritus” the next day. This essay by “Democritus” was the second of three that he wrote attacking “Examiner.” (See headnote to “Examiner” I, *New York Journal*, 11 December, above.) “Democritus” gives some hints as to the identity of the “Examiner”; also he is more explicit in his third essay that is printed in the *New York Journal* on 28 December (below).

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[2](#)

For the terms “gutta serena” and “Solomon Gundy,” see “Examiner” III, *New York Journal*, 19 December, notes 2 and 3 (above).

[3](#)

A reference to Hugh Blair (1718–1800), a Presbyterian minister and Regius Professor of Rhetoric and Belles-Lettres at the University of Edinburgh, whose sermons and lectures on rhetoric and belles lettres were widely published. Some of Blair’s writings were published in a series of “small volumes,” *The Beauties of...* See *Sentimental Beauties and Moral Delineations from the Writings of the Celebrated Dr. Blair...* (London, 1782).

[4](#)

On 22 December, the printer of the *New York Journal* informed his readers that for “winter” they should read “writer.” (See *New York Journal*, 22 December, Mfm:N.Y.)

[5](#)

On 22 December, the printer of the *New York Journal* informed his readers that for “mind” they should read “mud.” (See *New York Journal*, 22 December, Mfm:N.Y.)

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