

English Literary Criticism and Theory (NBBAN126 K3)
Introduction to Literary Criticism and Theory (NBBAN177K3)
English Literary Criticism and Theory Seminar (NBBAN127G2)
English Literary Criticism and Theory (LBBAN126K3)
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08.09

Jonathan Barnes's *Aristotle* (1982) is a brief, accessible overview of Aristotle's life and works. In a crowded field, Abraham Edel's *Aristotle and His Philosophy* (1982) and John M. Rist's *Mind of Aristotle* (1989) stand out as good basic introductions to Aristotle's biography and works. *The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle*, edited by Barnes (1995), contains chapters on important phases of Aristotle's philosophical project, including a survey of his life and work by Barnes.

On the *Poetics*, Stephen Halliwell's *Aristotle's "Poetics"* (1986) is the authoritative contemporary interpretation. Gerald F. Else, *Aristotle's "Poetics": The Argument* (1957), provides a detailed commentary on the text, and his *Plato and Aristotle on Poetry* (1986) is a useful comparative study. D. W. Lucas's *Aristotle—"Poetics"* (1968) offers significant commentary as well as the Kassel edition of the Greek text. Martha Nussbaum's *Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Philosophy* (1986) contains an influential modification of the argument about catharsis. Aristotle's *"Poetics" and English Literature: A Collection of Critical Essays*, edited by Elder Olson (1965), gathers views from the eighteenth century through the 1960s, highlighting the work of the Chicago Critics, or "Neo-Aristotelians," who promoted a formal method in literary study during the mid-twentieth century. Its last chapter, "Rhetoric and Poetic in the Philosophy of Aristotle," by Richard McKeon, a Chicago Critic, offers an illuminating discrimination of poetic and rhetorical approaches. McKeon's "Literary Criticism and the Concept of Imitation in Antiquity," in *Critics and Criticism: Essays in Method* (ed. R. S. Crane, 1952), is an important text on imitation. *Essays on Aristotle's "Poetics"*, edited by Amélie Oksenberg Rorty (1992), is an excellent contemporary collection by philosophers and scholars of Aristotle, clarifying concepts such as mimesis, catharsis, and comedy.

On the *Rhetoric*, W. M. A. Grimaldi's *Aristotle, "Rhetoric": A Commentary* (1980) is a useful exposition. *Essays on Aristotle's "Rhetoric"* (1996), edited by Amélie Oksenberg Rorty as a companion to her volume on the *Poetics*, provides an excellent range of contemporary interpretations and reevaluations of the text. Alexander Nehamas's "Pity and Fear in the *Rhetoric* and *Poetics*," in Aristotle's *"Rhetoric"*, *Philosophical Essays* (ed. David J. Furley and Nehamas, 1994), cogently compares Aristotle's treatment of emotion in both texts and, in a provocative argument, claims that catharsis refers to the internal resolution of a tragic plot itself rather than to the response of the audience.

The *"Poetics" of Aristotle and the "Tractatus Coislinianus": A Bibliography from about 900 till 1996*, compiled by Omert J. Schrier (1998), testifies to the massive literature relating to the *Poetics*. Aristotle's *"Rhetoric"*: *Fine Centuries of Philological Research*, compiled by Keith V. Erickson (1975), covers the many studies of the *Rhetoric*. *The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle* contains an excellent bibliography on all of Aristotle's work, with individual sections on the *Poetics* and *Rhetoric*. Both Janko's edition of the *Poetics* and Kennedy's of the *Rhetoric* include selective bibliographies on their respective texts. The Rorty collections on the *Poetics* and *Rhetoric* also include good selective bibliographies.

Aristotle

Poetics¹

[1, 1447a] Our topic is poetry in itself and its kinds, and what potential each has; how plots should be constructed if the composition is to turn out well;

1. Translated by Richard Janko, who sometimes adds clarifying words or phrases in square brackets and includes the Greek in parentheses. Also in square brackets in the text are the traditional chapter divisions inserted by Renaissance editors and

the Bekker numbers used almost universally in citing Aristotle's works; they refer to the page numbers and columns of an 1831 edition by Immanuel Bekker.

also, from how many parts it is [constituted], and of what sort they are; and likewise all other aspects of the same enquiry. Let us first begin, following the natural [order], from first [principles].

Epic and tragic composition, and indeed comedy, dithyrambic composition,² and most sorts of music for wind and stringed instruments are all, [considered] as a whole, representations.³ They differ from one another in three ways, by using for the representation (i) different media, (ii) different objects, or (iii) a manner that is different and not the same.

Some people use colours and forms for representations, making images of many objects (some by art, and some by practice), and others do so with sound; so too all the arts we mentioned produce a representation using rhythm, speech, and melody, but use these either separately or mixed. E.g., the art of [playing] the oboe and lyre, and any other arts that have the same potential (e.g. that of [playing] the pan-pipes), use melody and rhythm alone, but the art of dancers [uses] rhythm by itself without melody; for they too can represent characters, sufferings and actions, by means of rhythms given form.

But the art of representation that uses unaccompanied words or verses [1447b] (whether it mixes these together or uses one single class of verse-form) has to the present day no name. For we have no common name for the mimes of Sophron and Xenarchus and the Socratic dialogues,⁴ and would not have one even if someone were to compose the representation in [iambic] trimeters, elegiacs⁵ or some other such verse. But people attach the word "poet" to the verse-form, and name some "elegiac poets" and other "epic poets," terming them poets not according to [whether they compose a] representation but indiscriminately, according to [their use of] verse. Thus if someone brings out a work of medicine or natural science in verse, they normally call him a poet; but there is nothing in common between Homer and Empedocles⁶ except the verse-form. For this reason it is right to call the former a poet, but the latter a natural scientist rather than a poet. Likewise, if someone produced a representation by intermingling all the verse-forms, just as Chaeremon⁷ composed his *Centaure* (a recitation which mixes all the verse-forms), he must still be termed a poet. This, then, is how we should define these matters.

Some arts use all the media we have mentioned (i.e. rhythm, song and verse), like the composition of dithyrambic poems, that of nomes,⁸ and tragedy and comedy; they differ because the former use all the media at the same time, the latter [use them only] in certain parts. So these are what I mean

2. Greek choral poetry originally sung in honor of Dionysus, the god of wine worshipped in an ecstatic cult.
3. From the Greek *mimēsis*, translated as "representation" or "imitation."

4. The philosophical works of PLATO (ca. 427–ca. 327 B.C.E.), which are written as dialogues featuring his teacher, Socrates (469–399 B.C.E.), and one or more interlocutors. "Mimes": imitative performances usually featuring short scenes from daily life. Sophron of Syracuse (5th c. B.C.E.) wrote mimes in rhythmic prose; his son Xenarchus also wrote mimes.

5. A verse form consisting of couplets whose first line is in dactylic hexameter (i.e., a 6-foot line based on the syllabic pattern long-short-short), the

meter of epic, and whose second line replaces the 3d and 6th foot with one long syllable. "Iambic trimeters": the verse form of most dialogue and set speeches in tragedies (a 3-foot line based on the pattern short-long).

6. Pre-Socratic Greek natural philosopher (ca. 493–433 B.C.E.), who wrote in epic meter (dactylic hexameter). Homer (ca. 8th c. B.C.E.), Greek epic poet to whom is attributed the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*; the ancient Greeks also credited him with a number of lost shorter epics, including the comic *Mages*.

7. Greek tragedian (mid-4th c. B.C.E.).
8. Originally, melodies (for lyre or flute) created to accompany epic texts; later, choral compositions.

representation.

[2, 1448a] Since those who represent people in action, these people are necessarily either good or inferior: For characters almost always follow from these [qualities] alone; everyone differs in character because of vice and virtue. So they are either (i) better than we are, or (ii) worse, or (iii) such [as we are], just as the painters [represent them]; for Polygnotus used to make images of superior persons, Pauson of worse ones, and Dionysius⁹ of those like [us].

Clearly each of the [kinds of] representation we mentioned will contain these differences, and will vary by representing objects which vary in this manner. For these divergences can arise in dancing and in playing the oboe and lyre. They can also arise in speeches and unaccompanied verse: e.g. (i) Homer [represents] better persons, (ii) Cleophon [represents] ones like [us], and (iii) Hegemon of Thasos, who was the first to compose parodies, and Nicochares¹ who composed the *Deiliad*, [represent] worse ones. [They can arise] likewise in dithyrambs and nomes: for just as Timotheus and Philoxenus [represented] Cyclopes,² [so] one may represent [people in different ways]. Tragedy too is distinguished from comedy by precisely this difference; comedy prefers to represent people who are worse than those who exist, tragedy people who are better.

[3] Again, a third difference among these [kinds] is the manner in which one can represent each of these things. For one can use the same media to represent the very same things, sometimes (a) by narrating (either (i) becoming another [person], as Homer does, or (ii) remaining the same person and not changing), or (b) by representing everyone as in action and activity. Representation, then, has these three points of difference, as we said at the beginning, its media, its objects and its manner. Consequently, in one respect Sophocles is the same sort of representational artist as Homer, in that both represent good people, but in another he is like Aristophanes,³ since both represent men in action and doing [things].

This is why, some say, their works are called "dramas," because they represent men "doing" (*drōmias*). For this reason too the Dorians⁴ lay claim to both tragedy and comedy. The Megarians⁵ here allege that comedy arose during the time of their democracy, and the Megarians in Sicily claim it; for Epicharmus was from there, though he was not much prior to Chionides and Magnes.⁶ Some of the Dorians in the Peloponnese lay claim to tragedy. They produce the names [of comedy and drama] as an indication [of their origins]: they say that they call villages *kōmai* but the Athenians call them *dēmoi*, on the assumption that comedians were so called not from their rev-

9. Painter from Colophon. Polygnotus (ca. 500–ca. 440 B.C.E.), one of the first great Greek painters. Pauson (late 5th c. B.C.E.), Athenian caricaturist.

1. Athenian comic poet (active ca. 390 B.C.E.), whose *Deiliad* (*deilos* means "cowardly") parodied heroic epic. Cleophon (4th c. B.C.E.), Athenian tragic poet. Hegemon (5th c. B.C.E.), poet whose parodies won competitions in Athens.

2. Mythical one-eyed giants. Timotheus of Miletus (ca. 360 B.C.E.) and Philoxenus of Cythera (ca. 435–ca. 380 B.C.E.) were both Greek dithyrambic poets.

3. Greatest poet of Greek Old Comedy (450–385

euing (*komazēin*), but because they wandered around the villages, ejected in disgrace from the town. [1448b] They also say that they term "doing" *dran*, but that the Athenians term it *prattein*.

Anyway, as for the points of difference in representation, and how many and what they are, let this account suffice.

[4] Two causes seem to have generated the art of poetry as a whole, and these are natural ones.

(i) Representation is natural to human beings from childhood. They differ from the other animals in this: man tends most towards representation and learns his first lessons through representation.

Also (ii) everyone delights in representations. An indication of this is what happens in fact: we delight in looking at the most detailed images of things which in themselves we see with pain, e.g. the shapes of the most despised wild animals even when dead. The cause of this is that learning is most pleasant, not only for philosophers but for others likewise (but they share in it to a small extent). For this reason they delight in seeing images, because it comes about that they learn as they observe, and infer what each thing is, e.g. that this person [represents] that one. For if one has not seen the thing [that is represented] before, [its image] will not produce pleasure as a representation, but because of its accomplishment, colour, or some other such cause.

Since by nature we are given to representation, melody and rhythm (that verses are parts of rhythms is obvious), from the beginning those by nature most disposed towards these generated poetry from their improvisations, developing it little by little. Poetry was split up according to their particular characters; the grander people represented fine actions, i.e. those of fine persons; the more ordinary people represented those of inferior ones, at first composing invectives, just as the others composed hymns and praise-poems. We do not know of any composition of this sort by anyone before Homer, but there were probably many [who composed invectives]. Beginning with Homer [such compositions] do exist, e.g. his *Margites* etc. In these the iambic verse-form arrived too, as is appropriate. This is why it is now called "iambic", because they used to lampoon (*iambizein*) each other in this verse-form. Thus some of the ancients became composers of heroic poems, others of lampoons.

Just as Homer was the greatest composer of serious poetry (not that he alone composed well, but because he alone composed dramatic representations), so too he was first to indicate the form of comedy, by dramatising not an invective but the laughable. For his *Margites* stands in the same relation to comedies as do the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* to tragedies. [1449a] When tragedy and comedy appeared, people were attracted to each [kind of] composition according to their own particular natures. Some became composers of comedies instead of lampoons, but others presented tragedies instead of epics, because comedy and tragedy are greater and more honourable in their forms than are lampoon and epic. To consider whether tragedy is now fully [developed] in its elements or not, as judged both in and of itself and in relation to its audiences, is a different topic.

Anyway, arising from an improvisatory beginning (both tragedy and comedy—tragedy from the leaders of the dithyramb, and comedy from the leaders of the phallic processions which even now continue as a custom in many of

our cities), [tragedy] grew little by little, as [the poets] developed whatever [new part] of it had appeared; and, passing through many changes, tragedy came to a halt, since it had attained its own nature.

(i) Aeschylus⁷ was first to increase the number of its actors from one to two; he reduced the [songs] of the chorus, and made speech play the main role. Sophocles [brought in] three actors and scenery.

(ii) Again, as for its magnitude, [starting] from trivial plots and laughable diction, because it had changed from a satyric [composition],⁸ [tragedy only] became grand at a late date. Its verse-form altered from the tetrameter⁹ to iambic verse. For at first [poets] used the tetrameter, because the composition was satyric and mainly danced; but when [spoken] diction came in, nature itself found the proper verse-form. The iambic is the verse most suited to speech; and indication of this is that in [everyday] speech with each other we use mostly iambic [rhythms], but rarely hexameters, and [only] when we depart from the intonations of [everyday] speech.

(iii) Again, as for the number of its episodes,¹ and how each of its other [parts] is said to have been elaborated, let them pass as described; it would probably be a major undertaking to go through their particulars.

[5] Comedy is, as we said, a representation of people who are rather inferior—not, however, with respect to every [kind of] vice, but the laughable is [only] a part of what is ugly. For the laughable is a sort of error and ugliness that is not painful and destructive, just as, evidently, a laughable mask is something ugly and distorted without pain.

The transformations of tragedy, and [the poets] who brought them about, have not been forgotten; but comedy was disregarded from the beginning, because it was not taken seriously. [1449b] For the magistrate granted a chorus of comic performers at a late date—they had been volunteers. The record of those termed its poets begins from [a time] when comedy already possessed some of its forms. It is unknown who introduced masks, prologues, a multiplicity of actors, etc. As for the composing of plots, Epicharmus and Phormis² [introduced it]. In the beginning it came from Sicily, and, of the poets at Athens, Crates³ was the first to relinquish the form of the lampoon and compose generalised stories, i.e. plots.

Epic poetry follows tragedy insofar as it is a representation of serious people which uses speech in verse; but they differ in that [epic] has a single verse-form, and is narrative. Again, with respect to length, tragedy attempts as far as possible to keep within one revolution of the sun or [only] to exceed this a little, but epic is unbounded in time; it does differ in this respect, even though [the poets] at first composed in the same way in tragedies as in epics. As for their parts, some are the same, others are particular to tragedy. For this reason, whoever knows about good and inferior tragedies knows about

7. The earliest of the 3 great Greek tragedians (525–456 B.C.E.).

8. That is, like the satyr plays that formed part of the spring festival of Dionysus in early-5th-century B.C.E. Athens. Each of the poets competing wrote three tragedies and one satyr play; the latter presented grotesque versions of ancient legends, with the chorus dressed as satyrs (half-man, half-goat, and wearing a phallus).

9. That is, trochaic tetrameter (a 4-foot line based on the syllabic pattern long-short); though occa-

epics too. Tragedy possesses all [the parts] that epic has, but those that it possesses are not all in epic.

[6] We will discuss representational art in hexameters, and comedy, later. Now let us discuss tragedy, taking up the definition of its essence that results from what we have said.

Tragedy is a representation of a serious, complete action which has magnitude, in embellished speech, with each of its elements [used] separately in the [various] parts [of the play]; [represented] by people acting and not by narration; accomplishing by means of pity and terror the catharsis⁴ of such emotions.

By “embellished speech,” I mean that which has rhythm and melody, i.e. song; by “with its elements separately,” I mean that some [parts of it] are accomplished only by means of spoken verses, and others again by means of song.

Since people acting produce the representation, first (i) the ornament of spectacle will necessarily be a part of tragedy; and then (ii) song and (iii) diction, for these are the media in which they produce the representation. By “diction” I mean the construction of the [spoken] verses itself; by “song” I mean that of which the meaning is entirely obvious.

Since [tragedy] is a representation of an action, and is enacted by people acting, these people are necessarily of a certain sort according to their character and their reasoning. For it is because of these that we say that actions are of a certain sort, [1450a] and it is according to people’s actions that they all succeed or fail. So (iv) the plot is the representation of the action; by “plot” here, I mean the construction of the incidents. By (v) the “characters,” I mean that according to which we say that the people in action are of a certain sort. By (vi) “reasoning,” I mean the way in which they use speech to demonstrate something or indeed to make some general statement.

So tragedy as a whole necessarily has six parts, according to which tragedy is of a certain sort. These are plot, characters, diction, reasoning, spectacle and song. The media in which [the poets] make the representation comprise two parts [i.e. diction and song], the manner in which they make the representation, one [i.e. spectacle], and the objects which they represent, three [i.e. plot, character and reasoning]; there are no others except these. Not a few of them, one might say, use these elements; for they may have instances of spectacle, character, plot, diction, song and reasoning likewise.

But the most important of these is the structure of the incidents. For (i) tragedy is a representation not of human beings but of action and life. Happiness and unhappiness lie in action, and the end [of life] is a sort of action, not a quality; people are of a certain sort according to their characters, but happy or the opposite according to their actions. So [the actors] do not act in order to represent the characters, but they include the characters for the sake of their actions. Consequently the incidents, i.e. the plot, are the end of tragedy, and the end is most important of all.

(ii) Again, without action a tragedy cannot exist, but without characters it may. For the tragedies of most recent [poets] lack character, and in general there are many such poets. E.g. too among the painters, how Zeuxis⁵ relates

4. A much-debated Greek term, related to a verb meaning “to cleanse” or “purify”; usually left untranslated and understood as ‘purgation’, ‘it can

also mean “clarification.”

5. Greek painter from Heraclea in southern Italy; he was in Athens ca. 400 B.C.E.

to Polygnotus—Polygnotus is a good character-painter, but Zeus's painting contains no character at all.

(iii) Again, if [a poet] puts in sequence speeches full of character, well-composed in diction and reasoning, he will not achieve what was [agreed to be] the function of tragedy; a tragedy that employs these less adequately, but has a plot (i.e. structure of incidents), will achieve it much more.

(iv) In addition, the most important things with which a tragedy enthralls [us] are parts of plot—reversals and recognitions.

(v) A further indication is that people who try their hand at composing can be proficient in the diction and characters before they are able to structure the incidents; e.g. too almost all the early poets.

So plot is the origin and as it were the soul of tragedy, and the characters are secondary. It is very similar [1.450b] in the case of painting too: if someone daubed [a surface] with the finest pigments indiscriminately, he would not give the same enjoyment as if he had sketched an image in black and white. Tragedy is a representation of an action, and for the sake of the action above all [a representation] of the people who are acting.

Reasoning comes third, i.e. being able to say what is possible and appropriate, which is its function in the case of the speeches of civic life and rhetoric. The old [poets] made people speak like citizens, but the recent ones make them speak like rhetoricians. Character is that which reveals decision, of whatever sort; this is why those speeches in which the speaker decides or avoids nothing at all do not have character. Reasoning, on the other hand, is that with which people demonstrate that something is or is not, or make some universal statement.

Diction is fourth. By "diction" I mean, as we said earlier, communication by means of language, which has the same potential in the case of both verse and [prose] speeches.

Of the remaining [parts], song is the most important of the embellishments. Spectacle is something enthralling, but is very artless and least particular to the art of poetic composition. The potential of tragedy exists even without a performance and actors; besides, the designer's art is more essential for the accomplishment of spectacular [effects] than is the poets'.

[7] Now that these definitions have been given, let us next discuss what sort of structure of the incidents there should be, since this is the first and most important [part] of tragedy. We have laid down that tragedy is the representation of a complete i.e. whole action which has some magnitude (for there can be a whole with no magnitude). A whole is that which has a beginning, a middle and a conclusion. A beginning is that which itself does not of necessity follow something else, but after which there naturally is, or comes into being, something else. A conclusion, conversely, is that which itself naturally follows something else, either of necessity or for the most part, but has nothing else after it. A middle is that which itself naturally follows something else, and has something else after it. Well-constructed plots, then, should neither begin from a random point nor conclude at a random point, but should use the elements we have mentioned [i.e. beginning, middle and conclusion].

Further, to be fine both an animal and every thing which is constructed from some [parts] should not only have these [parts] in order, but also possess a magnitude that is not random. For fineness lies in magnitude and

order. For this reason a fine animal can be neither very small, for observation becomes confused when it approaches an imperceptible instant of time; nor [can it be] very large; for [1.451a] observation cannot happen at the same time, but its unity and wholeness vanish from the observers' view, e.g. if there were an animal a thousand miles long. Consequently, just as in the case of bodies and of animals these should have magnitude, but [only] a magnitude that is easily seen as a whole, so too in the case of plots these should have length, but [only] a length that is easily memorable.

As for the limit on their length, one limit relates to performances and the perception [of them]; not to the art [itself]. If the performance of a hundred tragedies were required [at one tragic competition], they would be performed "against the clock," as the saying goes! But as for the limit according to the nature of the thing [itself], the larger the plot is, the finer it is because of its magnitude, so long as the whole is still clear. To give a simple definition, in whatever magnitude a change from misfortune to good fortune, or from good fortune to misfortune, can come about by a sequence of events in accordance with probability or necessity—this is an adequate definition of its magnitude.

[8] A plot is not unified, as some suppose, if it concerns one single person. An indefinitely large number of things happens to one person, in some of which there is no unity. So too the actions of one person are many, but do not turn into a single action. For this reason, it seems, all those poets who composed a *Heracleid*, a *Theseid*⁶ or similar poems are in error. They suppose that, because Heracles was a single person, his story too must be a single story. But, just as Homer is superior in other respects, it seems that he saw this clearly as well (whether by art or by nature). In composing the *Odyssey*, he did not put into his poem everything that happened to *Odysseus*,⁷ e.g. that he was wounded on Parnassus and pretended to be insane during recruitment; whether one of these things happened did not make it necessary or probable that the other would happen. But he constructed the *Odyssey* around a single action of the kind we are discussing, and the *Iliad* similarly.

Therefore, just as in the other representational arts a single representation is of a single [thing], so too the plot, since it is a representation of action, ought to represent a single action, and a whole one at that; and its parts (the incidents) ought to be so constructed that, when some part is transposed or removed, the whole is disrupted and disturbed. Something which, whether it is present or not present, explains nothing [else], is no part of the whole.

[9] It is also obvious from what we have said that it is the function of a poet to relate not things that have happened, but things that may happen, i.e. that are possible in accordance with probability or necessity. For [1.451b] the historian and the poet do not differ according to whether they write in verse or without verse—the writings of Herodotus⁸ could be put into verse, but they would be no less a sort of history in verse than they are without verses. But the difference is that the former relates things that have happened, the latter things that may happen. For this reason poetry is a more philosophical and more serious thing than history; poetry tends to speak of

6. In ancient Greece, there were several epic *Heracleids* and *Theseids*—poems depicting, respectively, the heroes Heracles and Theseus.

7. The wily king of Ithaca whose efforts to return home to Greece after the Trojan War are chronic-

led in the *Odyssey*.

8. Greek historian (ca. 484–425 B.C.E.), chiefly of the Persian Wars; sometimes called "the father of history."

universals, history of particulars. A universal is the sort of thing that a certain kind of person may well say or do in accordance with probability or necessity—this is what poetry aims at, although it assigns names [to the people]. A particular is what Alcibiades⁹ did or what he suffered.

In the case of comedy this has already become clear. When [comic poets] have composed a plot according to probability, only then do they supply the names at random; they do not, like the composers of lampoons, compose [poems] about particular individuals. In the case of tragedy [the poets] keep to actual names. The reason is that what is possible is believable; we do not believe that what has never happened is possible, but things which have happened are obviously possible—they would not have happened, if they were impossible. Nonetheless, even among tragedies some have only one or two well-known names, and the rest made up; and some have not one, e.g. Agathon's *Antheus*. In this [drama] the incidents and the names alike are made up, and it is no less delightful. Consequently one must not seek to keep entirely to the traditional stories which tragedies are about. In fact it is ridiculous to seek to do so; since even the well-known [incidents] are known only to a few people, but even so everyone enjoys them.

So it is clear from these arguments that a poet must be a composer of plots rather than of verses, insofar as he is a poet according to representation, and represents actions. So even if it turns out that he is representing things that happened, he is no less a poet; for there is nothing to prevent some of the things that have happened from being the sort of things that may happen according to probability, i.e. that are possible, which is why he can make a poetic composition about them.

Among simple plots and actions, episodic [tragedies] are the worst. By "episodic" I mean a plot in which there is neither probability nor necessity that the episodes follow one another. Such [tragedies] are composed by inferior poets because of themselves, but by good ones because of the actors. For in composing competition-pieces, they extend the plot beyond its potential and [1452a] are often compelled to distort the sequence.

The representation is not only of a complete action but also of terrifying and pitiable [incidents]. These arise to a very great or a considerable extent when they happen contrary to expectation but because of one another. For they will be more amazing in this way than if [they happened] on their own, i.e. at random, since the most amazing even among random events are those which appear to have happened as it were on purpose, e.g. the way the statue of Mitys at Argos² killed the man who was the cause of Mitys' death, by falling on him as he looked at it. Such things do not seem to happen at random. Consequently plots of this kind are necessarily finer.

[10] Among plots, some are simple and some are complex; for the actions, of which plots are representations, are evidently of these kinds. By "simple," I mean an action which is, as we have defined it, continuous in its course and single, where the transformation comes about without reversal or recognition. By "complex," I mean an action as a result of which the transformation is accompanied by a recognition, a reversal or both. These should

arise from the actual structure of the plot, so it happens that they arise either by necessity or by probability as a result of the preceding events. It makes a great difference whether these [events] happen because of those or [only] after those.

[11] A reversal is a change of the actions to their opposite, as we said, and that, as we are arguing, in accordance with probability or necessity. E.g. in the *Oedipus*,³ the man who comes to bring delight to Oedipus, and to rid him of his terror about his mother, does the opposite by revealing who Oedipus is; and in the *Lynceus*,⁴ Lynceus is being led to his death, and Danaus follows to kill him, but it comes about as a result of the preceding actions that Danaus is killed and Lynceus is rescued.

A recognition, as the word itself indicates, is a change from ignorance to knowledge, and so to either friendship or enmity, among people defined in relation to good fortune or misfortune. A recognition is finest when it happens at the same time as a reversal, as does the one in the *Oedipus*. There are indeed other [kinds of] recognition. For it can happen in the manner stated regarding inanimate objects and random events; and one can recognise whether someone has done something or not done it. But the sort that most belongs to the plot, i.e. most belongs to the action, is that which we have mentioned: for such a recognition and reversal [1452b] will contain pity or terror (tragedy is considered to be a representation of actions of this sort), and in addition misfortune and good fortune will come about in the case of such events.

Since recognition is a recognition of people, some recognitions are by one person only of the other, when the identity of one of them is clear; but sometimes there must be a recognition of both persons. E.g. Iphigeneia is recognised by Orestes⁵ as a result of her sending the letter, but it requires another recognition for him [to be recognised] by Iphigeneia. These, then, reversal and recognition, are two parts of plot. A third is suffering. Of these, we have discussed reversal and recognition. Suffering is a destructive or painful action, e.g. deaths in full view, agonies, woundings etc.

[12] Regarding the parts of tragedy, we stated earlier which ones should be used as elements. The quantitative parts, i.e. the separate parts into which it is divided, are as follows: (i) prologue, (ii) episode, (iii) exit and (iv) choral [part], with this divided into (a) processional and (b) stationary [song]—these are shared by all [dramas], and [songs sung] from the stage, i.e. dirges—these are particular [to some].

(i) A prologue is a whole part of a tragedy that is before the processional [song] of the chorus.

(ii) An episode is a whole part of a tragedy that is between whole choral songs.

(iii) An exit is a whole part of a tragedy after which there is no song of the chorus.

3. *Oedipus Rex* (ca. 430 B.C.E.), by Sophocles—a play to which Aristotle frequently refers as a model for his definition of tragedy. Unknowingly, Oedipus kills his father, Laius; takes his father's place as king of Thebes; and marries his mother, Jocasta. When he learns that he has not escaped the fate foretold, he gouges out his eyes and banishes himself, hence undergoing a reversal from king to outcast.

4. Lost tragedy by the orator and tragic poet Theodectes (ca. 375–334 B.C.E.), about the daughters of King Danaus of Argos, who ordered them to kill their husbands (all obeyed except Hypermestra, whose husband was Lynceus).

5. In *Iphigeneia in Tauris* (ca. 413 B.C.E.), by Euripides (ca. 485–ca. 406 B.C.E.), the youngest of the 3 great Greek tragedians.

9. Athenian politician and general (ca. 450–404 B.C.E.).

2. The providential punishment of the murderer of Mitys of Argos happened some time before or around 374 B.C.E. [translator's note].

on stage.

Regarding the parts of tragedy, we stated earlier which ones should be used [as elements]; the quantitative ones, i.e. the separate parts into which it is divided, are these.

[13] After what we have just been saying, we must perhaps discuss next what [poets] should aim at and what they should beware of in constructing plots, i.e. how tragedy will achieve its function. Since the construction of the finest tragedy should be not simple but complex, and moreover it should represent terrifying and pitiable events (for this is particular to representation of this sort), first, clearly, it should not show (i) decent men undergoing a change from good fortune to misfortune; for this is neither terrifying nor pitiable, but shocking. Nor [should it show] (ii) wicked men [passing] from misfortune to good fortune. This is most untragic of all, as it has nothing of what it should; for it is neither morally satisfying nor pitiable nor terrifying. [1453a] Nor, again, [should it show] (iii) a thoroughly villainous person falling from good fortune into misfortune: such a structure can contain moral satisfaction, but not pity or terror, for the former is [felt] for a person undeserving of his misfortune, and the latter for a person like [ourselves]. Consequently the outcome will be neither pitiable nor terrifying.

There remains, then, the person intermediate between these. Such a person is one who neither is superior [to us] in virtue and justice, nor undergoes a change to misfortune because of vice and wickedness, but because of some error, and who is one of those people with a great reputation and a good fortune, e.g. Oedipus, Thyestes' and distinguished men from similar families. Necessarily, then, a plot that is fine is single rather than (as some say) double, and involves a change not from misfortune to good fortune, but conversely, from good fortune to misfortune, not because of wickedness but because of a great error by a person like the one mentioned, or by a better person rather than a worse one.

An indication [that this is so] is what is coming about. At first the poets recounted stories at random, but now the finest tragedies are constructed around a few households, e.g. about Alcmeon, Oedipus, Orestes, Meleager, Thyestes, Telephus and the others, who happen to have had dreadful things done to them, or to have done them.⁶ So the tragedy which is finest according to the [principles of the] art results from this structure. For this reason, people make the same error when they bring against Euripides the charge that he does this in his tragedies, and many of his [tragedies] end in misfortune; for this, as we said, is correct. A very important indication [that this is so is the following].

6. Based on a foot of the syllabic pattern short-short-long (sometimes known as marching meter because of its regularity).

7. Like Oedipus, a popular subject for Greek tragedy, though more survive; his story has numerous variants. He unknowingly ate the flesh of his own sons, served by his brother Atreus; and following the advice of an oracle, he committed incest with his daughter to begot the son who would avenge him.

8. Few of the tragedies involving these characters

The second[-best] structure is that which some say is first, the [tragedy] which has a double structure like the *Odyssey*, and which ends in opposite ways for the better and worse [persons]. This [structure] would seem to be first because of the weakness of the audiences; the poets follow the spectators, composing to suit their wishes. But this is not the pleasure [that comes] from tragedy, but is more particular to comedy. There the bitterest enemies in the story, e.g. Orestes and Aegisthus,⁹ exit as friends at the conclusion, and nobody kills anyone else.

[14, 1453b] That which is terrifying and pitiable can arise from spectacle, but it can also arise from the structure of the incidents itself; this is superior and belongs to a better poet. For the plot should be constructed in such a way that, even without seeing it, someone who hears about the incidents will shudder and feel pity at the outcome, as someone may feel upon hearing the plot of the *Oedipus*. To produce this by means of spectacle is less artful and requires lavish production. Those [poets] who use spectacle to produce what is only monstrous and not-terrifying have nothing in common with tragedy. For we should not seek every [kind of] pleasure from tragedy, but [only] the sort which is particular to it. Since the poet should use representation to produce the pleasure [arising] from pity and terror, it is obvious that this must be put into the incidents.

Let us consider, then, what sorts of occurrence arouse dread or compassion in us. These sorts of action against each another necessarily take place between friends, enemies or people who are neither. If it is one enemy [who does the action] to another, there is nothing pitiable, whether he does it or is [only] about to do it, except in the suffering itself. Nor [is it pitiable] if the people are neither [friends nor enemies]. But when suffering happen within friendly relationships, e.g. brother against brother, son against father, mother against son or son against mother, when someone kills someone else, is about to, or does something else of the same sort—these are what must be sought after.

[The poet] cannot undo the traditional stories, I mean e.g. that Clytemnestra is killed by Orestes or Eriphyle by Alcmeon; but he should invent for himself, i.e. use the inherited [stories], well. Let me explain more clearly what I mean by "well."

The action may arise (i) in the way the old [poets] made people act knowingly, i.e. in full knowledge, just as Euripides too made Medea kill her children. Or (ii) they may be going to act, in full knowledge, but not do it. Or (iii) they may act, but do the dreadful deed in ignorance, and then recognise the friendly relationship later, as Sophocles' Oedipus [does]. This is outside the drama; but [they may do the deed] in the tragedy itself, as Astydamos' Alcmeon or Telegonus in the *Wounded Odysseus* [do]. Again, fourth beside

9. Clytemnestra's lover (and Agamemnon's cousin), whom (in the version told in Aeschylus's *Agamemnon*) Orestes also kills.

1. A sorceress from Colchis. In *Medea* (431 B.C.E.), to avenge herself on Jason, who has deserted her for the daughter of a king, she kills him—and her—children.

2. A lost play by Sophocles in which Telegonus, the son of Odysseus and Circe, fatally wounds his father without knowing his identity. Astydamos (active ca. 390 B.C.E.), a prolific Athenian tragedian; Alcmaeon (and all but a few lines of his works) is lost.

act either have knowledge or do not.

Among these [ways], (i) to be about to act in full knowledge, but not do it, is the worst. For this is shocking and also not tragic, as there is no suffering. For this reason nobody composes in this way, [1445a] except rarely, e.g. Haemon against Creon in the *Antigone*.³ (ii) To act is second[-worst]. (iii) To act in ignorance, but recognise [the relationship] afterwards, is better. This has nothing shocking in it, and the recognition is astonishing. (iv) The last [way] is the best. I mean e.g. the *Cresphontes*, where Merope is about to kill her son, but does not kill him and recognises him; the *Iphigeneia*, where [it is the same for] the sister and her brother; and the *Helle*,⁴ where the son is about to hand over his mother but recognises her. This is why, as we said a while ago, tragedies are not about many families. [The poets] sought to produce this sort [of effect] in their plots, and discovered how to not by art but by chance; so they are obliged to concern themselves with those households in which such sufferings have happened.

As for the structure of the incidents, and what sort of plots there should be, let this suffice.

[15] Regarding characters, there are four things at which [the poet] should aim.

(i) First and foremost, the characters should be good. [The tragedy] will have character if, as we said, the speech or the action makes obvious a decision of whatever sort; it will have a good character, if it makes obvious a good decision. [Good character] can exist in every class [of person]; for a woman can be good, and a slave can, although the first of these [classes] may be inferior and the second wholly worthless.

(ii) Second, [they should be] appropriate. It is possible to be manly in character, but it is not appropriate for a woman to be so manly or clever.

(iii) Third, [the character should be] life-like. This is different from making the character good and appropriate in the way already stated.

(iv) Fourth, [the character should be] consistent. If the model for the representation is somebody inconsistent; and such a character is intended, even so it should be consistently inconsistent.

An example of unnecessary villainy of character is the Menelaus in the *Orestes*; of the unsuitable and inappropriate, the lament of Odysseus in the *Scylla*, and the speech of Melanippe;⁵ and of the inconsistent, the *Iphigeneia at Aulis* (the girl who begs [for her life] does not seem at all like the later *Iphigeneia*).⁶

In the characters too, exactly as in the structure of the incidents, [the

3. By Sophocles (ca. 441 B.C.E.). Haemon, who loves Antigone, tries to kill his father (Creon, king of Thebes), who is responsible for her suicide.

4. Nothing more is known of this play. The *Cresphontes* (now lost) and *Iphigeneia in Tauris* are both by Euripides.

5. In *Melanippe the Wise*, a lost play by Euripides; the heroine apparently argues with a philosophical sophist in an inappropriate way for a woman. Menelaus in the *Orestes*; in Euripides' play (408 B.C.E.), Menelaus basely refuses to help his nephew.

Scylla: a lost dithyramb by Timotheus, in which Odysseus weeps in an unmanly way for his crew members killed by the monster Scylla.

6. That is, *Iphigeneia at Tauris*. Euripides' play set at Aulis (ca. 405 B.C.E.) depicts Iphigeneia about to be sacrificed by her father, Agamemnon, so that the Greeks may have fair winds as they sail to Troy; according to one version of the myth, she was saved by Artemis and transported far away to Tauris, where she becomes high priestess (and where Orestes later comes).

happen after that one.

It is obvious that the solutions of plots too should come about as a result of the plot itself, [1454b] and not from a contrivance, as in the *Medea* and in the passage about sailing home in the *Iliad*.⁷ A contrivance must be used for matters outside the drama—either previous events which are beyond human knowledge, or later ones that need to be foretold or announced. For we grant that the gods can see everything. There should be nothing improbable in the incidents; otherwise, it should be outside the tragedy, e.g. that in Sophocles' *Oedipus*.

Since tragedy is a representation of people who are better than we are, [the poet] should emulate the good portrait-painters. In rendering people's particular shape, while making them [life]-like, they paint them as finer [than they are]. So too the poet, as he represents people who are angry, lazy, or have other such traits, should make them such in their characters, [but] decent [too]. E.g. Homer [made] Achilles' good as well as an example of stubbornness. [The poet] should guard against these things, as well as against [causing] reactions contrary to those that necessarily follow from the art of poetry. In fact one can often make errors in these; there is a sufficient account of them in my published work.

[16] We stated earlier what recognition is. As for the kinds of recognition, (i) the first is the least artful, which [poets] make most use of from lack of resourcefulness—recognition by signs. Of these, (a) some are congenital, e.g. "the spear-head that the earth-born bear," or [the birth-marks like] stars such as Carcinus' [made up] in his *Thyestes*. (b) Others are acquired. Of these (1) some are on the body, e.g. scars, and (2) others are external, e.g. necklaces, and e.g. [the recognition] by means of the dinghy in the *Tyro*.¹

These can be used more or less well; e.g. Odysseus was recognised from his scar in one way by the nurse; and in another by the swineherds.² For the latter recognitions, and all similar ones, are less artful because of the [means of] proof; but those that result from a reversal, like that in the "Bath-scene," are better.

(ii) Second are those recognitions made up by the poet, which is why they are not artful. E.g. in the *Iphigeneia*, how Orestes makes it known that he is Orestes; for Iphigeneia is recognised by means of the letter, but he himself says what the poet wants, not what the plot does. For this reason, this recognition is not far from the error we [just] mentioned; Orestes could have brought some actual objects. Also "the shuttle's voice" in Sophocles' *Tereus*.³

7. In *Iliad* 8.155–81, only the arbitrary intervention of the goddess Athena prevents the Greeks from giving up the fight at Troy and going home.

The *Medea*: after killing her children, Medea flees off in the chariot of the sun-god Helios, her grandfather; this "contrivance" is the *deus ex machina*.

8. The greatest warrior among the Greeks and the central character of the *Iliad*. He displays his "stubbornness" by long refusing to engage in his battle because of his anger with Agamemnon, the leader of the Greek forces.

9. Prolific Greek tragic poet (early 4th c. B.C.E.). The preceding quotation may be from Euripides' *Tereus*.

lost *Antigone*.

1. A lost play by Sophocles; Tyro's sons are abandoned in a small boat that leads to their later recognition.

2. Odysseus is recognized artfully (because inevitably) by his nurse when he shows them his scar in the "bath scene" (*Odyssey* 19.386–475), but his declaration of his identity to the swineherds, when he shows them the scar, as proof (21.205–25), is manufactured by the poet.

3. A lost play; Philomela tells her sister the story of her rape by Tereus, who has torn out her tongue to silence her, by weaving a picture of it.

70105 where ne bursts into tears upon seeing the paining, or the one in the "Tale told to Alcinoos"⁴ where Odysseus hears the lyre-player and weeps at his memories, as a result of which they recognise him.

(iv) Fourth is recognition resulting from an inference, e.g. in the *Libation Bearers*, on the grounds that "someone like [Electra] has come; but there is nobody like [her] except Orestes; it is he, then, who has come".⁵ Or the recognition [proposed by] the sophist Polyidus concerning Iphigeneia: it would be reasonable, he said, for Orestes to infer that "his sister was sacrificed, and it [now] falls to him to be sacrificed himself." Or in Theodectes' *Tydeus*, on the grounds that "he came to find a son, but is to die himself." Or the recognition in the *Sons of Phineus*:⁶ when the women see the place they infer their fate, on the grounds that "they are fated to be killed there, for [the boys] were left to perish there."

There is also a combined recognition resulting from a false inference by the audience, e.g. in *Odysseus the False Messenger*:⁷ for the fact that [Odysseus could] bend the bow, but nobody else [could], is made up by the poet and is a premise, and [so is Odysseus'] saying that he would recognise the bow which he had not seen; but the way he is expected to make himself known by the former means, but does so by the latter, is a [case of] false inference.

(v) The best recognition of all is that which results from the incidents themselves, when our astonishment comes about by means of probable [incidents], e.g. in Sophocles' *Oedipus* and the *Iphigeneia*: it is probable that Iphigeneia would wish to dispatch a letter. For such recognitions alone are without made-up [incidents] and necklaces. Recognitions as a result of inference are second[-best].

[17] In constructing his plots and using diction to bring them to completion, [the poet] should put [the events] before his eyes as much as he can. In this way, seeing them very vividly as if he were actually present at the actions [he represents], he can discover what is suitable, and is least likely to miss contradictions. An indication of this is the [contradiction] for which Carcinus was criticised. His Amphiarus comes up out of a shrine;⁸ this would have been missed by anyone not seeing it as a spectator. But [the play] failed on stage, as the spectators were upset about it.

As far as possible, [the poet should] also bring [his plots] to completion with gestures. Given the same nature, those [poets] who experience the emotions [to be represented] are most-believable, i.e. he who is agitated or furious [can represent] agitation and anger most truthfully. For this reason, the art of poetry belongs to the genius or the madman; of these, the first are adaptable, the second can step outside themselves.

As for his stories, both those [already] made up and those he composes himself, [1455b] he should set them out as universals, and only then introduce episodes, i.e. extend them. I mean that he might investigate what is

4. King of the Phaeacians and Odysseus's host in *Iliad* 7-12 (for the telltale weeping, see 8.521-34).

5. Dicaeogenes (late 5th c. B.C.E.), a minor Greek tragedian.

6. Aeschylus, *Libation Bearers* (458 B.C.E.), lines

168-234.

6. Lost, as is *Tydeus*. Polyidus (early 4th c. B.C.E.), perhaps the poet and critic Polyidus of Selymbria.

7. A lost play by an unknown author.

8. In a lost play.

rificed her. She is set down in another country, where there is a law that foreigners must be sacrificed to the goddess; this is the priesthood she is given. Some time later it turns out that the priestess' brother arrives. . . . The fact that the oracle commanded him to go there, for some reason that is not a universal, and his purpose [in going], are outside the plot. "After he arrives, he is captured. When he is about to be sacrificed [by his sister], he makes himself known [to her]," either as Euripides or as Polyidus arranged it, "by saying—as would be probable—that it was not only his sister's fate to be sacrificed, but his own too. This leads to the rescue." After this [the poet] should now supply the names and introduce episodes. Take care that the episodes are particular [to the story], e.g. in Orestes' case his madness through which he is captured, and his rescue by means of the purification. In dramas the episodes are brief, but epic is lengthened out with them. The story of the *Odyssey* is not long: "someone has been away from home for many years, with a god on the watch for him, and he is alone. Moreover affairs at home are such that his wealth is being consumed by [his wife's] suitors, and his son is being plotted against [by them]. He arrives after much distress, makes himself known to some people, and attacks. He is rescued, his enemies annihilated." This is what is proper [to the *Odyssey*]; its other [parts] are episodes.

[18] [Part] of every tragedy is the complication, and [part] is the solution. The [incidents] outside [the tragedy] and often some of those inside it are the complication, and the rest is the solution. By "complication," I mean the [tragedy] from the beginning up to the final part from which there is a transformation towards good fortune or misfortune; by "solution," the [tragedy] from the beginning of the transformation up to the end. E.g. in Theodectes' *Lynceus*, the prior incidents, the capture of the baby and then its parents' explanation is the complication, and the [tragedy] from the demand for the death penalty up to the end is the solution.

There are four kinds of tragedy (for we said that its parts too are of the same number): (i) the complex tragedy, the whole of which is reversal and recognition; (ii) the tragedy of suffering, e.g. the [tragedies called] *Ajax* and [1456a] *Ixion*;⁹ (iii) the tragedy of character, e.g. the *Women of Phthia* and the *Peleus*;¹ (iv) the fourth [kind] is spectacle, e.g. the *Daughters of Phorcys*, the *Prometheus*² and [dramas set] in Hades. Preferably [the poet] should attempt to have all [the parts]; otherwise, the most important and the majority of them, especially given the way people belittle poets nowadays. Since there have been poets good at each part [of tragedy], they demand that a single [poet] surpass the particular good [quality] of each one; but it is not right to call a tragedy the same [as another] or different according to anything

9. No play of this name survives. Ixion was the first to murder his wife and attempted to rape Hera, queen of the gods; as punishment for the second crime, he is chained forever to a wheel in the underworld.

Ajax: Sophocles' play (ca. 445 B.C.E.) tells the story of the Greek warrior driven mad by Athena who then commits suicide out of shame.

1. Both lost works revolve around the family of Achilles, who was the son of Peleus and came from Phthia. *Women of Phthia* is by Sophocles; both

Sophocles and Euripides wrote plays titled *Peleus*.

2. Perhaps Aeschylus's *Prometheus Bound*, whose hero speaks while bound to the rocks in the Caucasus. *Daughters of Phorcys*: perhaps by Aeschylus. Phorcys was a sea god, and his daughters were monsters: the 3 Graeae, old women who shared one tooth and one eye, and the 3 serpent-haired Gorgons, the sight of whom turned humans to stone.

monise both [parts].

[The poet] ought to remember what we have often said, and not compose a tragedy with an epic structure (by an "epic" structure, I mean one with more than one plot), e.g. if someone were to compose [a tragedy with] the whole plot of the *Iliad*. For there, the parts receive suitable magnitude because of the length [of the epic]; but in dramas the result is far from one's expectation.

An indication [that this is so is the following]: those [tragedians] who composed a *Sack of Troy* as a whole and not in part like Euripides, or a *Niobe*³ and not like Aeschylus, either fail or compete badly, since even Agathon failed in this one respect. In reversals and in simple incidents, they aim to arouse the amazement which they desire; for this is tragic and morally satisfying. This is possible when someone who is clever but villainous is deceived, like Sisyphus,⁴ or someone who is brave but unjust is defeated. This is even probable, as Agathon says; for it is probable that many things will happen even against probability.

[The poet] should regard the chorus as one of the actors. It should be a part of the whole, and contribute to the performance, not as in Euripides but as in Sophocles. In the rest the sung [parts] belong to the plot no more than they belong to another tragedy. For this reason they sing interludes; Agathon was first to begin this. Yet what difference is there between singing interludes and trying to adapt a speech, or a whole episode, from one [drama] to another?

[19] We have discussed the other elements [of tragedy]; it remains to discuss diction and reasoning. As for reasoning, what was said about it in my *Rhetoric*⁵ should be assumed; for this is proper rather to that enquiry. All [the effects] that have to be produced by speech fall under reasoning. The types of these are (i) demonstration and refutation, (ii) the production of emotions [1456b] (e.g. pity, terror, anger, etc.), and again (iii) [arguments about things] importance or unimportance.

In the incidents too [the poet] clearly should use some of the same elements when he needs to make things [e.g.] pitiable, dreadful, important or probable, except that there is this difference, that these [effects] should be apparent without a production, but those dependent on speech should be produced by the speaker and arise from speech. What would be the speaker's function, if the element were apparent even without [the use of] speech?

Among matters related to diction, one kind of investigation is the forms of the diction. Knowledge of this belongs to the art of delivery and to the person with mastery in it. [I mean] e.g. what is a command, what is a wish, a statement, a threat, a question, an answer, etc. No criticism at all made

consider there to be in "Sing, goddess, of the wrath," which Protagoras⁶ criticises on the grounds that [Homer] supposes he is making a wish, but is giving an order? (For Protagoras says that telling someone to do something or not do it is an order.) For this reason let us leave this investigation aside, as it belongs to another art and not to that of poetry.

[20] The parts of diction in its entirety are as follows: (i) the element [i.e. letter], (ii) the syllable, (iii) the particle, (iv) the conjunction, (v) the name [i.e. noun or adjective], (vi) the verb, (vii) the inflection, (viii) the utterance. (i) The element is an indivisible sound—not every [kind of] sound, but one from which it is natural for a composite sound to arise. For wild animals too make indivisible sounds, none of which I mean by an element. The types of this [kind of] sound are (a) the vowel, (b) the semi-vowel and (c) the consonant.

(a) A vowel is that which has an audible sound without a contact [between the parts of the mouth]. (b) A semi-vowel is that which has an audible sound with [such] a contact, e.g. *s* and *r*. (c) A consonant is that which has no audible sound in itself with [such] a contact, but becomes audible together with those elements that have a sound of some sort; e.g. *g* and *d*.

The elements differ according to the forms of the mouth, the places [in the mouth where they are produced], aspiration, non-aspiration, length, shortness, and also high, low or intermediate pitch. One must investigate the particulars of these matters in works on versification.

(ii) A syllable is a non-significant sound composed of a consonant and [an element] which has sound. In fact *gr* without an *a* is a syllable, and [it is also a syllable] with an *a*, as in *gra*. But the investigation of the differences between these also belongs to the art of versification.

(iii) A particle is (a) a non-significant sound which neither precludes, [1.457a] nor brings about, the production of a single significant sound that by nature is composed of several sounds [i.e. an utterance], and which it is not appropriate to place at the beginning of an utterance on its own, e.g. *men, etor, de*. Or [it is] (b) a non-significant sound which by nature produces, as a result of [joining together] several sounds that are significant, a single significant sound [i.e. an utterance], e.g. "about," "concerning" etc.

(iv) A conjunction is a non-significant sound which makes clear the beginning of an utterance, its end or its dividing-point, and which by nature is placed both at the extremities and in the middle [of an utterance], e.g. "or," "because," "but."

(v) A name [i.e. noun or adjective] is a composite significant sound without [an indication of] time, no part of which is significant in itself. For in double names we do not use [any part] as being significant in and of itself: e.g. in "Theodore" [i.e. "gift of god"] *dore* is not significant.

(vi) A verb is a composite significant sound with [an indication of] time, no part of which is significant in itself, just as in the case of names. For "human being" or "white" does not signify when, but "walks" or "walked"

3. There are no known epics concerning Niobe; Aeschylus's *Niobe* is lost. *Sack of Troy*: a poem in the epic cycle, by Lesches of Mytilene (ca. 7th c. B.C.E.) or Arctinus of Miletus (ca. 8th c. B.C.E.). Euripides treated some of the same events in his *Trojan Women* and *Hecuba*.

4. A sly-trickster who murdered travelers and once even chained the god of death, he is punished eter-

nally for betraying Zeus's secrets; he tries to roll a stone over the top of a steep hill, but always falls and must try again from the bottom. Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides all wrote plays on Sisyphus.

5. In a discussion of types of argument; see *Rhetoric* 1.356a-1.358a.

6. Pre-Socratic philosopher (5th c. B.C.E.), who was one of the most successful of the sophists, or itinerant teachers. "Sing . . ." the first words of the *Iliad*.

of Horace. Bernard Frischer, in *Shifting Paradigms: New Approaches to Horace's "Ars Poetica"* (1991), presents a detailed statistical analysis of the epistle's many controversies.

Volume 3 of Brink's *Horace on Poetry* (cited above) contains an extensive bibliography of primary and secondary sources on Horace's literary criticism. For a more general work, see the bibliographical essay in *Homage to Horace: A Bimillenary Celebration* (ed. S. J. Harrison, 1995).

Horace

Ars Poetica¹

Unity and Consistency

Imagine a painter who wanted to combine a horse's neck with a human head, and then clothe a miscellaneous collection of limbs with various kinds of feathers, so that what started out at the top as a beautiful woman ended in a hideously ugly fish. If you were invited, as friends, to the private view, could you help laughing? Let me tell you, my Piso² friends, a book whose different features are made up at random like a sick man's dreams, with no unified form to have a head or a tail, is exactly like that picture.

'Painters and poets have always enjoyed recognized rights to venture on what they will.' [11] Yes, we know; indeed, we ask and grant this permission turn and turn about. But it doesn't mean that fierce and gentle can be united, snakes paired with birds or lambs with tigers.

Serious and ambitious designs often have a purple patch or two sewn on to them just to make a good show at a distance—a description of a grove and altar of Diana,⁴ the meanderings of a stream running through pleasant meads, the River Rhine, the rainbow: [19] but the trouble is, it's not the place for them.

Maybe you know how to do a picture of a cypress tree? What's the good of that, if the man who is paying for the picture is a desperate ship-wrecked mariner swimming to safety? The job began as a wine-jar: the wheel runs round—why is that a tub that's coming out? In short, let it be what you will, but let it be simple and unified.

Skill Needed to Avoid Faults

Most of us poets—father and worthy sons—are deceived by appearances of correctness. I try to be concise, but I become obscure; my aim is smoothness, but sinews and spirit fail; professions of grandeur end in bombast; the over-cautious who fear the storm creep along the ground. Similarly, the writer who wants to give fantastic variety to his single theme [30] paints a dolphin in his woods and a wild boar in his sea. If art is wanting, the flight from blame leads to faults. The poorest smith near the School of Aemilius⁵ will reproduce nails and mimic soft hair in bronze, though he has no luck with the over-all effect of his work, because he won't know how to organize the

1. Translated by D. A. Russell. In this prose translation of Horace's verse, subheads have been added by the translator.

2. Horace is thought to have addressed the *Ars to* Lucius Calpurnius Piso (48 B.C.E.–32 C.E.) and his

identified.

3. Or "equal" [translator's note].

4. Roman goddess of the hunt, the moon, and childbirth.

5. A school for gladiators, near the shops of bronze

whole. If I were anxious to put anything together, I would as soon be that man as I would live with a mis-shapen nose when my black eyes and black hair had made me a beauty.

You writers must choose material equal to your powers. Consider long what your shoulders will bear and what they will refuse. [40] The man who chooses his subject with full control will not be abandoned by eloquence or lucidity of arrangement.

As to arrangement: its excellence and charm, unless I'm very wrong, consist in saying at this moment what needs to be said at this moment, and postponing and temporarily omitting a great many things. An author who has undertaken a poem must be choosy—cling to one point and spurn another.

As to words: if you're delicate and cautious in arranging them, you will give distinction to your style if an ingenious combination makes a familiar word new. If it happens to be necessary to denote hidden mysteries by novel symbols, [50] it will fall to you to invent terms the Cethegi in their loincloths⁶ never heard—and the permission will be granted if you accept it modestly—and, moreover, your new and freshly invented words will receive credit, if sparingly derived from the Greek springs. Is the Roman to give Caecilius and Plautus privileges denied to Virgil and Varius? Why am I unpopular if I can make a few acquisitions, when the tongue of Cato and Ennius⁸ so enriched their native language and produced such a crop of new names for things?

Fashions in Words

It always has been, and always will be, lawful to produce a word stamped with the current mark. [60] As woods change in leaf as the seasons slide on, and the first leaves fall, so the old generation of words dies out, and the newly born bloom and are strong like young men. We and our works are a debt owed to death. Here a land-locked sea protects fleets from the North wind—a royal achievement; here an old barren marsh where oars were piled feeds neighbouring cities and feels the weight of the plough; here again a river gives up a course that damaged the crops and learns a better way. But whatever they are, all mortal works will die; and still less can the glory and charm of words endure for a long life. [70] Many words which have fallen will be born again, many now in repute will fall if usage⁹ decrees: for in her hand is the power and the law and the canon of speech.

Metre and Subject

Histories of kings and generals, dreadful wars: it was Homer¹ who showed in what metre these could be narrated. Lines unequally yoked in pairs²

6. I.e., primitive Romans [translator's note].

7. Roman poet (ca. 74–14 B.C.E.), friend of Virgil and Horace; author of the tragedy *Thyestes*. Caecilius Statius (d. ca. 168 B.C.E.), former slave from Gaul who wrote Latin comedies. Plautus (d. ca. 184 B.C.E.), Roman comic dramatist whose plays were modeled on Greek New Comedy originals.

8. Roman tragic and epic poet (ca. 239–169 B.C.E.) who tried to refine the Latin language

9. Or "need" [translator's note].

1. Greek epic poet (8th c. B.C.E.) to whom the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are traditionally attributed.

2. In elegiac couplets, formed by a dactylic hexameter (a 6-foot line based on the syllabic pattern long-short-short) and a line replacing the 3d and 6th foot with one long syllable. The shorter second line gives the couplet a sense of falling off, thought to imitate melancholy.

B.C.E.), Roman statesman, stern moralist, and prolific writer of treatises and history.

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fulfilled³ though who first sent these tiny 'elegies' into the world is a grammarians' quarrel and still *sub judice*. Madness armed Archilochus with its own iambus;⁴ [80] that too was the foot that the comic sock and tragic buskin held, because it was suitable for dialogue, able to subdue the shouts of the mob, and intended by nature for a life of action. To the lyre, the Muse granted the celebration of gods and the children of gods, victorious boxers, winning race-horses, young men's love, and generous wine. If I have neither the ability nor the knowledge to keep the duly assigned functions and tones of literature, why am I hailed as a poet? Why do I prefer to be ignorant than learn, out of sheer false shame? A comic subject will not be set out in tragic verse; [90] likewise, the Banquet of Thyestes⁵ disdains being told in poetry of the private kind, that borders on the comic stage. Everything must keep the appropriate place to which it was allotted.

Nevertheless, comedy does sometimes raise her voice, and angry Chremes⁶ perorates with swelling eloquence. Often too Telephus and Peleus⁷ in tragedy lament in prosaic language, when they are both poor exiles and throw away their bombast and words half a yard long, if they are anxious to touch the spectator's heart with their complaint.

Emotion and Character

It is not enough for poetry to be beautiful; it must also be pleasing and lead the hearer's mind wherever it will. [101] The human face smiles in sympathy with smilers and comes to the help of those that weep. If you want me to cry, mourn first yourself; then your misfortunes will hurt me, Telephus and Peleus. If your words are given you ineptly, I shall fall asleep or laugh. Sad words suit a mournful countenance, threatening words an angry one; sportive words are for the playful, serious for the grave. For nature first shapes us within for any state of fortune—gives us pleasure or drives us to anger or casts us down to the ground with grievous sorrow and pains us—[111] and then expresses the emotions through the medium of the tongue. If the words are out of tune with the speaker's fortunes, the knights and infantry of Rome will raise a cackle. It will make a lot of difference whether the speaker is a god or a hero, an old man of ripe years or a hot youth, an influential matron or a hard-working nurse, a travelling merchant or the tiller of a green farm, a Colchian or an Assyrian, one nurtured at Thebes or at Argos.⁸

Choice and Handling of Myth

Either follow tradition or invent a consistent story. [120] If as a writer you are representing Achilles with all his honours, let him be active, irascible,

3. Horace is thinking of inscriptions accompanying dedications to gods [translator's note].
4. Metrical foot made of one short and one long syllable; iambic trimeter was the measure used in dialogue in both Greek comedies and Greek tragedies. Archilochus (ca. 7th c. B.C.E.), Ionian lyric poet thought to be the earliest writer of iambic verse.
5. In Greek mythology, Atræus murdered his brother Thyestes and served the boy to Thyestes, who had seduced Atræus's wife.
6. Miserly character in the comedies of Terence

(Roman dramatist, ca. 190—ca. 159 B.C.E.).
7. Father of the Greek hero Achilles, the central character in the *Iliad*. Telephus: son of Heracles and Auge, wounded by Achilles' spear and cured by its rust.
8. The Argive Agamemnon shows reserve and dignity, while the Theban Creon is a headstrong tyrant. The Assyrian would be effeminate, as compared with the Colchian, but both would be barbarians (Assyria was an ancient empire of west Asia; Colchis bordered the Black Sea).

implacable, and fierce; let him say 'the laws are not for me' and set no limit to the claims that arms can make. Let Medea be proud and indomitable, Ino full of tears, Ixion treacherous, Io never at rest, Orestes full of gloom.⁹ On the other hand, if you are putting something untried on the stage and venturing to shape a new character, let it be maintained to the end as it began and be true to itself. It is hard to put generalities in an individual way: you do better to reduce the song of Troy to acts than if you were the first to bring out something unknown and unsaid.¹ [131] The common stock will become your private property if you don't linger on the broad and vulgar round, or anxiously render word for word, a loyal interpreter, or again, in the process of imitation, find yourself in a tight corner from which shame, or the rule of the craft, won't let you move; or, once again, if you avoid a beginning like the cyclic poet²—

Of Priam's fortune will I sing, and war
well known to fame.

If he opens his mouth as wide as that, how *can* the promiser bring forth anything to match it? The mountains shall be in labour, and there shall be born—a silly mouse. [140] How much better was the way of that poet whose every endeavour is to the point!

Tell me, O Muse, of him who, after Troy
had fallen, saw the manners and the towns
of many men.³

His plan is not to turn fire to smoke, but smoke to light, so as to relate magnificent wonders thereafter—Antiphates and the Cyclops, Scylla and Charybdis.⁴ He doesn't start the Return of Diomedes from the death of Meleager,⁵ nor begin the Trojan war from the twin eggs;⁶ he is always making good speed towards the end of the story, and carries his hearer right into the thick of it as though it were already known. [150] He leaves out anything which he thinks cannot be polished up satisfactorily by treatment, and tells his fables and mixes truth with falsehood in such a way that the middle squares with the beginning and the end with the middle.

Let me tell you what I and the public both want, if you're hoping for an applauding audience that will wait for the curtain and keep its seat until the epilogue-speaker says 'Pray clap your hands'.⁷ You must mark the manners

9. Son of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra who avenges his father's murder by killing his mother and her lover; he is gloomy because the Furies bound him for the crime of matricide. Medea: enchantress of Greek myth who helps Jason gain the Golden Fleece, and, after he abandons her, murders their children in revenge. Ino: daughter of Cadmus, wife of Athamas; pursued by her enraged husband after plotting against her step-children, she leaped into the sea with her son, Ixion: king who slew his father-in-law and is bound to a perpetually revolving wheel in the underworld as punishment for his attempted seduction of Juno. Io: daughter of Inachus who was loved by Zeus and subsequently transformed into a cow, goaded by gadflies sent by the angry Hera, Zeus's wife.
1. I.e., to invent names and circumstances for a general theme is undesirable; if you object that the known myths are hackneyed, the remedy is in the treatment of them in a new way [translator's note].

2. That is, a poet of the epic cycle, writing poems in Homeric style and usually about events of the Trojan War.

3. *Odyssey* 1.1ff. [translator's note].

4. Characters from Homer's *Odyssey*: Antiphates, king of the Laestrygones; Cyclops, Greek mythological giant with one eye; Scylla, half-human sea monster that takes men from passing ships; Charybdis, a dangerous whirlpool in the waters between Sicily and Italy, regarded as a female monster.

5. Uncle of Diomedes, a Greek hero in the *Iliad*, and therefore of an older generation.

6. The offspring of Leda and Zeus were twins, Clytemnestra and Helen; Helen, taken from her husband by the Trojan prince Paris, is usually considered by poets to be the immediate cause of the Trojan War.

7. The comedies of the Roman playwrights Plautus and Terence close with *plaudite* (applaud!) or an equivalent phrase.

of each time of life, and assign the appropriate part to changing natures and ages. The child, just able to repeat words and planting his steps on the ground with confidence, is eager to play with his contemporaries, gets in and out of a temper without much cause, and changes hour by hour. [16.] The beardless youth, his tutor at last out of the way, enjoys his horses and dogs and the grass of the sunny Park. Moulded like wax into vice, he is surly to would-be advisers, slow to provide for necessities, prodigal of money, up in the air, eager, and quick to abandon the objects of his sudden love. Soon interests change: the grown man's mind pursues wealth and influential connections, is enslaved to honour, and avoids doing anything he may soon be trying to change. [169] Many distresses surround the old man. He is acquisitive, and poor man, doesn't put his hand on what he has laid up; he is afraid to use it. He goes about his business timidly and coldly, procrastinating, letting things drag on in hope, lazy yet greedy of his future; he is awkward and grumbling, given to praising the days when he was a boy and to criticizing and finding fault with his juniors. Years as they come bring many blessings with them; and as they go take many away. To save yourself giving a young man an old man's role or a boy a grown man's, remember that your character should always remain faithful to what is associated with his age and suits it.

Some Rules for Dramatists⁸

Actions may be either performed on the stage or reported when performed. [180] What comes in through the ear is less effective in stirring the mind than what is put before our faithful eyes and told by the spectator to himself. However, you are not to bring on to the stage events which ought to be carried out within; you are to remove many things from sight, and let them be related in due course by the eloquence of an eye-witness. Don't let Medea murder the children before the people's gaze, or wicked Atreus cook human offal in public, or Procne be metamorphosed into a bird or Cadmus⁹ into a snake. Anything you show me like that earns my incredulity and disgust.

A play that wants to be in demand and to be revived must not be shorter or longer than five acts.¹

[191] There should be no god to intervene, unless the problem merits such a champion.²

No fourth character should attempt to speak.

The chorus should play an actor's part, and do a man's duty. It should not sing behind the acts anything which has no relevance to or cohesion with the plot. It should side with the good and give them friendly counsel, restrain the angry, and approve those who scruple to go astray. It should praise a frugal table's fare, sound justice, law, and times of peace when the town's gates stand open. [200] It should keep secrets entrusted to it, and beg and pray the gods that Fortune may return to the wretched and abandon the proud.

8. Most of the precepts enumerated in this section may be found in ARISTOTLE'S *Poetics* (see above).

9. Founder of Thebes; in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Cadmus and his wife are changed into serpents. Atreus: father of Agamemnon and Menelaus; he arranged the feast of Thyestes. Procne: wife of Theseus, who punished him for raping her sister by killing her own child and serving him to her husband; later all three were turned into birds.

1. Not Aristotelian; but Menander seems normally to have composed his comedies in five acts, separated by choral interludes [translator's note].

Menander (ca. 342—ca. 292 B.C.E.), a leading writer of Greek New Comedy.

2. The *deus ex machina* was a divine character lowered from above the stage to conveniently resolve the action at the end of a play.

Development of Tragedy

The flute used not to be, as it is now, bound with copper and a rival to the trumpet. It was slight and simple, with few apertures, but serviceable to accompany and aid the chorus and to fill with its music the still not too crowded benches, where a population of no great size gathered in numbers easily counted, honest and decent and modest. But when that same population won wars and began to extend its territory, when longer walls came to embrace the cities, and people indulged themselves on holidays by drinking in the daytime, and nobody blamed them, [211] then rhythm and tunes acquired greater licence. For what taste could the uneducated show, the holiday crowd of countrymen and townsmen, honest folk and rogues, all mixed up together? This is how the musician came to add movement and elaboration to his art, and to trail his robe as he roamed the stage. This is how even the austere lyre gained a stronger voice, while lofty eloquence produced strange utterance and thought that shrewdly grasped practical needs and prophesied the future grew indistinguishable from the oracles of Delphi.³

Satyr-Plays⁴

[220] The competitor in tragic poetry, who strove for a worthless goat,⁵ next showed the rustic Satyrs, naked. Preserving his seriousness despite his keen wit, he made an attempt at a joke, because the audience, drunk and lawless at the end of the festival, had to be prevented from going away by tricks and pleasing innovations. But the way to recommend your laughing, joking satyrs, the way to turn seriousness to jest, is this: no god or hero you bring on the stage, if he was seen not long ago in royal gold and purple, must lower his language and move into a humble cottage; not, on the other hand, must his efforts to get off the ground lead him to try to grasp clouds and void. [231] Tragedy does not deserve to blurt out trivial lines, but she will modestly consort a little with the forward satyrs, like a respectable lady dancing because she must on a feast day.

As a Satyr-writer, my Piso friends, I shall not limit my liking to plain and proper terms, nor yet try to be so different from the tone of tragedy that there is no difference between Davus talking or bold Pythias, when she's just tricked Simon out of a talent,⁶ and Silenus, at once guardian and servant of the god he has brought up. [240] I shall make up my poem of known elements, so that anyone may hope to do the same, but he'll sweat and labour to no purpose when he ventures: such is the force of arrangement and combination, such the splendour that commonplace words acquire. Your woodland Fauns, if you take my judgement, should beware of behaving as if they were born at the street corner and were creatures of the Forum—they

3. The oracle of Apollo, and the most important oracle in ancient Greece.

4. These featured Silenus and satyrs in burlesque episodes of myth; style and meter were those of tragedy, not comedy. The piece was commonly performed: as a fourth play after three tragedies.

5. Euripides' *Cyclops* (ca. 410 B.C.E.) is the only complete extant example. Aristotle believed satyr-plays were that these satyrs were the creatures of the Forum.

6. Typical New Comedy names: slave, maid or prostitute, old man [translator's note].

note]. Silenus: male spirit associated with Dionysus, later represented as a drunken old man. "Satyrs": woodland spirits, usually part human, part goat.

5. Horace believes that the Greek term *tragōidia*, literally, "goat song," took its name from the prize of a goat.

6. Typical New Comedy names: slave, maid or prostitute, old man [translator's note].

shouldn't play the gallant in languishing verse or crack dirty and disreputable jokes; possessors of horses⁷ or ancestors or property take offence at this sort of thing and don't look kindly on work approved by the fried-peas-and-nuts public, or give it the prize.

The Need for Technical Perfection

[251] A long syllable following a short one makes an iambus.⁸ He is a quick foot; this is why he ordered iambic lines to be called trimeters, although he was giving six beats to the line, and was the same in form from first to last. Not all that long ago, wanting to fall rather more slowly and weightily upon our ears, he admitted the stately spondees to family privileges—what a comfortable, easy-going foot he is!—but without being quite so complaisant as to give up the second and fourth positions in the line. Rarely does he appear in Accius⁹ noble trimeters, and his rarity in Ennius' [260] weighty lines as they fly out on the stage damns them with the shocking accusation of hasty and careless craftsmanship—or else sheer ignorance of the trade.

Of course, it's not every critic that notices lines that aren't tuneful, and Roman poets have enjoyed undeserved licence. But does that entitle *me* to make mistakes and scribble away carelessly? Or should I rather expect everyone to see my mistakes, and so play safe and cautious, keeping within the bounds of what I can hope to be pardoned for? In that case, all I've done is to avoid blame; I have not deserved praise.

Greek Models

Study Greek models night and day. [270] Your ancestors praised Plautus' metre and his humour. On both counts their admiration was too indulgent, not to say childish, if it's true that you and I know how to distinguish a witless jest from a subtle one and if we've skill in our fingers and ears to know what sounds are permitted.

Inventiveness of the Greeks in Drama

The hitherto unknown genre of the tragic Muse is said to be Thespis¹ invention; he is supposed to have carried on a cart verses to be sung and acted by performers whose faces were smeared with wine-lees. After him came Aeschylus,² the inventor of the mask and splendid robe; he gave the stage a floor of modest boards, and taught the actors to talk big and give themselves height by their high boots. [281] Next came Old Comedy,³ much praised, though its liberty degenerated into vice and violence deserving restraint of law; the law was accepted, and the chorus fell silent, its right of shameful insult removed.

7. In the Roman Republic, the *equites* (horsemen or "knights") formed a wealthy class almost equal to senators in social standing.

8. Horace's main theme in what preceded was propriety; in the next section it is perfection. He marks the transition by humorously giving some very elementary metrical instruction [translator's note]. A spondee is a metrical foot formed by two long syllables.

9. Roman playwright and literary critic (170–90 B.C.E.).

1. Pioneer of Greek tragedy (6th. c. B.C.E.) who introduced the actor's reply to the chorus.

2. Greek dramatist (525–456 B.C.E.) who introduced the third actor to the Greek stage.

3. The greatest writer of Old Comedy was Aristophanes (ca. 450–ca. 385 B.C.E.).

Inventiveness of the Romans

Our poets have left nothing unattempted. Not the least part of their glory was won by venturing to abandon the footsteps of the Greeks and celebrate our own affairs; some produced historical plays, some comedies in Roman dress. [289] Latium⁴ would have been as famous for literature as for valour and deeds of arms if the poets had not, one and all, been put off by the labour and time of polishing their work. Children of Numa,⁵ show your disapproval of any poem which long time and much correction have not disciplined and smoothed ten times over, to satisfy the well-pared nail.

The Poets

Democritus⁷ thinks native talent a happier thing than poor, miserable art, and banishes sane poets from his Helicon.⁸ That's why so many don't bother to cut their nails or beard, but seek solitude and keep away from the bath. [299] For a man is sure to win the reward and name of poet if he never lets barber Licinus get hold of that head that three Anticyras⁹ won't make sound. I'm a fool to purge my bile when spring comes round. I could write as good poetry as any; but nothing is worth that price, and so I'll play the part of the whetstone, that can sharpen the knife though it can't itself cut. In other words, without writing myself, I will teach function and duty—where the poet's resources come from, what natures and forms him, what is proper and what not, in what directions excellence and error lead.

Wisdom is the starting-point and source of correct writing. [310] Socratic books¹ will be able to point out to you your material, and once the material is provided the words will follow willingly enough. If a man has learned his duty to his country and his friends, the proper kind of love with which parent, brother, and guest should be cherished, the functions of a senator and a judge, the task of a general sent to the front—then he automatically understands how to give each character its proper attributes. My advice to the skilled imitator will be to keep his eye on the model of life and manners, and draw his speech living from there.

[319] Sometimes a play devoid of charm, weight, and skill, but attractive with its commonplaces and with the characters well drawn, gives the people keener pleasure and keeps them in their seats more effectively than lines empty of substance and harmonious trivialities.

Greek and Roman Attitudes

The Greeks have the gift of genius from the Muse, and the power of well-rounded speech. They covet nothing but praise. Roman boys do long sums and learn to divide their *as* into a hundred parts.²

4. Area of central Italy that included Rome.

5. Numa Pompilius, half-legendary second king of Rome (traditional dates, 715–673 B.C.E.).

6. From this point, the poem turns to topics concerned with the poet himself: inspiration, moral knowledge, care for posterity, commitment. This main theme continues to the end [translator's note].

7. Greek philosopher (460–370 B.C.E.).

8. Mountain sacred to the Muses.

9. Hellebore, proverbially a cure for madness, came from Anticyra [translator's note].

1. The Greek philosopher Socrates (469–399 B.C.E.) left no writings, but he was the most important speaker in the dialogues of his greatest pupil, PLATO (ca. 427–ca. 347 B.C.E.).

2. Twelve unciae = 1 as; 5 unciae = quincunx; one-third as = triens; one-half as = semis [translator's note]. An as was worth perhaps \$3.

Young Albinus,³ subtract one uncia from a quincunx: what's left? . . . You could have told me by now . . .

'A triens.'

'Excellent. You'll be able to look after your affairs. Now add an uncia. What is it now?'

[330] 'A semis.'

Once this rust and care for cash has tainted the soul, can we hope for poems to be written that deserve preserving with cedar oil and keeping safe in smooth cypress?

Poets aim either to do good or to give pleasure—or, thirdly, to say things which are both pleasing and serviceable for life.

Whatever advice you give, be brief, so that the teachable mind can take in your words quickly and retain them faithfully. Anything superfluous overflows from the full mind.

Whatever you invent for pleasure, let it be near to truth. We don't want a play to ask credence for anything it feels like, or draw a living child from the ogress's belly after lunch. [341] The ranks of elder citizens chase things off the stage if there's no good meat in them, and the high-spirited youngsters won't vote for dry poetry. The man who combines pleasure with usefulness wins every suffrage, delighting the reader and also giving him advice; this is the book that earns money for the Sositii,⁴ goes overseas and gives your celebrated writer a long lease of fame.

However, there are some mistakes we are ready to forgive. The string doesn't always give the note that the hand and mind intended: it often returns a high note when you ask for a low. [350] The bow won't always hit what it threatens to hit. But when most features of a poem are brilliant, I shan't be offended by a few blemishes thrown around by carelessness or human negligence. But what then? If a copyist goes on making the same mistake however much he is warned, he is not forgiven; if a lyre-player always gets the same note wrong, people laugh at him; so, in my estimation, if a poet fails to come off a good deal, he's another Choerilius,⁵ whom I admire with a smile if he's good two or three times. Why, I'm angry even if good Homer goes to sleep, [360] though a doze is quite legitimate in a long piece of work.

Poetry is like painting. Some attracts you more if you stand near, some if you're further off. One picture likes a dark place, one will need to be seen in the light, because it's not afraid of the critic's sharp judgement. One gives pleasure once, one will please if you look at it over ten times.

Dear elder son of Piso, though your father's words are forming you in the right way and you have wisdom of your own besides, take this piece of advice away with you and remember it. In some things, a tolerable mediocrity is properly allowed. A mediocre lawyer or advocate [370] is a long way from the distinction of learned Messalla and doesn't know as much as Aulus Caecilius,⁶ but he has his value. But neither men nor gods nor shop-fronts allow a poet to be mediocre. Just as music out of tune or thick ointment or Sardinian honey with your poppy⁷ gives offence at a nice dinner, because the

3. Roman family name.

4. Booksellers (the Sositii were brothers and well-known booksellers).

5. Minor poet of the 4th c. B.C.E. who accompanied Alexander the Great on his campaigns and was paid to celebrate him.

6. Famous Augustan lawyer. Messalla Corvinus (64 B.C.E.–8 C.E.), Roman political leader, orator, author, soldier, and a patron of the arts.

7. Poppy seeds, when roasted and served with honey, were considered a delicacy; but they were spoiled if the honey had a bitter flavor.

meal could go on without them, so poetry, which was created and discovered for the pleasure of the mind, sinks right to the bottom the moment it declines a little from the top. The man who doesn't know how to play keeps away from the sporting gear in the park. [380] The man who's never been taught ball or discus or hoop keeps quiet, so that the packed spectators can't get a free laugh. But the man who doesn't know how to make verses still has a go. Why shouldn't he? He's free, and of free birth, he's assessed at an equestrian property rate, and he's not got a fault in the world.

You will never do or say anything if Minerva⁸ is against you: your taste and intelligence guarantee us that. But if you do write something some day, let it find its way to critic Maecius⁹ ears, and your father's, and mine; and be stored up for eight years in your notebooks at home. You will be able to erase what you haven't published; words once uttered forget the way home.

Poetry and Its Social Uses and Value

[391] Orpheus,¹ who was a holy man and the interpreter of the gods; deterred the men of the forests from killing and from disgusting kinds of food. This is why he was said to tame tigers and rabid lions. This too is why Amphion,² the founder of the city of Thebes, was said to move rocks where he wished by the sound of the lyre and coaxing prayers. In days of old, wisdom consisted in separating public property from private, the sacred from the secular, in checking promiscuity, in laying down rules for the married, in building cities, in inscribing laws on wooden tablets. [400] And that is how honour and renown came to divine poets and poetry. After them came the great Homer and Tyrtaeus,³ who sharpened masculine hearts for war by their verses. Oracles were uttered in verse. The path of life was pointed out in verse. Kings' favours were won by the Muses' tunes. Entertainment was found there also, and rest after long labour. So there is no call to be ashamed of the Muse with her skill on the lyre or of Apollo⁴ the singer.

Art and Nature

Do good poems come by nature or by art? This is a common question. For my part, I don't see what study can do without a rich vein of talent, [410] nor what good can come of untrained genius. They need each other's help and work together in friendship. A boy who wants to reach the hoped-for goal in the race endures and does a lot, sweats and freezes, refrains from sex and wine. The clarinetist who is playing in honour of Apollo learns his lesson first and stands in awe of his master. But nowadays it's enough to say: 'I write marvellous poems. The itch take the hindmost! It's a disgrace for me to be left behind and admit I don't know something that, to be sure, I never learned.'

8. Roman goddess of handicrafts and war, whose attributes became conflated with those of the Greek goddess Athena.

9. Roman author of 12 epigrams of whom nothing is known except his name.

1. A holy man because he founded the Greek religion Orphism. His extraordinary musical powers—said to be able to charm not only wild beasts but also rocks and trees—made Orpheus a model of

the poet.
2. Son of Zeus and Antiope, responsible in part for the miraculous construction of the walls of Thebes.

3. Poet of the 7th c. B.C.E.—according to tradition, a lame Attic schoolmaster—who composed war songs and martial elegies for the Spartans, who sang them while marching.
4. Son of Zeus and Leto, god of music and poetry.

[419] A poet who is rich in land and investments bids his flatterers 'come and better themselves'—just like an auctioneer collecting a crowd to buy his wares. But if he's a man who can set out a good dinner properly and go bail for a poor and impecunious client and get him out of a grim legal tangle, I shall be surprised if the lucky fellow knows how to distinguish a false friend from a true. If you have given a man a present, or if you want to, don't then lead him, full of joy, to your verses. He's bound to say 'Splendid, beautiful, just right'; he'll grow pale here, he'll drip dew from loving eyes, he'll jump about, he'll beat the ground with his foot. [431] Your mocker is more deeply stirred than your true admirer, just as hired mourners at a funeral say and do almost more than those who genuinely grieve. Kings are said to ply a man with many cups and test him with wine if they are trying to discover if he deserves their friendship. If you write poetry, the fox's hidden feelings will never escape you. If you read anything aloud to Quintilius,⁵ he'd say 'pray change that, and that'. You would say you couldn't do better, [440] though you'd tried two or three times, to no purpose. Then he'd tell you to scratch it out and put the badly turned lines back on the anvil. If you preferred defending your error to amending it, he wasted no more words or trouble on preventing you from loving yourself and your handiwork without competition. A wise and good man will censure flabby lines, reprehend harsh ones, put a black line with a stroke of the pen besides unpolished ones, prune pretentious ornaments, force you to shed light on obscurities, convict you of ambiguity, mark down what must be changed. [450] He'll be an Aristarchus.⁶ He won't say, 'Why should I offend a friend in trifles?' These trifles lead to serious troubles, if once you are ridiculed and get a bad reception.

The Mad Poet

Men of sense are afraid to touch a mad poet and give him a wide berth. He's like a man suffering from a nasty itch, or the jaundice, or fanaticism, or Diana's wrath.⁷ Boys chase him and follow him round incautiously. And if, while he's belching out his lofty lines and wandering round, he happens to fall into a well or a pit, like a Fowler intent on his birds, then, however long he shouts 'Help! Help! Fellow citizens, help!' there'll be no one to bother to pick him up. [461] And if anyone should trouble to help and let down a rope, my question will be, 'How do you know that he didn't throw himself down deliberately? Are you sure he wants to be saved?' And I shall tell the tale of the death of the Sicilian poet. Empedocles⁸ wanted to be regarded as an immortal god, and so he jumped, cool as you like, into burning Etna.⁹ Let poets have the right and privilege of death. To save a man against his will is the same as killing him. This isn't the only time he's done it. If he's pulled out now, he won't become human or lay aside his love of a notorious end.

[470] It's far from clear why he keeps writing poetry. Has the villain pissed on his father's ashes? Or disturbed the grim site of a lightning-strike? Any-

5. Roman critic of the 2d c. B.C.E.; the name is used here to denote someone with taste.
6. The great Alexandrian scholar [2d c. B.C.E.] marked spurious or doubtful lines in Homer with the sign which Horace here attributes to the good critic [translator's note].
7. Lunoav (as the word's derivation from *luna* sug-

gests) was supposed to be caused by the moon goddess, Diana.
8. Sicilian philosopher and statesman. (5th c. B.C.E.). The actual place and manner of his death is disputed.
9. Europe's highest active volcano, located in Sicily.

way, he's raving, and his harsh readings put learned and unlearned alike to flight, like a bear that's broken the bars of his cage. If he catches anyone, he holds on and kills him with reading. He's a real leech that won't let go of the skin till it's full of blood.

ca. 10 B.C.E.

LONGINUS

first century C.E.

Since the eighteenth century, the ancient Greek text *On Sublimity* has maintained a reputation as one of the most influential classical works in the tradition of European criticism, despite the uncertainty that surrounds its authorship and date of composition. A distinctive feature of this famous treatise is its favorable commentary on the role of emotion (*pathos*) in the practices of writing, oratory, and reading. According to the author of *On Sublimity* (*Peri Hypsous* in Greek), whom critics refer to as "Longinus," the presence of noble passion is essential for achieving sublimity (*hupsos*), by which he means an elevated and lofty style of writing that rises above the ordinary. From Longinus's author-centered perspective, writers and orators achieve greatness not just by rhetorical techniques but also by deep feelings, profound thoughts, and natural genius: "Sublimity is the echo of a noble mind." Often the experience of reading a great author or listening to a great speech leads us to a feeling of ecstasy or transport (*ekstasis*), which is distinct from the more rational effects of persuasion, the goal of rhetoric. For Longinus, sublimity uplifts the spirit of the reader, filling him or her with unexpected astonishment and pride, arousing noble thoughts, and suggesting more than words can convey.

The extant text of *On Sublimity* derives from a tenth-century medieval manuscript that offers conflicting statements as to the identity of the treatise's creator. For unknown reasons, the table of contents attributes the text to either "Dionysius or Longinus," while the title of the manuscript itself simply indicates that a certain "Dionysius Longinus" is the author. The first attribution suggests that the author is either the Augustan Age Dionysius of Halicarnassus or Cassius Longinus, the third-century pupil of PLOTINUS. For various detailed reasons, neither of these alternatives has convinced scholars. The principal argument against Dionysius is that *On Sublimity* does not comport with the style and general approach of his other works, whose authorship is not in question. The main point of contention against Longinus, who in the eighteenth century was universally held to be the author, is that textual evidence taken from the concluding chapter on the decline of literature suggests a date of composition no later than 100 C.E., thus ruling out a third-century author. The title of the manuscript offers no solution either, for nothing is known of a Dionysius Longinus. One of the few things that can be determined with some certainty is that the author must have been a Hellenized Jew or at least in contact with Jewish culture, since the opening of Genesis is cited as a worthy example of sublimity. Such a reference is quite distinctive: no other known pagan writer employs the Bible in this manner. While scholars continue to attribute *On Sublimity* to Cassius Longinus, they do so as a matter of convenience.

Despite seven lengthy gaps that make up approximately one-third of the original text, the intended organization of *On Sublimity* is reasonably certain. After the formal preface addressed to Postumius Terentianus (about whom we know nothing) and the

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the names given to poets—*vates*, or “prophet,” by the Romans, and *poietes*, or “maker,” by the Greeks—as evidence of their ancient dignity. But he bases his defense essentially on what the poet does. While all arts depend on works of nature, the poet, supreme among artists, can make another nature, new and more beautiful. “Nature never set forth the earth in so rich tapestry as divers poets have done, neither with pleasant rivers, fruitful trees, sweet-smelling flowers, nor whatsoever else may make the too much loved earth more lovely.”

Moreover, the poet presents virtues and vices in a more lively and affecting way than nature does, teaching, delighting, and moving the reader at the same time. The poet is superior to both the philosopher and the historian, because he is more concrete than the one and more universal than the other. Sidney also refutes Platon’s charge that poets are liars by stating that “the poet nothing affirmeth,” and he denies as well the Platonic claim that poetry arouses base desires. Surveying the English literary scene up to his time, Sidney finds little to praise except for Surrey’s lyrics, the *Mirror for Magistrates*, Spenser’s *Shephearides Calender*; the drama he found generally bad. Despite his seriousness and logical rigor, Sidney’s manner in this tract is graceful and easy, a manifestation of that *sprezzatura*, or casualness in doing something difficult perfectly, which Castiglione held up as an ideal in *The Courtier*.

Sir Philip Sidney From The Defence of Poesy

[The Uses of Horsemanship]

When the right virtuous Edward Wotton¹ and I were at the Emperor’s court together, we gave ourselves to learn horsemanship of John Pietro Pugliano, one that with great commendation had the place of an esquire² in his stable. And he, according to the fertility of the Italian wit, did not only afford us the demonstration of his practice but sought to enrich our minds with the contemplations therein which he thought most precious. But with none I remember mine ears were at any time more laden, than when (either angered with slow payment, or moved with our learner-like admiration) he exercised his speech in the praise of his faculty. He said soldiers were the noblest estate of mankind, and horsemen the noblest of soldiers. He said they were the masters of war and ornaments of peace, speedy goers and strong abiders, triumphers both in camps and courts. Nay, to so unbelievably a point he proceeded, as that no earthly thing bred such wonder to a prince as to be a good horseman. Skill of government was but a *pedanteria*³ in comparison. Then would he add certain praises by telling what a peerless beast the horse was, the only serviceable courtier without flattery, the beast of most beauty, faithfulness, courage, and such more, that if I had not been a piece of a logician⁴ before I came to him I think he would have persuaded me to have wished myself a horse. But thus much at least with his no few words he drave into me, that self-love is better than any gilding to make that seem gorgeous wherein ourselves be parties. Wherein, if Pugliano’s strong affection and weak arguments will not satisfy you, I will give you a nearer example of myself, who (I know not by what mischance) in these my not old years and idlest times having slipped into the

1. Edward Wotton (1548–1626) was an English courtier and statesman and a good friend of Sidney’s.
2. Equerry, an officer in charge of the horses and stables of a noble house.

3. Pedantry, narrow and overly detailed knowledge, of use only to schoolmasters.

4. I.e., if I did not have some skill in logic.

title of a poet, am provoked to say something unto you in the defense of that my unselected vocation, which if I handle with more good will than good reasons, bear with me, since the scholar is to be pardoned that followeth the steps of his master.⁵ And yet I must say that, as I have just cause to make a pitiful defense of poor poetry, which from almost the highest estimation of learning is fallen to be the laughing-stock of children, so have I need to bring some more available⁶ proofs; since the former is by no man barred of his deserved credit, the silly⁷ latter hath had even the names of philosophers used to the defacing of it, with great danger of civil war among the Muses.

[The Poet, Poetry]

* * * Since the authors of most of our sciences were the Romans, and before them the Greeks, let us a little stand upon their authorities, but even so far as to see what names they have given unto this now scorned skill.⁸

Among the Romans a poet was called *vates*, which is as much as a diviner, foreseer, or prophet, as by his conjoined words *vaticinium* and *vaticinari*⁹ is manifest: so heavenly a title did that excellent people bestow upon this heart-ravishing knowledge. And so far were they carried into the admiration thereof, that they thought in the chanceable hitting upon any such verses great foretellers of their following fortunes were placed. Whereupon grew the word of *Sortes Virgilianae*,¹ when by sudden opening Virgil’s book they lighted upon any verse of his making, whereof the histories of the emperors’ lives are full: as of Albinus,² the governor of our island, who in his childhood met with this verse

Arma amens capio nec sat rationis in armis³

and in his age performed it. Which, although it were a very vain and godless superstition, as also it was to think spirits were commanded by such verses—whereupon this word charms, derived of *carmina*,⁴ cometh—so yet serveth it to show the great reverence those wits were held in; and altogether not without ground, since both the oracles of Delphos and Sibylla’s prophecies⁵ were wholly delivered in verses. For that same exquisite observing of number and measure in the words, and that high flying liberty of conceit⁶ proper to the poet, did seem to have some divine force in it.

And may not I presume a little further, to show the reasonableness of this word *vates*, and say that the holy David’s⁷ Psalms are a divine poem? If I do, I shall not do it without the testimony of great learned men, both ancient and modern. But even the name of Psalms will speak for me, which being interpreted, is nothing but songs; then that it is fully written in metre, as all learned

5. I.e., Pugliano; Sidney is being ironic.

6. Effective.

7. Weak, poor.

8. I.e., poetry.

9. To prophesy. “*Vates*,” poet-prophet. “*Vaticinium*,” a prophecy.

1. Casting of lots out of Virgil, i.e., accepting as prophecy a line of Virgil chosen by random opening of the *Aeneid*.

2. Roman governor of Britain, declared emperor by his troops in 193 A.D., but defeated four years later.

3. Franitic, I take up arms, yet there is little purpose in arms. (*Aeneid* 2.314).

4. Songs, poems.

5. The Pythia (priestesses) at Delphi in Greece proclaimed Apollo’s oracles. The Sibyls were thought to be prophetesses from the east. The Cumaean Sibyl directed Aeneas to the underworld and brought the famous Sibylline Books to Rome.

6. Imaginative conception.

7. The biblical King David, commonly identified in the Renaissance as author of the Book of Psalms.

hebricans agree, although the rules be not yet fully found;⁸ lastly and principally, his handling his prophecy, which is merely⁹ poetical: for what else is the awaking his musical instruments, the often and free changing of persons, his notable *prosopopoeias*,¹ when he maketh you, as it were, see God coming in His majesty, his telling of the beasts' joyfulness and hills leaping, but a heavenly poesy, wherein almost² he showeth himself a passionate lover of that unspeakable and everlasting beauty to be seen by the eyes of the mind, only cleared by faith? But truly now having named him, I fear me I seem to profane that holy name, applying it to poetry, which is among us thrown down to so ridiculous an estimation. But they that with quiet judgements will look a little deeper into it, shall find the end and working of it such as, being rightly applied, deserveth not to be scourged out of the Church of God.

But now let us see how the Greeks named it, and how they deemed of it. The Greeks called him a "poet," which name hath, as the most excellent, gone through other languages. It cometh of this word *poiein*, which is, to make: wherein, I know not whether by luck or wisdom, we Englishmen have met with³ the Greeks in calling him a maker: which name, how high and incomparable a title it is, I had rather were known by marking the scope of other sciences than by any partial⁴ allegation.

There is no art delivered to mankind that hath not the works of nature for his principal object, without which they⁵ could not consist, and on which they so depend, as they become actors and players, as it were, of what nature will have set forth. So doth the astronomer look upon the stars, and, by that he seeth, set down what order nature hath taken therein. So doth the geometrician and arithmetician in their diverse sorts of quantities. So doth the musicians in time tell you which by nature agree,⁶ which not. The natural philosopher thereon hath his name, and the moral philosopher standeth upon⁷ the natural virtues, vices, or passions of man; and follow nature (saith he) therein, and thou shalt not err. The lawyer saith what men have determined; the historian what men have done. The grammarian speaketh only of the rules of speech; and the rhetorician and logician, considering what in nature will soonest prove and persuade, thereon give artificial rules, which still are compassed within the circle of a question according to the proposed matter.⁸ The physician weigheth⁹ the nature of man's body, and the nature of things helpful or hurtful unto it. And the metaphysic, though it be in the second and abstract notions, and therefore be counted supernatural, yet doth he indeed build upon the depth of nature. Only the poet, disdaining to be tied to any such subjection, lifted up with the vigour of his own invention, doth grow in effect another nature, in making things either better than nature bringeth forth, or, quite anew, forms such as never were in nature, as the Heroes, Deimigods, Cyclops, Chimeras, Furies,¹ and such like: so as he goeth hand in hand with nature, not enclosed within the narrow warrant of her gifts, but freely ranging only

8. Many Renaissance scholars who knew some Hebrew ("hebricans") thought the psalms were written in verse forms approximating classical meters.

9. Entirely.

1. Personifications.

2. Indeed.

3. Agree with.

4. Biased.

5. The several arts.

6. Which rhythmic measures agree with nature.

7. Takes as subject matter. "Natural philosopher": scientist. "Thereon": i. e., from studying nature.

8. The rules of those arts ("artificial rules") are always bound by the specific proposed issue.

9. Studies.

1. Avenging deities who punish crimes both in this world and after death. "Heroes": in the Greek sense, part human, part divine. "Cyclops": one-eyed giants in Homer's *Odyssey*. "Chimeras": fire-breathing monsters with lion's head, goat's body, and serpent's tail.

within the zodiac of his own wit. Nature never set forth the earth in so rich tapestry as divers poets have done; neither with so pleasant rivers, fruitful trees, sweet-smelling flowers, nor whatsoever else may make the too much loved earth more lovely. Her world is brazen, the poets only deliver a golden.²

But let those things alone, and go to man—for whom as the other things are, so it seemeth in him her uttermost cunning; is employed—and know whether she have brought forth so true a lover as Theagenes, so constant a friend as Pylades, so valiant a man as Orlando, so right a prince as Xenophon's Cyrus,³ so excellent a man every way as Virgil's Aeneas. Neither let this be jestingly conceived, because the works of the one be essential, the other in imitation or fiction,⁴ for any understanding knoweth the skill of each artificer standeth in that *idea* or fore-conceit⁵ of the work, and not in the work itself. And that the poet hath that *idea* is manifest, by delivering them forth in such excellency as he had imagined them. Which delivering forth also is not wholly imaginative,⁶ as we are wont to say by them that build castles in the air; but so far substantially it worketh, not only to make a Cyrus, which had been but a particular excellency as nature might have done, but to bestow a Cyrus upon the world to make many Cyruses, if they will learn a right why and how that maker made him.

Neither let it be deemed too saucy a comparison to balance the highest point of man's wit with the efficacy of nature; but rather give right honour to the heavenly Maker of that maker, who having made man to His own likeness, set him beyond and over all the works of that second nature,⁷ which in nothing he showeth so much as in poetry, when with the force of a divine breath⁸ he bringeth things forth surpassing her doings—with no small arguments to the credulous of that first accursed fall of Adam, since our erected wit maketh us know what perfection is, and yet our infected will⁹ keepeth us from reaching unto it. But these arguments will by few be understood, and by fewer granted. This much (I hope) will be given me, that the Greeks with some probability of reason gave him the name above all names of learning.

Now let us go to a more ordinary opening¹ of him, that the truth may be the more palpable: and so I hope, though we get not so unmatched a praise as the etymology of his names will grant, yet his very description, which no man will deny, shall not justly be barred from a principal commendation.

Poesy therefore is an art of imitation, for so Aristotle termeth it in the word *mimesis*²—that is to say, a representing, counterfeiting, or figuring forth—to speak metaphorically, a speaking picture—with this end, to teach and delight.

[Three Kinds of Poets]

Of this have been three general kinds. The chief, both in antiquity and excellency, were they that did imitate the unconceivable excellencies of God.

2. A reference to *The Four Ages* (of man) (see pp. 989–991), the idea that the world has declined from the first and perfect Golden Age, through the Silver, Bronze, and Iron ages: "Hesiod's *Nature's*."

3. Cyrus the Great of Persia, exemplary hero of Xenophon's prose romance, the *Cyropaedia* (4th century B.C.). Theagenes, hero of Heliodorus' Greek romance, *Aethiopica* (3rd century A.D.). Pylades, friend of the Greek hero Orestes. Orlando, hero of Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* (1516).

4. The works of nature are real ("essential"); those of the poet are fiction.

5. Imaginative plan, conception.

6. Fanciful.

7. Physical nature.

8. Literally, inspiration.

9. Will corrupted in the Fall by Original Sin. "Erected

wit": sound intelligence.

1. Analysis or explanation.

2. *Poetics*, 1.2.

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David in his Psalms; Solomon in his Song of Songs, in his Ecclesiastes, and Proverbs; Moses and Deborah in their Hymns; and the writer of Job: which, beside other, the learned Emanuel Tremellius and Franciscus Junius³ do entitle the poetical part of the Scripture. Against these none will speak that hath the Holy Ghost in due holy reverence. (In this kind, though in a full wrong divinity, were Orpheus, Amphion, Homer in his Hymns, and many other, both Greeks and Romans.) And this poesy must be used by whomsoever will follow St. James's counsel in singing psalms when they are merry; and I know is used with the fruit of comfort by some, when, in sorrowful pangs of their death-bringing sins, they find the consolation of the never-leaving goodness.

The second kind is of them that deal with matters philosophical, either moral, as Tyrtæus, Phocylides, Cato,⁵ or natural, as Lucretius and Virgil's *Georgics*; or astronomical, as Manilius and Pontanus; or historical, as Lucan; in which who mislike, the fault is in their judgement quite out of taste, and not in the sweet food of sweetly uttered knowledge.

But because this second sort is wrapped within the fold of the proposed subject, and takes not the course of his own invention, whether they properly be poets or no let grammarians dispute, and go to the third, indeed right poets; of whom chiefly this question ariseth: betwixt whom and these second is such a kind of difference as betwixt the meaner sort of painters, who counterfeit only such faces as are set before them; and the more excellent, who having no law but wit,⁷ bestow that in colours upon you which is fittest for the eye to see; as the constant though lamenting look of Lucretia, when she punished herself another's fault,⁸ wherein he painteth not Lucretia whom he never saw; but painteth the outward beauty of such a virtue. For these third⁹ be they which most properly do imitate to teach and delight, and to imitate borrow nothing of what is, hath been, or shall be; but range, only reined with borrow'd discretion, into the divine consideration of what may be and should be. These be they that, as the first and most noble sort may justly be termed *vates*, so these are waited on in the excellentest languages and best understandings with the fore-described name of poets. For these indeed do merely¹ make to imitate; and imitate both to delight and teach; and delight, to move men to take that goodness in hand, which without delight they would fly as from a stranger; and teach, to make them know that goodness whereunto they are moved— which being the noblest scope to which ever any learning was directed; yet want there not idle tongues to bark at them.

These be subdivided into sundry more special denominations. The most notable be the heroic, lyric, tragic, comic, satiric, iambic, elegiac, pastoral, and certain others, some of these being termed according to the matter they deal with, some by the sorts of verses they liked best to write in; for indeed the greatest part of poets have apparelled their poetical inventions in that number;²

3. Two scholars who produced a Protestant Latin translation of the Bible in 1575-80.
 4. "Is any merry? Let him sing psalms" (James 5:13).
 5. Dionysius Cato was the reputed author of the *Disticha de moribus*, four books of epigrammatic moral precepts in Latin hexameters, used as a textbook in Elizabethan schools.
 6. Lucan wrote *De Bello Civili* (*Pharsalia*), a heroic poem on the struggle between Caesar and Pompey. Lucretius wrote a philosophical epic *De rerum natura*

(*On the Nature of Things*). Virgil's *Georgics* exalts the life and work of the farmer.
 7. Imagination, governed by sound understanding.
 8. A notable exemplar of chastity and honor, the Roman matron Lucretia committed suicide after being raped by the son of King Tarquinius Superbus.
 9. I.e., the right poets.
 1. Only.
 2. I.e., in numbers, poet-to-meters.

of writing which is called verse—indeed but apparelled, verse being but ornament and no cause to poetry, since there have been many most excellent poets that never versified, and now swarm many versifiers that need never answer to the name of poets. For Xenophon, who did imitate so excellently as give us *effigiem iusti imperii*, the portraiture of a just empire, under the name of Cyrus, (as Cicero saith of him) made therein an absolute heroical poem. So did Heliodorus in his sugared invention of that picture of love in *Ægænes* and *Chariclea*; and yet both these wrote in prose: which I speak to show that it is not rhyming and versing that maketh a poet—no more than a king's gown maketh an advocate, who though he pleaded in armour should be an advocate and no soldier. But it is that feigning notable images of virtues, *veces*; or what else, with that delightful teaching, which must be the right describing note to know a poet by; although indeed the senate of poets hath chosen verse as their fittest raiment, meaning, as in matter they passed all in all, so in manner to go beyond them: not speaking (table-talk fashion or like men in a dream) words as they chanceably fall from the mouth, but peising⁴ each syllable of each word by just proportion according to the dignity of the subject.

[Poetry, Philosophy, History]

Now therefore it shall not be amiss first to weigh this latter sort of poetry by his works, and then by his parts; and if in neither of these anatomies⁵ he be condemnable, I hope we shall obtain a more favourable sentence.

This purifying of wit—this enriching of memory, enabling of judgement, and enlarging of conceit—which commonly we call learning, under what name soever it come forth, or to what immediate end soever it be directed, the final end is to lead and draw us to as high a perfection as our degenerate souls, made worse by their clayey lodgings, can be capable of.

This, according to the inclination of the man, bred many-formed impressions. For some that thought this felicity principally to be gotten by knowledge, and no knowledge to be so high or heavenly as acquaintance with the stars, gave themselves to astronomy; others, persuading themselves to be demigods if they knew the causes of things, became natural and supernatural philosophers; some an admirable delight drew to music; and some the certainty of demonstration to the mathematics. But all, one and other, having this scope: to know, and by knowledge to lift up the mind from the dungeon of the body to the enjoying his own divine essence.

But when by the balance of experience it was found that the astronomer, looking to the stars, might fall in a ditch, that the inquiring philosopher might be blind in himself, and the mathematician might draw forth a straight line with a crooked heart, then lo, did proof, the overruler of opinions, make manifest that all these are but serving sciences, which, as they have each a private end in themselves, so yet are they all directed to the highest end of the mistress-knowledge, by the Greeks called *architectonike*⁶ which stands (as I think) in the knowledge of a man's self, in the ethic and politic consideration, with the end of well-doing and not of well-knowing only—even as the saddler's next⁷

3. All others, in all respects.
 4. Weighing.
 5. Analyses.

6. The science that orders or systematizes knowledge.
 7. Nearest.

end is to make a good saddle, but his further end to serve a nobler faculty; which is horsemanship, so the horseman's to soldiery, and the soldier not only to have the skill, but to perform the practice of a soldier. So that, the ending of all earthly learning being virtuous action, those skills that most serve to bring forth that have a most just title to be princes over all the rest.

Wherein, if we can, show we the poet's nobleness, by setting him before his other competitors. Among whom as principal challengers step forth the moral philosophers, whom, me thinketh, I see coming towards me with a sullen gravity, as though they could not abide vice by daylight, rudely clothed for to witness outwardly their contempt of outward things, with books in their hands against glory, whereto they set their names, sophisticatedly⁸ speaking against subtlety, and angry with any man in whom they see the foul fault of anger. These men casting largess as they go, of definitions, divisions, and distinctions;⁹ with a scornful interrogative do soberly ask whether it be possible to find any path so ready to lead a man to virtue as that which teacheth what virtue is; and teach it not only by delivering forth his very being, his causes and effects, but also by making known his enemy, vice, which must be destroyed, and his cumbersome servant, passion, which must be mastered; by showing the generalities that containeth it, and the specialities that are derived from it; lastly, by plain setting down how it extendeth itself out of the limits of a man's own little world to the government of families and maintaining of public societies.

The historian scarcely giveth leisure to the moralist to say so much, but that he, laden with old mouse-eaten records, authorizing himself (for the most part) upon other histories, whose greatest authorities are built upon the notable foundation of hearsay; having much ado to accord differing writers and to pick truth out of their partiality;² better acquainted with a thousand years ago than with the present age, and yet better knowing how this world goeth than how his own wit runneth; curious for antiquities and inquisitive of novelties; a wonder to young folks and a tyrant in-table talk, denieth, in a great chafe, that any man for teaching of virtue, and virtuous actions is comparable to him. "I am *testis temporum, lux veritatis, vita memoriae, magistra vitae, nuntia vetustatis*." The philosopher,³ saith he, "teacheth a disputative virtue, but I do an active. His virtue is excellent in the dangerless Academy of Plato, but mine showeth forth her honourable face in the battles of Marathon, Pharsalia, Poitiers, and Agincourt." He teacheth virtue by certain abstract considerations, but I only bid you follow the footing of them that have gone before you. Old-aged experience goeth beyond the fine-witted philosopher, but I give the experience of many ages. Lastly, if he make the songbook, I put the learner's hand to the lute; and if he be the guide, I am the light." Then would he allege you innumerable examples, confirming story by stories, how much the wisest senators and princes have been directed by the credit of history, as Brutus, Alphonsus of Aragon,⁵ and who not, if need be? At length the long line of their disputa-

8. With deceptive subtlety.

9. Bountiful gifts of scholastic terms and arguments.

1. Basing his authority.

2. Bias.

3. I am the witness of the times, the light of truth, the life of memory, the teacher of life, and the messenger of antiquity (Cicero, *De Oratore*, 2.9.36).

4. At Marathon, the Greeks defeated the Persians (490

B.C.); at Pharsalia, Caesar defeated Pompey (48 B.C.)

and at Poitiers (1356) and Agincourt (1415); the English defeated the French.

5. Marcus Brutus was inspired to rise up against Caesar by the history of his great republican ancestor, Junius Brutus, who expelled the Tarquin kings. Alphonsus V of Aragon (1396-1458) carried the histories of Livy and Caesar into battle with him.

tion-maketh a point in this, that the one giveth the precept, and the other⁶ the example.

* * *

Now, to that which commonly is attributed to the praise of history, in respect of the notable learning is got by marking the success,⁷ as though therein a man should see virtue exalted and vice punished—truly that commendation is particular to poetry, and far off from history. For indeed poetry ever sets virtue so out in her best colours, making Fortune her well-waiting handmaid, that one must needs be enamoured of her. Well may you see Ulysses in a storm,⁸ and in other hard plights; but they are but exercises of patience and magnanimity, to make them shine the more in the near-following prosperity. And of the contrary part, if evil men come to the stage, they ever go out (as the tragedy writer⁹ answered to one that misliked the show of such persons) so manacled as they little animate folks to follow them. But the history, being captured to the truth of a foolish world, is many times a terror from well-doing, and an encouragement to unbridled wickedness. For see we not valiant Miltiades rot in his fetters? The just Phocion and the accomplished Socrates put to death like traitors? The cruel Severus live prosperously? The excellent Severus miserably murdered? Sulla and Marius dying in their beds? Pompey and Cicero slain then when they would have thought exile a happiness? See we not virtuous Cato draven to kill himself,² and rebel Caesar so advanced that his name yet, after 1600 years, lasteth in the highest honour? And mark but even Caesar's own words of the aforementioned Sulla (who in that only did honestly, to put down his dishonest tyranny), *litteras nescivit*, as if want of learning caused him to do well.³ He meant it not by poetry, which, not content with earthly plagues, deviseth new punishments in hell for tyrants; nor yet by philosophy, which teacheth *occidendo esse*;⁴ but no doubt by skill in history, for that indeed can afford you Cypselus, Periander, Phalaris, Dionysius,⁵ and I know not how many more of the same kennel, that speed well enough in their abominable injustice of usurpation.

I conclude, therefore, that he⁶ excelleth history, not only in furnishing the mind with knowledge, but in setting it forward to that which deserveth to be called and accounted good: which setting forward, and moving to well-doing, indeed setteth the laurel crown upon the poets as victorious, not only of the historian, but over the philosopher, howsoever in teaching it may be questionable.⁷

For suppose it be granted (that which I suppose with great reason may be

6. History. "The one": philosophy.

7. The outcome.

8. In *Odyssey* 5.291ff.

9. Euripides (as reported by Plutarch).

1. Great statesman and orator killed at Antony's command trying to escape from Rome. Miltiades, Athenian general and victor at Marathon, later imprisoned by the Athenians. Phocion, Athenian general and statesman executed for treason because he opposed an unjust war. "Cruel Severus": Emperor Lucius Septimus Severus, a plunderer of cities. "Excellent Severus": Emperor Alexander Severus, a reformer slain by his troops. Sulla and Marius, political rivals who brought unrest and destruction to Rome for more than twenty

years. Pompey the Great, defeated by Caesar at Pharsalia and slain in Egypt.

2. Cato: Cato the Younger committed suicide after his party failed to defeat Caesar.

3. Caesar did well only in putting down Sulla's dishonest tyranny, and it was the fact that Sulla did not know (historical) literature (*litteras nescivit*) that enabled Caesar to defeat him.

4. They (tyrants) must be killed.

5. Four famous tyrants of the classical world: the first two were from Corinth; Phalaris, Agrigentum; Dionysius the Elder; Syracuse.

6. The poet.

7. Arguable.

But I am content not only to decipher him⁶ by his works (although works, in commendation or dispraise, must ever hold a high authority), but more narrowly will examine his parts; so that (as in a man) though all together may carry a presence full of majesty and beauty, perchance in some one defectuous piece⁷ we may find blemish.

Now in his parts, kinds, or species (as you list to term them), it is to be noted that some poesies have coupled together two or three kinds, as the tragical and comical, whereupon is risen the tragi-comical. Some, in the manner, have mingled prose and verse, as Sannazzaro and Boethius.⁸ Some have mingled matters heroical and pastoral. But that cometh all to one in this question, for, if severed they be good, the conjunction cannot be hurtful. Therefore, perchance forgetting some and leaving some as needless to be remembered, it shall not be amiss in a word to cite the special kinds, to see what faults may be found in the right use of them.

Is it then the Pastoral poem which is misliked? (For perchance where the hedge is lowest⁹ they will soonest leap over.) Is the poor pipe¹ disdained, which sometime out of Meliboeus' mouth can show the misery of people under hard lords or ravening soldiers, and again, by Tityrus, what blessedness is derived to them that lie lowest from the goodness of them that sit highest;² sometimes, under the pretty tales of wolves and sheep, can include the whole considerations of wrong-doing and patience; sometimes show that contentions for trifles can get but a trifling victory: where perchance a man may see that even Alexander and Darius, when they strave who should be cock of this world's dunghill, the benefit they got was that the after-livers may say

Haec memini et victum frustra contendere Thyrsin:
Ex illo Corydon, Corydon est tempore nobis.³

Or is it the lamenting Elegiac; which in a kind heart would move rather pity than blame; who bewails with the great philosopher Heraclitus,⁴ the weakness of mankind and the wretchedness of the world; who surely is to be praised, either for compassionate accompanying just causes of lamentations, or for rightly painting out how weak be the passions of woefulness?⁵ Is it the bitter but wholesome Iambic,⁶ who rubs the galled mind, in making shame the trumpet of villainy, with bold and open crying out against naughtiness? Or the Satiric, who

Omne vafer vitium ridenti tangit amico,⁷

6. I. e., the poet.
7. Defective part.
8. Jacopo Sannazaro's pastoral romance *Arcadia* (1502) influenced Sidney's own *Arcadia*. Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy* (524 A. D.).
9. Pastoral was considered the humblest kind of poetry, written in the lowest style.
1. The shepherd's oaten flute, symbol of pastoral poetry.
2. In Virgil's first eclogue, Meliboeus laments the seizure of his land while Tityrus rejoices that his lands were protected by the emperor.
3. "Thus I remember, and how Thyrsis vanquished, strove in vain. / From that day it is Corydon, Corydon with us" (Virgil, *Eclogue* 7. 69-70). I. e., the great vic-

teach more perfectly than the poet, yet do I think that no man is so much *philophilosophos*⁸ as to compare the philosopher in moving with the poet. And that moving is of a higher degree than teaching, it may by this appear, that it is well nigh both the cause and effect of teaching. For who will be taught, if he be not moved with desire to be taught? And what so much good doth that teaching bring forth (I speak still of moral doctrine) as that it moveth one to do that which it doth teach? For, as Aristotle saith, it is not *gnosis* but *praxis*⁹ must be the fruit. And how *praxis* can be, without being moved to practise, it is no hard matter to consider.

The philosopher showeth you the way, he informeth you of the particularities, as well of the tediousness of the way, as of the pleasant lodging you shall have when your journey is ended, as of the many by-turnings that may divert you from your way. But this is to no man but to him that will read him, and read him with attentive studious painfulness;¹ which constant desire whose ever hath in him, hath already passed half the hardness of the way, and therefore is beholding to the philosopher but for the other half. Nay truly, learned men have learnedly thought that where once reason hath so much overmastered passion as that the mind hath a free desire to do well, the inward light each mind hath in itself is as good as a philosopher's book; since in nature² we know it is well to do well, and what is well, and what is evil, although not in the words of art which philosophers bestow upon us; for out of natural conceit³ the philosophers drew it. But to be moved to do that which we know, or to be moved with desire to know, *hoc opus, hic labor est*.⁴

Now therein of all sciences (I speak still of human, and according to the human conceit) is our poet the monarch. For he doth not only show the way, but giveth so sweet a prospect into the way, as will entice any man to enter into it. Nay, he doth, as if your journey should lie through a fair vineyard, at the first give you a cluster of grapes, that full of that taste, you may long to pass further. He beginneth not with obscure definitions, which must blur the margin with interpretations, and load the memory with doubtfulness; but he cometh to you with words set in delightful proportion, either accompanied with, or prepared for, the well enchanting skill of music; and with a tale forsooth he cometh unto you, with a tale which holdeth children from play, and old men from the chimney corner. And, pretending no more, doth intend the winning of the mind from wickedness to virtue—even as the child is often brought to take most wholesome things by hiding them in such other as have a pleasant taste, which, if one should begin to tell them the nature of *aloes* or *rhubarbarum*⁵ they should receive, would sooner take their physic at their ears than at their mouth. So is it in men (most of which are childish in the best things, till they be cradled in their graves): glad will they be to hear the tales of Hercules, Achilles, Cyrus, Aeneas; and, hearing them, must needs hear the right description of wisdom, valour, and justice; which, if they had been barely, that is to say philosophically, set out, they would swear they be brought to school again.

8. A lover of philosophers.
9. Doing. "Gnosis": knowing (*Ethics* 1. 1).
1. Carefulness.
2. Considering that by nature.
3. Natural understanding, as opposed to the philosophers' special vocabulary ("words of art").
4. This is the task, this is the work to be done (Virgil, *Aeneid* 6. 129).
5. Two bitter purgatives.

never weavem. nū: he make a man laugh at folly, and at length ashamed, to laugh at himself, which he cannot avoid without avoiding the folly; who, while

circum praecordia ludit,⁸

giveth us to feel how many headaches a passionate life bringeth us to; how, when all is done,

Est Ulubris, animus si nos non deficit aequus?⁹

No, perchance it is the Comic, whom naughty play-makers and stage-keepers have justly made odious. To the arguments of abuse I will answer after. Only this much now is to be said, that the comedy is an imitation of the common errors of our life, which he representeth in the most ridiculous and scornful sort that may be, so as it is impossible that any beholder can be content to be such a one. Now, as in geometry the oblique must be known as well as the right, and in arithmetic the odd as well as the even, so in the actions of our life who seeth not the filthiness of evil wanteth a great foil to perceive the beauty of virtue. This doth the comedy handle so in our private and domestical matters as with hearing it we get as if we were an experience what is to be looked for of a niggardly Demea, of a crafty Davus, of a flattering Gnatho, of a vain-glorious Thraso,¹ and not only to know what effects are to be expected, but to know who be such, by the signifying badge given them by the comedian.² And little reason hath any man to say that men learn the evil by seeing it so set out, since, as I said before, there is no man living but, by the force truth hath in his nature, no sooner seeth these men play their parts, but wisheth them *in pistrinum*;³ although perchance the sack of his own faults lie so hidden behind his back that he seeth not himself dance the same measure;⁴ whereto yet nothing can more open his eyes than to find his own actions contemptibly set forth. So that the right use of comedy will (I think) by nobody be blamed, and much less of the high and excellent Tragedy, that openeth the greatest wounds, and showeth forth the ulcers that are covered with tissue; that maketh kings fear to be tyrants, and tyrants manifest their tyrannical humours; that, with stirring the affects⁵ of admiration and commiseration, teacheth the uncertainty of this world; and upon how weak foundations gilden roofs are builded; that maketh us know

Qui sceptra saevus duro imperio regit
Timet timentes; metus in auctorem redit.⁶

But how much it can move, Plutarch yieldeth a notable testimony of the abominable tyrant Alexander Pheraeus,⁷ from whose eyes a tragedy, well made

8. He plays around the innermost feelings (Persius, *Satires* 1.117)
9. It is as Ulubrae, if a well-balanced mind does not fall us (an adaptation of Horace, *Epistle* 1.11.30). Ulubrae was a proverbially uninspiring town surrounded by marshes.

1. Type characters in the Roman comedies of Terence (195-159 B.C.), respectively, the heavy father, clever servant, parasite, and braggart. Terence and Plautus (251-184 B.C.) were the chief classical models for comedy for the Renaissance.
2. Writer of comedies.
3. Mill used for punishment of Roman slaves.

4. In a fable of Aesop, a sack filled with one's own faults is carried (out of sight) on the back, while one filled with the faults of others is carried in front.

5. Feelings. "Humours": natures or dispositions, as influenced by the balance of four chief bodily fluids, or humours—blood, phlegm, cholera, and bile.

6. He who rules his people with a harsh government/fears those who fear him; the fear returns upon its author (Seneca, *Oedipus*, 705).

7. Plutarch records that this cruel tyrant wept at the sufferings of Heubea and Andromache in Euripides' *Troades*.

and represented, drew abundance of tears, who without all pity had muredet infinite numbers, and some of his own blood: so as he, that was not ashamed to make matters for tragedies, yet could not resist the sweet violence of a tragedy. And if it wrought no further good in him, it was that he, in despite of himself, withdrew himself from hearkening to that which might mollify his hardened heart. But it is not the tragedy they do mislike; for it were too absurd to cast out so excellent a representation of whatsoever is most worthy to be learned.

As it the Lyric⁸ that most displeaseth, who with his tuned lyre and well-accorded voice, giveth praise, the reward of virtue, to virtuous acts; who gives moral precepts, and natural problems; who sometimes raiseth up his voice to the height of the heavens, in singing the lauds of the immortal God? Certainly, I must confess my own barbarousness, I never heard the old song of Percy and Douglas⁹ that I found not my heart moved more than with a trumpet; and yet it is sung but by some blind crowder,¹ with no rougher voice than rude style, which, being so evil apparelled in the dust and cobwebs of that uncivil age, what would it work trimmed in the gorgeous eloquence of Pindar?² In Hungary I have seen it the manner at all feasts, and other such meetings, to have songs of their ancestors' valour, which that right soldierlike nation think one of the chiefest kindlers of brave courage. The incomparable Lacedemonians³ did not only carry that kind of music ever with them to the field, but even at home, as such songs were made, so were they all content to be singers of them—when the lusty men were to tell what they did, the old men what they had done, and the young what they would do. And where a man may say that Pindar many times praiseth highly victories of small moment, matters rather of sport than virtue; as it may be answered, it was the fault of the poet, and not of the poetry, so indeed the chief fault was in the time and custom of the Greeks, who set those toys at so high a price that Philip of Macedon reckoned a horselace won at Olympus among his three-fearful felicities.⁴ But as the unimitable Pindar often did, so is that kind most capable and most fit to awake the thoughts from the sleep of idleness to embrace honourable enterprises.

There rests the Heroical—whose very name (I think) should daunt all back-biters: for by what conceit⁵ can a tongue be directed to speak evil of that which draweth with him no less champions than Achilles, Cyrus, Aeneas, Turnus, Tydeus, and Rinaldo?⁶—who doth not only teach and move to a truth, but teacheth and moveth to the most high and excellent truth; who maketh magnanimity and justice shine through all misty fearfulness and foggy desires, who, if the saying of Plato and Tully⁷ be true, that who could see virtue would be wonderfully ravished with the love of her beauty—this man sets her out to make her more lovely in her holiday apparel, to the eye of any that will deign not to disdain until they understand. But if anything be already said in the defence of sweet poetry, all concurrereth to the maintaining the heroical, which is not only a kind, but the best and most accomplished kind of poetry. For, as

8. Here defined as poetry concerned chiefly with praise, and sung (originally) to musical accompaniment.

9. Ballad of Chevy Chase.

1. Fiddler.

2. Pindar's odes, the most exalted lyric poetry of Greece, celebrated victors in athletic games. That uncivil age, the Middle Ages.

3. Spartans.

4. Plutarch records that Philip received three awesome tidings in one day: that his general was victorious in battle, that his wife had borne a son, and that his horse won a race at Olympia.

5. Conception.

6. In Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* and Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata*: "Tydeus" in Statius's epic, *Thebaid*.

7. Marcus Tullius Cicero.

the image of each action stirreth and instructeth the mind, so the lofty image of such worthies most inflameth the mind with desire to be worthy, and informs with counsel how to be worthy. Only let Aeneas be worn in the tablet of your memory, how he governeth himself in the ruin of his country; in the preserving his old father, and carrying away his religious ceremonies;⁸ in obeying God's commandment to leave Dido, though not only all passionate kindness, but even the human consideration of virtuous gratefulness, would have craved other of him; how in storms, how in sports, how in war, how in peace, how a fugitive, how victorious, how besieged, how besieging, how to strangers, how to allies, how to enemies, how to his own; lastly, how in his inward self, and how in his outward government—and I think, in a mind not prejudiced with a prejudicating humour, he will be found in excellency fruitful, yea, even as Horace saith,

melius Chryshipo et Crantore.⁹

But truly I imagine it falleth out with these poet-whippers, as with some good women, who often are sick, but in faith they cannot tell where, so the name of poetry is odious to them, but neither his cause nor effects, neither the sum that contains him, nor the particularities descending from him, give any fast handle to their carping dispraise.

Since then poetry is of all human learning the most ancient and of most fatherly antiquity, as from whence other learnings have taken their beginnings; since it is so universal that no learned nation doth despise it, nor barbarous nation is without it; since both Roman and Greek gave such divine names unto it, the one of prophesying, the other of making, and that indeed that name of making is fit for him, considering that where all other arts retain themselves within their subject, and receive, as it were, their being from it, the poet only bringeth his own stuff, and doth not learn a conceit out of a matter, but maketh matter for a conceit; since neither his description nor end containing any evil, the thing described cannot be evil; since his effects be so good as to teach goodness and to delight the learners; since therein (namely in moral doctrine, the chief of all knowledges) he doth not only far pass the historian, but, for instructing, is well nigh comparable to the philosopher, for moving leaves him behind him; since the Holy Scripture (wherein there is no uncleanness) hath whole parts in it poetical, and that even our Saviour Christ vouchsafed to use the flowers of it; since all his kinds are not only in their united forms but in their severed dissections fully commendable; I think (and think I think rightly) the laurel crown appointed for triumphant captains doth worthily (of all other learnings) honour the poet's triumph.

[Answers to Charges against Poetry]

Now then go we to the most important imputations laid to the poor poets. For aught I can yet learn, they are these. First, that there being many other more fruitful knowledges, a man might better spend his time in them than in

8. Sacred objects, household gods. After fleeing Troy, Aeneas and his Trojans stayed for a time in Carthage; whose queen, Dido, became Aeneas's lover. She killed herself when Aeneas (at the gods' command) sailed away to accomplish his fate, the founding of the Roman empire.
9. In *Epistle 1.2.4*, Horace praises Homer as a "better [teacher] than Chryppus [a great Stoic philosopher] and Crantor" (a commentator on Plato).
1. Firm.

this. Secondly, that it is the mother of lies. Thirdly, that it is the nurse or abuse, infecting us with many pestilent desires; with a siren's sweetness drawing the mind to the serpent's tail of sinful fancies (and herein, especially, comedies give the largest field to ear² as Chaucer saith); how, both in other nations and in ours, before poets did soften us, we were full of courage, given to martial exercises, the pillars of manlike liberty; and not lulled asleep in shady idleness with poets' pastimes. And lastly, and chiefly, they cry out with open mouth as if they had overshot Robin Hood, that Plato banished them out of his commonwealth.³ Truly, this is much, if there be much truth in it.

First, to the first.⁴ That a man might better spend his time, is a reason indeed; but it doth (as they say) but *petere principium*.⁵ For if it be as I affirm, that no learning is so good as that which teacheth and moveth to virtue; and that none can both teach and move thereto so much as poetry: then is the conclusion manifest that ink and paper cannot be to a more profitable purpose employed. And certainly, though a man should grant their first assumption, it should follow (methinks) very unwillingly, that good is not good, because better is better. But I still and utterly deny that there is sprung out of earth a more fruitful knowledge.

To the second, therefore, that they should be the principal liars, I will answer paradoxically, but truly, I think truly, that of all writers under the sun the poet is the least liar, and, though he would, as a poet can scarcely be a liar. The astronomer, with his cousin the geometrician, can hardly escape, when they take upon them to measure the height of the stars. How often, think you, do the physicians lie, when they aver things good for sicknesses, which afterwards send Charon⁶ a great number of souls drowned in a potion before they come to his ferry? And no less of the rest, which take upon them to affirm. Now, for the poet, he nothing affirms, and therefore never lieth. For, as I take it, to lie is to affirm that to be true which is false. So as the other artists,⁷ and especially the historian, affirming many things, can, in the cloudy knowledge of mankind, hardly escape from many lies. But the poet (as I said before) never affirmeth. The poet never maketh any circles⁸ about your imagination, to conjure you to believe for true what he writes. He citeth not authorities of other histories, but even for his entry⁹ calleth the sweet Muses to inspire into him a good invention; in truth, not labouring to tell you what is or is not, but what should or should not be. And therefore, though he recount things not true, yet because he telleth them not for true, he lieth not—without we will say that Nathan in his speech before-alleged to David,¹ which as a wicked man durst scarce say, so think I none so simple would say that Aesop lied in the tales of his beasts; for who thinks that Aesop wrote it for actually true were well worthy to have his name chronicled among the beasts he writeth of. What child is there, that, coming to a play, and seeing *Thebes* written in great letters upon an old door, doth believe that it is Thebes? If then a man can arrive to that child's age to know that the poets' persons and doings are but pictures what should be,

2. To plow (*Knight's Tale*, 28).
3. Plato proposed that most sorts of poets be banished from his ideal commonwealth, because they stir up unworthy emotions and because their imitations are far removed from truth (*Republic*, 10.595–608c).
4. First objection.
5. Beg the question.
6. In classical myth, the ferryman who takes the souls of the dead over the river Styx.
7. Practitioners of the liberal arts.
8. As a magician does in conjuring.
9. In his opening lines.
1. Nathan's parable (2 Samuel 12.1–15) of a man robbed of his one ewe lamb by a rich man.

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affirmatively but allegorically and figuratively written.

So that, since the excellencies of it may be so easily and so justly confirmed; and the low-creeping objections so soon trodden down: it not being an art of lies, but of true doctrine; not of effeminateness, but of notable stirring of courage; not of abusing man's wit, but of strengthening man's wit; not banished, but honoured by Plato: let us rather plant more laurels for to engarland the poets' heads (which honour of being laureate, whereas besides them only triumphant captains were, is a sufficient authority too show the price they ought to be held in) than suffer the ill-favoured breath of such wrong-speakers once to blow upon the clear springs of poesy.

[Poetry in England]

But since I have run so long a career³ in this matter, methinks, before I give my pen a full stop, it shall be but a little more lost time to inquire why England, the mother of excellent minds, should be grown so hard a stepmother to poets, who certainly in wit ought to pass all other, since all only proceedeth from their wit, being indeed makers of themselves, not takers of others.

But I that, before ever I durst aspire unto the dignity, am admitted into the company of the paper-blurters, do find the very true cause of our wanting estimation is want of desert—taking upon us to be poets in despite of Pallas.⁴ Now, wherein we want desert were a thankworthy labour to express; but if I knew, I should have mended myself. But I, as I never desired the title, so have I neglected the means to come by it. Only, overmastered by some thoughts, I yielded an inky tribute unto them. Marry, they that delight in poesy itself should seek to know what they do, and how they do; and especially look themselves in an unflattering glass of reason, if they be inclinable unto it. For poesy must not be drawn by the ears; it must be gently led, or rather it must lead—which was partly the cause that made the ancient-learned affirm it was a divine gift, and no human skill: since all other knowledges lie ready for any that hath strength of wit. A poet no industry can make, if his own genius be not carried into it; and therefore it is an old proverb, *orator fit, poeta nascitur*.⁵

Yet confess I always that as the fertilest ground must be manured, so must the highest-flying wit have a Daedalus⁶ to guide him. That Daedalus, they say, both in this and in other, hath three wings to bear itself up into the air of due commendation: that is, art, imitation, and exercise. But these, neither artificial rules nor imitative patterns, we much cumber ourselves withal. Exercise indeed we do, but that very foreheadwardly: for where we should exercise to know, we exercise as having known; and so is our brain delivered of much matter which never was begotten by knowledge. For there being two principal parts, matter to be expressed by words and words to express the matter, in

2. Accuse of lying.

3. Course.

4. I.e., scorning the dictates of Wisdom.

5. An orator is made; a poet is born.

6. The legendary craftsman who invented wings of wax for himself and his son Icarus. Ignoring his father's instructions, Icarus flew too close to the sun, melted his wings, and fell into the sea.

neither we use art or imitation rightly. Our matter is *quodlibet* indeed, though wrongly performing Ovid's verse,

Quicquid conabor dicere, versus erit⁷

never marshalling it into any assured rank, that almost the readers cannot tell where to find themselves.

Chaucer, undoubtedly, did excellently in his *Troilus and Criseyde*; of whom, truly, I know not whether to marvel more, either that he in that misty time could see so clearly, or that we in this clear age go so stumbly after him. Yet had he great wants, fit to be forgiven in so reverent an antiquity. I account the *Mirror of Magistrates*⁸ meetly furnished of beautiful parts, and in the Earl of Surrey's lyrics many things tasting of a noble birth, and worthy of a noble mind. The *Shepherds' Calendar* hath much poetry in his eclogues, indeed worthy the reading, if I be not deceived. (That same framing of his style to an old-rustic language I dare not allow, since neither Theocritus in Greek, Virgil in Latin, nor Sannazaro in Italian⁹ did affect it.) Besides these I do not remember to have seen but few (to speak boldly) printed that have poetical sinews in them; for proof whereof, let but most of the verses be put in prose, and then ask the meaning; and it will be found that one verse did but beget another, without ordering at the first: what should be at the last, which becomes a confused mass of words, with a tingling sound of rhyme, barely accompanied with reason.

Our tragedies and comedies (not without cause cried out against), observing rules neither of honest civility nor skilful poetry—excepting *Corbodus*¹ (again, I say, of those that I have seen), which notwithstanding as it is full of stately speeches and well-sounding phrases, climbing to the height of Seneca's style, and as full of notable morality, which it doth most delightfully teach, and so obtain the very end of poesy, yet in truth it is very defective in the circumstances, which grieveth me, because it might not remain as an exact model of all tragedies. For it is faulty both in place and time, the two necessary companions of all corporal actions. For where the stage should always represent but one place, and the uttermost time presupposed in it should be, both by Aristotle's precept and common reason, but one day, there is both many days, and many places, inartificially² imagined.

But if it be so in *Corbodus*, how much more in all the rest, where you shall have Asia of the one side, and Afric of the other, and so many other under kingdoms, that the player, when he cometh in, must ever begin with telling where he is, or else the tale will not be conceived? Now you shall have three ladies walk to gather flowers: and then we must believe the stage to be a garden. By and by we hear news of shipwreck in the same place: and then we are to blame if we accept it not for a rock. Upon the back of that comes out a hideous monster with fire and smoke: and then the miserable beholders are bound to take it for a cave. While in the meantime two armies fly in, represented with four swords and bucklers:³ and then what hard heart will not receive it for a pitched field?

7. Whatever I try to say will turn to verse (Ovid, *Tristia*, 4, 10, 26). "Quodlibet", what you will.

8. A large collection of Elizabethan poems on the downfall of princes and great men.

9. Models for pastoral poetry in the Renaissance.

F. Senecan blank verse tragedy by Thomas Sackville and Thomas Norton (1565), called the first regular English tragedy. The highly rhetorical and declamatory Roman tragedies of Seneca (5 B.C.—65 A.D.) were models of the grand tragic style in the Renaissance.

2. Unskillfully. Sidney here voices the Renaissance commonplace (erroneously derived from Aristotle) that tragedies should observe the three unities: time (one day), place (one locale), and action (one plot). Aristotle insisted only on unity of action.

3. Shields.

But I have lavished out too many words of this play matter. I do it because as they are excellent parts of poetry, so is there none so much used in England and none can be more pitifully abused; which, like an unmannerly daughter showing a bad education, causeth her mother Poesy's honesty to be called in question.

Other sort of poetry almost have we none, but that lyrical kind of songs and sonnets: which, Lord, if He gave us so good minds, how well it might be employed, and with how heavenly fruit, both private and public, in singing the praises of the immortal beauty: the immortal goodness of that God who giveth us hands to write and wits to conceive; of which we might well want words, but never matter; of which we could turn our eyes to nothing, but we should ever have new-budding occasions. But truly many of such writings come under the banner of irresistible love, if I were a mistress, would never persuade me they were in love: so coldly they apply fiery speeches, as men that had rather read lovers' writings—and so caught up certain swelling phrases which hang together like a man that once told my father that the wind was north-west and by south, because he would be sure to name winds enough:—than that in truth they feel those passions, which easily (as I think) may be bewrayed by that same forcibleness or *energia* (as the Greeks call it) of the writer. But let this be a sufficient though short note, that we miss the rightness of the material point of poetry.

* * *

Now of versifying there are two sorts, the one ancient, the other modern: the ancient marked the quantity of each syllable, and according to that fragment his verse; the modern, observing only number⁷ (with some regard to the accent) the chief life of it standeth in that like sounding of the words, which we call rhyme. Whether of these be the more excellent, would bear many speeches: the ancient (no doubt) more fit for music, both words and time observing quantity, and more fit lively to express diverse passions, by the low or lofty sound of the well-weighted syllable; the latter likewise, with his rhyme, striketh a certain music to the ear, and, in fine, since it doth delight, though by another way, it obtains the same purpose: there being in either sweetness, and waiting in neither majesty. Truly the English, before any vulgar language I know, fit for both sorts. For, for the ancient, the Italian is so full of vowels that must ever be cumbered with elisions; the Dutch⁸ so, of the other side, with consonants, that they cannot yield the sweet sliding, fit for a verse; the French in his whole language hath not one word that hath his accent in the last syllable saving two, called *anteperultima*; and little more hath the Spanish, and therefore very gracelessly may they use dactyls.⁹ The English is subject to none of these defects. Now for the rhyme, though we do not observe quantity, yet we observe the accent very precisely, which other languages either cannot do, or will not do so absolutely. That *caesura*,⁴ or breathing place in the midst

9. Classical "quantity" meant the length or duration of syllables. Moderns simply count the "number" of syllables.

1. The common or "vulgar" people spoke the vernacular languages, whereas the learned could speak and write in Latin.

2. German.

3. "Dactyls"; see "Rhythm and Meter" (p. 2558).

Because of the accent patterns in French and Spanish those languages cannot make good use of this poetical foot.

4. In its use of "caesuras" (see "Rhythm and Meter" p. 2559) as well as the several kinds of metrical feet English poetry achieves greater variety and flexibility than poetry in the other vernacular languages.

the verse, neither Italian, nor Spanish have, the French and we never almost of it. Lastly, even the very rhyme itself, the Italian cannot put it in the last syllable, by the French named the masculine rhyme, but still in the next to the last; which the French call the female, or the next before that, which the Italian term *sdruciolata*. The example of the former is *buono: suono*, of the latter *suocia: femina: semina*. The French, of the other side, hath both of the male, as *bon: son*, and the female, as *plaise: taise*, but the *sdruciolata* he hath not where the English hath all three, as *due: true, father: rather, motion: motion*⁵—with much more which might be said, but that already I find the richness of this discourse is much too much enlarged.

[Conclusion]

So that since the ever-praiseworthy Poesy is full of virtue-breeding delightfulness, and void of no gift that ought to be in the noble name of learning; since she blames laid against it are either false or feeble; since the cause why it is not esteemed in England is the fault of poet-apes, not poets; since, lastly, the tongue is most fit to honour poesy, and to be honoured by poesy; I conjure you all that have had the evil luck to read this ink-wasting toy of mine, even in the name of the nine Muses, no more to scorn the sacred mysteries of poesy; no more to laugh at the name of poets, as though they were next inheritors to Apollo; no more to jest at the reverent title of a rhymist; but to believe, with Aristotle, that they were the ancient treasurers of the Grecians' divinity; to believe, with Bembus, that they were first bringers-in of all civility; to believe, with Scaliger, that no philosopher's precepts can sooner make you an honest man than the reading of Virgil; to believe, with Clausenus, the translator of Oenotus, that it pleased the heavenly Deity, by Hesiod⁶ and Homer, under the veil of fables, to give us all knowledge, logic, rhetoric, philosophy natural and moral, and *quid non?*⁷ to believe, with me, that there are many mysteries contained in poetry, which of purpose were written darkly, lest by profane wits should be abused; to believe, with Landino,⁸ that they are so beloved of the gods that whatsoever they write proceeds of a divine fury; lastly, to believe ourselves, when they tell you they will make you immortal by their verses. Thus doing, your name shall flourish in the printers' shops; thus doing, you shall be of kin to many a poetical preface; thus doing, you shall be most fair, most rich, most wise, most all, you shall dwell upon superlatives; thus doing, though you be *libertino patre natus*, you shall suddenly grow *Herculeas proles*,⁹

Si quid mea carmina possunt!

Thus doing, your soul shall be placed with Dante's Beatrice, or Virgil's Anchises. But if (fie of such a but) you be born so near the dull-making cataract of Nilus that you cannot hear the planet-like² music of poetry; if you have so earth-

announced with three syllables, accented on the

8. Christoforo Landino, Florentine humanist, who developed this argument in his edition of Dante's *Divine Comedy* (1481).

9. A descendant of Hercules. "Libertino patre natus": born of a free slave father (Horace, *Satires* 1.6.45).

1. If my songs are of any avail (*Aeneid* 9.446).

2. Resembling the music of the spheres, most beautiful of all music. According to Cicero, the noise of the Nile's cataracts deafened those who lived nearby.

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creeping a mind that it cannot lift itself up to look to the sky of poetry, or rather, by a certain rustical disdain, will become such a mome as to be a Momus³ of poetry; then, though I will not wish unto you the ass's ears of Midas,⁴ nor to be driven by a poet's verses, as Bubonax⁵ was, to hang himself, nor to be rhymed to death, as is said to be done in Ireland,⁶ yet thus much course I must send you, in the behalf of all poets, that while you live, you live in love, and never get favour for lacking skill of a sonnet; and, when you die, your memory die from the earth for want of an epitaph.

1595

The Nightingale

The nightingale, as soon as April bringeth¹
Unto her rested sense a perfect waking
(While late bare earth, proud of new clothing, springeth),
Sings out her woes, a thorn her song-book making,
And mournfully bewailing,
Her throat in tunes expresseth
What grief her breast oppresseth,
For Thereus' force on her chaste will prevailing.
O Philomela fair, O take some gladness,
That here is juster cause of plaintful sadness:
Thine earth now springs, mine fadeth,
Thy thorn without, my thorn my heart invadeth.

Alas, she hath no other cause of anguish
But Thereus' love, on her by strong hand wroken,²
Wherein she suffering, all her spirits languish;
Full womanlike complains her will was broken.
But I who daily craving,
Cannot have to content me,
Have more cause to lament me,
Since wanting is more woe then too much having.
O Philomela fair, O take some gladness,
That here is juster cause of plaintful sadness:
Thine earth now springs, mine fadeth,
Thy thorn without, my thorn my heart invadeth.

1581

Thou Blind Man's Mark¹

Thou blind man's mark,² thou fool's self-chosen snare,
Fond fancy's scum, and dregs of scattered thought,

3. God of ridicule, son of Night and Sleep, hence, a critic; "Mome": a stupid person.
4. He was given ass's ears because he preferred Pan's music to Apollo's (Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 11. 146-79).
5. Bubonax, a sculptor who hanged himself when his works were satirized by the poet Hipponax. Sidney fuses the two names.
6. Irish bards were thought to be able to cause death with their rhymed charms.
1. In England, the nightingale's song is heard only in

Band³ of all evils, cradle of causeless care,
Thou web of will, whose end is never wrought—
Desire, desire! I have too dearly bought
With price of mangled mind, thy worthless ware;
Too long, too long asleep thou hast me brought,
Who should my mind to higher things prepare.

But yet in vain thou hast my ruin sought;
In vain thou madest me to vain things aspire;
In vain thou kindest all thy smoky fire;

For virtue hath this better lesson taught—
Within myself to seek my only hire,
Desiring nought but how to kill desire.

1598

Leave Me, O Love

Leave me, O Love which reachest but to dust,
And thou my mind aspire to higher things;
Grow rich in that which never taketh rust,
Whatever fades but fading pleasure brings.

Draw in thy beams, and humble all thy might
To that sweet yoke where lasting freedoms be;
Which breaks the clouds and opens forth the light,
That doth both shine and give us sight to see.

O take fast hold; let that light be thy guide
In this small course which birth draws out to death,
And think how evil becometh him to slide,
Who seeketh heaven, and comes of heavenly breath.¹
Then farewell world; thy uttermost I see;
Eternal Love, maintain thy life in me.

1598

wedding band.
1. It will become one who has a soul and seeks heaven to "slide" to earthly things.

EDMUND SPENSER

1552-1599

1599: Publication of *The Shepheardes Calender*.

1596: Publication of *The Faerie Queene*, books 1 to 3; 1596, books 1 to 6.

greatest nondramatic poet of the Elizabethan era, Edmund Spenser, was born in London, probably in 1552, and attended the Merchant Taylors' School under

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John Dryden

From An Essay of Dramatic Poesy

[Two Sorts of Bad Poetry]

* * * "I have a mortal apprehension of two poets, whom this victory, with the help of both her wings, will never be able to escape. " 'Tis easy to guess whom you intend," said Lisideus; "and without naming them, I ask you: if one of them does not perpetually pay us with clenches upon words, and a certain clownish kind of raiillery? if now and then he does not offer at a catachresis or Clevelandism, wrestling and torturing a word into another meaning: in fine, if he be not one of those whom the French would call un mauvais buffon, one who is so much a well-willer to the satire, that he spares no man; and though he cannot strike a blow to hurt any, yet ought to be punished for the malice of the action, as our witches are justly hanged, because they think themselves so, and suffer deservedly for believing they did mischief, because they meant it." "You have described him," said Crites, "so exactly that I am afraid to come after you with my other extremity of poetry. He is one of those who, having had some advantage of education and converse, knows better than the other what a poet should be, but puts it into practice more unluckily than any man; his style and matter are everywhere alike: he is the most calm, peaceable writer you ever read: he never disquiets your passions with the least concernment, but still leaves you in as even a temper as he found you; he is a very Leveler in poetry: he creeps along with ten little words in every line, and helps out his numbers with for to, and unto, and all the pretty expletives! he can find, till he drags them to the end of another line; while the sense is left tired halfway behind it: he doubly starves all his verses, first for want of thought, and then of expression; his poetry neither has wit in it, nor seems to have it; like him in Martial:

1. With the reopening of the theaters in 1660, older plays were revived, but despite their power and charm, they seemed old-fashioned. Although new playwrights, ambitious to create a modern English drama, soon appeared, they were uncertain of their direction. What, if anything, useful could they learn from the dramatic practice of the ancients? Should they ignore the English dramatists of the late 16th and early 17th centuries? Should they make their example the vigorous contemporary drama of France? Dryden addresses himself to these and other problems in this essay; his first extended piece of criticism. Its purpose, he tells us, was "chiefly to vindicate the honor of our English writers from the censures of those who unjustly prefer the French before them." Its method is skeptical: Dryden presents several points of view, but imposes none. The form is a dialogue among friends, like the Tusulan Disputations or the Brutus of Cicero. Crites praises the drama of the ancients; Eugenius protests against their authority and argues for the idea of progress in the arts; Lisideus urges the excellence of French plays; and Neander, speaking in the climactic position, defends the native tradition and the greatness of Shakespeare, Fletcher, and Jonson. The dialogue takes place on June 3, 1665, in a boat on the Thames. The four friends are rowed downstream to listen to the commanding of the English and Dutch fleets, engaged in battle off the Suffolk coast. As the gunfire recedes they are assured of victory and order: their boatman to return to London, and naturally

Pauper videri Cinna vult, et est pauper.

"He affects plainness, to cover his want of imagination: when he writes the serious way, the highest flight of his fancy is some miserable antithesis, or seeming contradiction; and in the comic he is still reaching at some thin conceit, the ghost of a jest, and that too flies before him, never to be caught; these swallows which we see before us on the Thames are the just resemblance of his wit: you may observe how near the water they stoop, how many proffers they make to dip, and yet how seldom they touch it; and when they do, it is but the surface: they skim over it but to catch a gnat, and then mount into the air and leave it."

[The Wit of the Ancients: The Universal]

* * * "A thing well said will be wit in all languages; and though it may lose something in the translation, yet to him who reads it in the original, 'tis still the same: he has an idea of its excellency, though it cannot pass from his mind into any other expression or words than those in which he finds it. When Phaedria, in the Eunuch, had a command from his mistress to be absent two days, and, encouraging himself to go through with it, said, Tandem ego non illa caream, si sit opus, vel totum triduum?—Parneno, to mock the softness of his master, lifting up his hands and eyes, cries out, as it were in admiration, 'Hui! universum triduum!' the elegance of which universum, though it cannot be rendered in our language, yet leaves an impression on our souls: but this happens seldom in him; in Plautus⁶ oftener, who is infinitely too bold in his metaphors and coining words, out of which many times his wit is nothing; which questionless was one reason why Horace falls upon him so severely in those verses:

Sed proavi nostri Plautinos et numeros et
Laudavere sales, nimium patienter utrumque,
Ne dicam stolidi.

For Horace himself was cautious to obtrude a new word on his readers, and makes custom and common use the best measure of receiving it into our writings:

Multa renascentur quae nunc cecidere, cadentique
Quae nunc sunt in honore vocabula, si volet usus,
Quem penes arbitrium est, et jus, et norma loquendi.

The not observing this rule is that which the world has blamed in our satirist, Cleveland: to express a thing hard and unnaturally is his new way of elocution. 'Tis true no poet but may sometimes use a catachresis: Virgil does it—

2. "Cinna wishes to seem poor, and he is poor" (Epigrams 8.19).
3. A comedy by the Roman poet Terence (ca. 185-159 B.C.).
4. "Shall I not then do without her, if need be, for three whole days?"
5. The wit of Parneno's exclamation, "Oh, three entire days," depends on universum, which suggests that a lover may regard three days as an eternity, "Admiration"; wonder.
6. Thus Maccus Plautus, Roman comic poet (ca. 254-184 B.C.).
7. "But our ancestors too tolerantly (I do not say foolishly) praised both the verse and the wit of Plautus" (Art of Poetry, lines 270-272). Dryden misquotes slightly.
8. "Many words that have perished will be born again, and those shall perish that are now esteemed, if usage wills it, in whose power are the judgment, the law, and the pattern of speech" (Art of Poetry, lines 70-72).

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Mistaque ridenti colocasia fundet acantho—
in his eclogue of Pollio; and in his seventh *Aeneid*:

*mirantur et undae,
Miratur nemus insuetum fulgentia longe
Scuta virum fluvio pictasque innare carinas.*¹

And Ovid once so modestly that he asks leave to do it:

*quem, si verbo audacia detur,
Haud metuum summi dixisse Palatia caeli.*²

calling the court of Jupiter by the name of Augustus his palace; though in another place he is more bold, where he says, *et longas visent Capitolia pom-pas*.³ But to do this always, and never be able to write a line without it, though it may be admired by some few pedants, will not pass upon those who know that wit is best conveyed to us in the most easy language; and is most to be admired when a great thought comes dressed in words so commonly received that it is understood by the meanest apprehensions, as the best meat is the most easily digested: but we cannot read a verse of Cleveland's without making a face at it, as if every word were a pill to swallow: he gives us many times a hard nut to break our teeth, without a kernel for our pains. So that there is this difference betwixt his satires and Doctor Donne's; that the one gives us deep thoughts in common language, though rough cadence; the other gives us common thoughts in abstruse words: 'tis true in some places his wit is independent of his words, as in that of the *Rebel Scot*:

Had Cain been Scot, God would have changed his doom;
Not forced him wander, but confined him home.⁴

"*Si sic omnia dixisset*!" This is wit in all languages: it is like mercury, never to be lost or killed: and so that other—

For beauty, like white powder, makes no noise,
And yet the silent hypocrite destroys.⁶

You see that the last line is highly metaphorical, but it is so soft and gentle that it does not shock us as we read it."

[*Shakespeare and Ben Jonson Compared*]

"To begin, then, with Shakespeare. He was the man who of all modern, and perhaps ancient poets, had the largest and most comprehensive soul. All the images of Nature were still present to him, and he drew them, not laboriously, but luckily; when he describes anything, you more than see it, you feel it too. Those who accuse him to have wanted learning, give him the greater

commendation: he was naturally learned; he needed not the spectacles of books to read Nature; he looked inwards, and found her there. I cannot say he is everywhere alike; were he so, I should do him injury to compare him with the greatest of mankind. He is many times flat, insipid; his comic wit degenerating into clenches, his serious swelling into bombast. But he is always great when some great occasion is presented to him; no man can say he ever had a fit subject for his wit and did not then raise himself as high above the rest of poets,

*Quantum lenta solent inter viburna cupressi*⁷

The consideration of this made Mr. Hales of Eton⁸ say that there was no subject of which any poet ever writ, but he would produce it much better treated of in Shakespeare; and however others are now generally preferred before him, yet the age wherein he lived, which had contemporaries with him Fletcher and Jonson, never equaled them to him in their esteem: and in the last king's court, when Ben's reputation was at highest, Sir John Suckling,¹ and with him the greater part of the courtiers, set our Shakespeare far above him.

"As for Jonson, to whose character I am now arrived, if we look upon him while he was himself (for his last plays were but his dotages), I think him the most learned and judicious writer which any theater ever had. He was a most severe judge of himself, as well as others: One cannot say he wanted wit, but rather that he was frugal of it. In his works you find little to retrench² or alter. Wit, and language, and humor also in some measure, we had before him; but something of art³ was wanting to the drama till he came. He managed his strength to more advantage than any who preceded him. You seldom find him making love in any of his scenes or endeavoring to move the passions; his genius was too sullen and saturnine⁴ to do it gracefully, especially when he knew he came after those who had performed both to such an height. Humor was his proper sphere;⁵ and in that he delighted most to represent mechanic people.⁶ He was deeply conversant in the ancients, both Greek and Latin, and he borrowed boldly from them: there is scarce a poet or historian among the Roman authors of those times whom he has not translated in *Sejarius* and *Catiline*.⁷ But he has done his robberies so openly, that one may see he fears not to be taxed by any law. He invades authors like a monarch; and what would be theft in other poets is only victory in him. With the spoils of these writers he so represents old Rome to us, in its rites, ceremonies, and customs, that if one of their poets had written either of his tragedies, we had seen less of it than in him. If there was any fault in his language, 'twas that he weaved it too closely and laboriously, in his serious plays;⁸ perhaps, too, he did a little too much Romanize our tongue, leaving the words which he translated almost as much Latin as he found them: wherein, though he learnedly followed the

7. "As do cyresses among the bending shrubs" (*Virgil, Eclogues* 1.25).

8. The learned John Hales (1584-1656), provost of Eton. He is reputed to have said this to Jonson himself.

9. Charles I.

1. Courtier, poet, playwright, much admired in Dryden's time for his wit and the easy naturalness of his style.

2. Delete.

3. Craftsmanship.

4. Heavy.

5. In Jonson's comedies the characters are seen under the domination of some psychological trait, ruling passion, or affection—i.e., some "humor"—which makes them unique and ridiculous.

6. I.e., artisans.

7. Jonson's two Roman plays, dated 1605 and 1611, respectively.

8. This is the reading of the first edition. Curiously enough, in the second edition Dryden altered the phrase to "in his comedies especially."

9. "The earth shall give forth the Egyptian bean, mingled with the smiling acanthus" (*Eclogues* 4.20).

3. "And the Capitol shall see the long processions" (*Metamorphoses* 1.175-176).

4. Lines 63-64.

5. "Had he said everything thus!" (*Juvenal, Satires* 10.123-124).

6. From *Ruberius*, lines 39-40. Mercury is said to be "killed" if its fluidity is destroyed.

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idiom of their language, he did not enough comply with the idiom of ours. If I would compare him with Shakespeare, I must acknowledge him the more correct poet, but Shakespeare the greater wit.⁹ Shakespeare was the Homer, or father of our dramatic poets; Jonson was the Virgil, the pattern of elaborate writing; I admire him, but I love Shakespeare. To conclude of him; as he has given us the most correct plays, so in the precepts which he has laid down in his *Discoveries*, we have as many and profitable rules for perfecting the stage, as any wherewith the French can furnish us.⁷

1668

From The Author's Apology for Heroic Poetry and Heroic License¹

["Boldness" of Figures and Tropes Defended:
The Appeal to "Nature"]

* * * They, who would combat general authority with particular opinion, must first establish themselves a reputation of understanding better than other men. Are all the flights of heroic poetry to be concluded bombast, unnatural, and mere madness, because they are not affected with their excellencies? It is just as reasonable as to conclude there is no day, because a blind man cannot distinguish of light and colors. Ought they not rather, in modesty, to doubt of their own judgments, when they think this or that expression in Homer, Virgil, Tasso, or Milton's *Paradise* to be too far strained, than positively to conclude that 'tis all fustian and mere nonsense? 'Tis true there are limits to be set betwixt the boldness and rashness of a poet; but he must understand those limits who pretends to judge as well as he who undertakes to write: and he who has no liking to the whole ought, in reason, to be excluded from censuring of the parts. He must be a lawyer before he mounts the tribunal; and the judicature of one court, too, does not qualify a man to preside in another. He may be an excellent pleader in the Chancery, who is not fit to rule the Common Pleas. But I will presume for once to tell them that the boldest strokes of poetry, when they are managed artfully, are those which most delight the reader.

Virgil and Horace, the severest writers of the severest age, have made frequent use of the hardest metaphors and of the strongest hyperboles; and in this case the best authority is the best argument, for generally to have pleased, and through all ages, must bear the force of universal tradition. And if you would appeal from thence to right reason, you will gain no more by it in effect than, first, to set up your reason against those authors, and, secondly, against all those who have admired them. You must prove why that ought not to have pleased which has pleased the most learned and the most judicious; and, to be thought knowing, you must first put the fool upon all mankind. If you can enter more deeply than they have done into the causes and resorts² of that

9. Genius.

1. This essay was prefixed to Dryden's *State of Innocence*, the libretto for an opera (never produced), based on *Paradise Lost*. Dryden had been ridiculed for the extravagant and bold imagery and rhetorical figures that are typical of the style of his rhymed heroic plays. This preface is a defense not only of his own predilection for

what Samuel Johnson described as "wild and daring sallies of sentiment, in the irregular and eccentric violence of wit" but also of the theory that heroic and idealized materials should be treated in lofty and boldly metaphorical style; hence his definition of wit as propriety.

2. Mechanical springs that set something in motion.

of great crimes, and applied myself to the representing of blindsides, and little extravagancies; to which, the wittier a man is, he is generally the more obnoxious.⁷ It succeeded as I wished; the jest went round, and he was laughed at in his turn who began the frolic. * * *

1693

From The Preface to *Fables Ancient and Modern*¹

[In Praise of Chaucer]

In the first place, as he is the father of English poetry, I hold him in the same degree of veneration as the Grecians held Homer, or the Romans Virgil. He is a perpetual fountain of good sense; learned in all sciences;² and, therefore, speaks properly on all subjects. As he knew what to say, so he knows also when to leave off; a continence which is practiced by few writers, and scarcely by any of the ancients, excepting Virgil and Horace. * * *

Chaucer followed Nature everywhere, but was never so bold to go beyond her; and there is a great difference of being *poeta* and *nimis poeta*,³ if we may believe Catullus, as much as betwixt a modest behavior and affectation. The verse of Chaucer, I confess, is not harmonious to us; but 'tis like the eloquence

2. Early English miniaturists prided themselves on the art of giving roundness to the full face without painting in shadows.

3. Satirical mirth, good-natured satire.

4. A notorious public executioner of Dryden's time (d. 1686). His name later became a generic term for all members of his profession.

5. *Absalom and Achitophel*, lines 544-568 (pp. 180-9).

6. Reviled, abused. Observe that the verb differed in meaning from its noun, defined above.

7. Liable.

1. Dryden's final work, published in the year of his death, was a collection of translations from Homer, Martial (*Epigrams* 3, 4).

which moves pleasure in a reader, the field is open, you may be heard: but those springs of human nature are not so easily discovered by every superficial judge: it requires philosophy, as well as poetry, to sound the depth of all the passions, what they are in themselves, and how they are to be provoked; and in this science the best poets have excelled. * * * From hence have sprung the tropes and figures,³ for which they wanted a name who first practiced them and succeeded in them. Thus I grant you that the knowledge of Nature was the original rule, and that all poets ought to study her, as well as Aristotle and Horace, her interpreters.⁴ But then this also undeniably follows, that those things which delight all ages must have been an imitation of Nature—which is all I contend. Therefore is rhetoric made an art; therefore the names of so many tropes and figures were invented, because it was observed they had such an effect upon the audience. Therefore catachreses and hyperboles⁵ have found their place amongst them; not that they were to be avoided, but to be used judiciously and placed in poetry as heightenings and shadows are in painting, to make the figure bolder, and cause it to stand off to sight. * * *

[Wit as "Propriety"]

* * * [Wit] is a propriety of thoughts and words; or, in other terms, thought and words elegantly adapted to the subject. If our critics will join issue on this definition, that we may *convenire in aliquo tertio*,⁶ if they will take it as a granted principle, it will be easy to put an end to this dispute. No man will disagree from another's judgment concerning the dignity of style in heroic poetry; but all reasonable men will conclude it necessary that sublime subjects ought to be adorned with the sublimest, and, consequently, often with the most figurative expressions. * * *

1677

From A Discourse Concerning the Original and Progress of Satire¹

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[The Art of Satire]

* * * How easy is it to call rogue and villain, and that wittily! But how hard to make a man appear a fool, a blockhead, or a knave without using any of those opprobrious terms! To spare the grossness of the names, and to do the thing yet more severely, is to draw a full face, and to make the nose and cheeks

3. I.e., such figures of speech as metaphors and similes. "Tropes": the use of a word in a figurative sense.

4. In the words of the French critic René Rapin, the rules (largely derived from Aristotle's *Poetics* and Horace's *Art of Poetry*) were made in order to "reduce Nature to method" (cf. Pope, *An Essay on Criticism* 1.88-89, p. 2218).

5. Deliberate overstatement or exaggeration. "Catachresis": the use of a word in a sense remote from its normal meaning.

6. "To find some means of agreement, in a third term, between the two opposites" (W. P. Ker's note).

1. This passage is an excerpt from the long and ram-

bling preface that served as the dedication of a translation of the satires of the Roman satirists Juvenal and Persius to Charles Sackville, sixth earl of Dorset. The translations were made by Dryden and other writers among them William Congreve. Dryden traces the origin and development of verse satire in Rome and in a very fine passage contrasts Horace and Juvenal as satiric poets. It is plain that he prefers the "tragic" satire of Juvenal to the urbane and laughing satire of Horace. But in the passage printed here, he praises his own satiric character of Zimri (the duke of Buckingham) in *Absalom and Achitophel* for the very reason that it is modeled on Horatian "satillery," not Juvenalian invective.

of his *Canterbury Tales* the various manners and humors (as we now call them) of the whole English nation in his age. Not a single character has escaped him. All his pilgrims are severally distinguished from each other; and not only in their inclinations but in their very physiognomies and persons. Baptista Porta⁸ could not have described their natures better than by the marks which the poet gives them. The matter and manner of their tales, and of their telling, are so suited to their different educations, humors, and callings that each of them would be improper in any other mouth. Even the grave and serious characters are distinguished by their several sorts of gravity; their discourses are such as belong to their age, their calling, and their breeding, such as are becoming of them, and of them only. Some of his persons are vicious, and some virtuous; some are unlearned, or (as Chaucer calls them) lewd, and some are learned. Even the ribaldry of the low characters is different: the Reeve, the Miller, and the Cook are several⁹ men, and distinguished from each other as much as the mincing Lady Prioresse and the broad-speaking, gap-toothed Wife of Bath. But enough of this; there is such a variety of game springing up before me that I am distracted in my choice, and know not which to follow. 'Tis sufficient to say, according to the proverb, that here is God's plenty. * * *

1700

4. "Suitable to the ears of that time." Tacitus was a Roman historian and writer on oratory (A. D. ca. 55-ca. 117).

5. John Cower (d. 1408) was a poet and friend of Chaucer. John Lydgate (ca. 1370-ca. 1449) wrote poetry that shows the influence of Chaucer. "Numbers": versification.

6. Thomas Speght's Chaucer, which Dryden used, was first published in 1598; the second edition, published

in 1602, was reprinted in 1687.

7. The pentameter line. In Dryden's time few readers knew how to pronounce Middle-English, especially the syllabic *e*. Moreover, Chaucer's works were known only in corrupt printed texts. As a consequence Chaucer's verse seemed rough and irregular.

8. Giambattista della Porta (ca. 1535-1615), author of a Latin treatise on physiognomy.

9. Different.

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