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An Essay on True and Apparent Beauty in Which From Settled Principles is Rendered the Grounds for Choosing and Rejecting Epigrams

by Pierre Nicole

Translated by J. V. Cunningham

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INTRODUCTION

The following essay forms the introduction to a famous anthology of the seventeenth century, the *Epigrammatum delectus*, a Port-Royal textbook published at Paris in 1659.[1] The essay was twice translated into French in the same century, but the use of the text in France did not survive, apparently, the downfall of the Port-Royal movement. It was, however, later adopted by Eton College, where it was used in the sixth form.[2] The text went through thirteen English editions between 1683 and 1762. The author of the essay, and a collaborator with Claude Lancelot in making the selections for the anthology, was Pierre Nicole, who began teaching in the Little Schools around 1646. It has been said that the essay was written at that time.[3]

The scope of the anthology is indicated on the title page, which I translate: *A selection of epigrams carefully chosen from the whole range of ancient and modern poets, and so on. With an essay on true and apparent beauty, in which from settled principles is rendered the grounds for choosing and rejecting epigrams. There are added the best sententiae of the ancient poets, chosen sparingly and with severe judgement. With shorter sententiae, or proverbs, Latin, Greek, Spanish, and Italian, drawn both from the chief authors of those languages and from everyday speech*.

The essay is preceded by a preface in which the origin, purpose and method of the anthology is explained. The two ends of instruction, we are told,[4] are learning and character, and of these the latter is the more important. But there are many books, and especially books of epigrams, that are quite filthy and obscene. Young people are led by curiosity to read these, and losing all chastity of mind enter upon a progressive corruption of life. It would be best if they could be kept wholly from such books; but there is a good deal in them of genuine profit and literary merit, which makes it difficult to keep them wholly out of the hands of youth. Therefore the editor undertook to expurgate the epigrammatists, especially Catullus and Martial. He was horrified when he read over their works, but he found some good among the bad, as in vipers not everything is poisonous but some things even useful to health. His primary purpose, then, was to protect the good young man from being harmed and to leave him no excuse for wishing to have or peruse such books since the good in them had already been extracted for him.

The difficulty then arose of making the selection serve the purposes both of morality and of judgement. The editor could either gather together all the epigrams that were not obscene, or he could choose only the best. He took in fact both ways: he preserved everything of Catullus and Martial except the cheapest odds and ends and filthiest obscenities, and he applied strict standards of judgement to the rest so that, unless an epigram had literary merit or contained something worth knowing, he felt there was no reason to burden the book with it.

Nevertheless, some middling epigrams found entrance into the anthology—he confesses the fact so the reader will not look for excellence without flaw. The reasons were, first, that the complete perfection he was looking for is seldom or never attained. Hence, if he had admitted only those epigrams in which there was nothing to censure, the task would not have been one of selecting some but rather of rejecting almost all. Again, in epigrams dealing with memorable events or in praise of famous men, sometimes he looked to the profit of the work rather than to its polish, as in Ausonius' quatrains on the Caesars. Finally, he will not deny that chance has played its part against his will. As a judge after a series of severe sentences will give a lighter one to a man no less guilty than the others, so after rejecting a great number of epigrams by some writer a sense of pity arose and a distaste with severity of judgement; then if anything that seemed pointed

turned up, though no better than what was rejected, he could not bear to see it discarded. This has occasionally happened, but hardly ever without a warning note to the reader.

He admits that some, perhaps quite excellent, epigrams have escaped him, either because he never read them or because he was at the moment of reading less attentive. But the paucity or lack of selections from a given writer should not be taken as an indication of ignorance or indiligence in that case. Rather, he confidently professes to have exerted the greatest patience and industry—patience, since so many were so bad. His hope was by his trouble to free others from so much trouble. With this in mind he read countless authors of different ages and countries, a total of around 50,000 epigrams, from most of which nothing at all was worth excerpting. There is no point in memorializing the names of the bad, except to note in passing that he found hardly anything so inept as the *Delitiae*, as they call them, of the German poets[5]—in this connection he gives special mention to the book of Lancinus Curtius[6], which contains 2,000 epigrams.

He found some fairly tolerable epigrams in other books, which nevertheless he excluded, for what is lacking in distinction is better not known at all than learned at the expense of better things, not to speak of its being a burden to the mind which gradually will lose the ability to judge excellence, and so, becoming accustomed to mediocrity, will be unable to attempt anything higher. There is no more useful motto for a man in quest of solid learning than Grotius' line: "Not to know some things is a large part of wisdom."[7]

The editor added to the epigrams a collection of sententiae since the two forms are quite cognate, the sententia being a kind of shorter epigram, for the principal part of an epigram, the conclusion, usually consists in a sententia. It is true that such collections have come in bad repute, and not wholly unjustly, but the thing itself is worth doing. For what is our aim in reading books except to nourish and fashion judgement? and what better serves this end than sententiae, which furnish as it were the premises and axioms by which one is able to form a just and true judgement on most of the duties and affairs of human life? Hence he extracted these gems from the huge pile of trifles in which they lay mixed. Perhaps they please less in isolation than when one runs across them as he reads, and for this reason such anthologizing should be contemned. But it would be precious to refuse a great accession of profit because of a small dimunition of pleasure.

The editor thought that in many cases the selections should not be published without notes, for epigrams have often some obscurity in them and their whole charm is lost unless the light that would illuminate it is at hand. The notes to the selections from Martial are pretty largely taken from Farnaby. Elsewhere the editor has supplied notes sparingly, at those points where the reader might be stuck. He has also changed the titles of a good many pieces, especially where the original involved the name of some fictitious or base person. The purpose of a title is to recall the whole piece to memory or to facilitate finding it in an index. Why, then, title an epigram *To Gargilianus* or *Cecilianus*, which gives no idea of what the epigram is about? The editor, therefore, has substituted titles which express as well as possible the force of the poem, a difficult task especially when the meaning is compact, as only one who has tried it knows.

But that out of the brevity of this book the reader may get that ability in judgement, which above all should be cultivated, the editor thought it worth while to prefix to the anthology an exposition of the norms of judgement used in selecting the epigrams. He drew these norms not merely from his own wit or from the authorities of Antiquity, but from the conversation of learned men experienced in civilized life. Hence the reader will find here their judgements, not the editor's, and will, if he is unbiased, perceive how just and accurate they are.

The preface is then followed by the essay. The principles of the essay, as Nicole asserted above in the preface, are not peculiarly his own but those of the group with which he was associated. They are the principles, for example, of the *Port-Royal logic*: particularly 1), "one of the most important rules of true rhetoric," "*that there is nothing beautiful except that which is true*; which would take away from discourse a multitude of vain ornaments and false thoughts;" and 2) the doctrine that "the figurative style commonly expresses, with the things, the emotions which we experience in conceiving or speaking of them," and hence in the light of the adjustment of feeling to the situation "we may judge the use which ought to be made of it, and what are the subjects to which it is adapted."[8]

The purpose of the book is to serve morality and to promote judgement.[9] To this end the editor provides a check list of the better epigrams, and affixes an asterisk to designate the best.[10] Seventeen pieces are given the highest rating: thirteen of Martial's (1.8, 1.21, 1.33, 2.5, 3.44, 3.46, 4.56, 4.69, 5.10, 5.13, 8.69, 10.53, and 12.13); the re-written epigram ascribed to Seneca and discussed in the notes to the essay (note 32); Claudian on Archimedes' sphere;[11] Boethius, *De cons. phil.* 1.m.4; and one modern poem, Buchanan's dedication of the *Paraphrase of the psalms* to Mary, Queen of Scots.[12]

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[1] This paragraph is based largely on James Hutton, *The Greek anthology in France*, "Cornell studies in classical philology," XXVIII (1946), p. 192, and *The Greek anthology in Italy*, "Cornell studies in English," XXIII (1935), pp. 69-70.

[2] Sir H. C. Maxwell Lyte, *A history of Eton college*, London, 1911, 4th ed., p. 311.

[3] Nigel Abercrombie, *The origins of Jansenism*, Oxford, 1936, p. 246; no authority is there cited.

[4] The following paragraphs contain an abbreviated and paraphrastic translation of the preface.

[5] Janus Gruter, *Delitiae poetarum germanorum*, 6 v., Frankfort, 1612.

[6] See Georg Ellinger, *Geschichte der neulateinischen literatur Deutschlands*, I, "Italien und der Deutsche humanismus," Berlin, 1929, pp. 115-7.

[7] The last line of an epigram on learned ignorance, *Poemata*, Leyden, 1637, pp. 331-2, printed in the *Delectus*, p. 399.

[8] *The Port-Royal logic*, tr. Thomas Spencer Baynes, 8th ed., Edinburgh, n.d., Discourse 2, p. 17; Part 3. 20, p. 286; and 1. 14, p. 90.

[9] *Ibid.*, Discourse 1, p. 1, "Thus the main object of our attention should be, to form our judgement, and render it as exact as possible; and to this end, the greater part of our studies ought to tend."

[10] Lipsius had suggested some such procedure (Justus Lipsius, *Epist. quaest.*, 1.5, *Opera omnia*, Antwerp, 1637, I, p. 143): "He would do a service to the world of letters who would make a selection of Martial's epigrams in the fashion of the old critics and would affix a mark of praise to the good and of blame to the bad." [Pg vii]

[11] Shorter poems 51, *Claudian*, ed. Maurice Platnauer, 2 v., "Loeb classical library," London, 1922, II, 278-81.

[12] *Poemata*, Amsterdam, 1687, p. 1; not in *Opera omnia*, Leyden, 1725.

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AN ESSAY ON TRUE AND APPARENT BEAUTY IN WHICH FROM SETTLED PRINCIPLES IS RENDERED THE GROUNDS FOR CHOOSING AND REJECTING EPIGRAMS.

Why men's judgments on beauty differ so much.

I should say that the reason why even learned men differ so widely and display so great a range of opinion in judging the excellence of particular writers is that practically no one looks to reason and weighs the matter in the light of true and settled principles. Indeed everyone in the act of judging embraces a hastily conceived opinion and follows his impressions without reflection or judgment. Thus it is that few have made any attempt so far to arrive at an exact knowledge of the nature of true beauty, by which in the last analysis all else must be determined; rather, each has immediately pronounced that to be beautiful which affected him with some sort of pleasure. Yet there is no norm of judgment more misleading or more variable, for a false and adulterate beauty will give pleasure to minds imbued with deformed opinions whom a true and solid beauty often cannot affect. It follows there is nothing so ugly that it will not please someone or other, and nothing on the other hand so absolutely beautiful that it will not displease someone. Farmers will be found to dance to absurd songs, and whole theaters time and again roar at the tasteless jokes of the actors. Similarly, there are a good many who find little or no delight in Vergil or Terence, though there is nothing in the world of letters more polished—such is the power of custom and preconceived opinion to impart or preclude delight. Consequently, if we wish to dissociate ourselves from the fickle mob of opinions, we must have recourse to reason, which is single, [Pg 2] fixed, and simple. We must discover by her aid that true and genuine figure of beauty with which is marked whatever is truly beautiful and finished, and from which whatever departs is justly called ugly and repugnant to taste.

Reason leads us directly to nature and establishes that to be generally beautiful which accords both with the nature of the thing itself and with our own. For example, if an object that is excessive or defective in some part is thought ugly, it is because it diverges from nature which demands a completeness in the parts and despises excess. Almost everything that is judged to be ugly is so judged for the same reason: you will always observe that there is here some flaw at variance with a rightly constituted nature. Nevertheless, for an object to be declared beautiful it is not enough that it answer to its own nature; it must also be congruent with ours. For our nature, being invariable both in the soul and in the body endowed with senses, has definite inclinations and aversions by which it is either attracted or estranged. Thus our eye is moved with pleasure by certain colors, our ear is drawn by a certain kind of sounds; one thing delights the soul, one repels it, each in the measure that it corresponds or is repugnant to our ways of

feeling. However, what is meant by nature here is not any nature at all, since some are misshapen, perverse, and corrupt. What is meant is a nature corrected and well-ordered from whose inclinations must arise the judgement of beauty and charm.

However, the essence of true beauty is such that it is not fugitive, changeable, or of one time, but rather invariable, fixed, persistent and such as pleases all times equally. And although there may be found some men of so corrupt a nature that they despise beauty, nevertheless they are but few. And even these may be recalled to truth by reason, since false beauty though it may for a while have its admirers cannot long hold them, for nature itself which cannot be erased will gradually beget in them a distaste for it. For, as Cicero so notably says, time that erases the fictions of opinion only confirms the judgements of nature.[1] [Pg 3]

If we may apply this maxim to literature we may say that that is truly beautiful which agrees both with the nature of things themselves and with the inclinations of our senses and of our soul. And since in a work of literature one takes account of sound, diction, and idea, the agreement of all these with nature in its two aspects is required for beauty. Hence we will take these up one by one, beginning with sound.

ON SOUND

How seldom it charms in echoing the sense, how commonly by sweetness. Its natural measure in the ear.

We have assigned the first division of natural beauty to sound, which we distinguish from diction in that propriety and force of meaning are looked to in this; in sound it is the pleasantness or harshness that is regarded, flattering or offending the ear, or it is a kind of imitation of the subject-matter—sad things recited tearfully, excited rapidly, or harsh harshly. This is common enough in the spoken word; in writing, however, with which we are chiefly concerned here, it is uncommon, though Vergil sometimes quite happily represents the sound of things themselves, their swiftness and slowness, in the sound of his verse. When you hear, for example, the well-known *procumbit humi bos*, do you not seem to hear the blunt sound of the falling bull? Or when you read the line *Quadrupedante putrem sonitu quatit ungula campum*,[2] doesn't the sound of running horses strike your ears? But this effect, as I said, is uncommon, and hardly to be found in any other poet than Vergil. Thus the chief potentiality of sound, and the most common, lies in charming the ear. It is a slight beauty, yet it is of nature, and for this reason especially agreeable to all classes of people. For there is scarcely any person so uneducated as not to be naturally displeased at what is incomplete and botched, or not to perceive what is full, ordered, and defined. Hence Cicero says justly in the *Orator*: [Pg 4]

> The ear, or the soul at the injunction of the ears, possesses a natural way of measuring sounds, by this judges some longer, some shorter, and ever anticipates the completion of a measure. It feels hurt when a rhythm is maimed or curtailed as if it had been defrauded of due payment. It dislikes even more whatever is prolonged and runs on beyond the proper bounds, since too much is more offensive than too little. Not that everyone knows the metrical feet, or understands anything about rhythm, or is aware of what offends him, or where, or why; it is rather that nature has set in our ears a power of judging the length and brevity of sound, as also the acute and grave accent of words.[3]

Pleasantness of sound is justly exacted of poets. The harshness of many poets, particularly the German. Some are too melodious.

Hence it is that anyone who wishes to conform to nature must necessarily strive for pleasantness of sound. This is the more justly exacted of poets since poetry itself is nothing other than measured language, bound into fixed numbers and feet, for the purpose of charming the ear. Consequently, those poets are justly censured who rest content with rounding off their words in six feet and altogether neglect to accommodate the ear. A good many epigrammatists are constant offenders in this kind, especially those who have rendered the Greek Anthology in Latin and the German poets.

For example, who can tolerate this German epigram? [Pg 5]

> He who made all that nothing was of nothing,
> Who'll make that nothing that now something is,
> Made you who nothing were what you now are
> From nothing, will make nothing what you are—
> Yes, or if something, being but sin from sin,
> From sin must form something for heaven fit.

Again, what is harsher than this epigram?

> You from your soul could not but know mine that
> That gave up in your ghost but just now his:
> As soul is known from soul so is your ghost
> Known to the Muses by my muse that's yours.

Or than this distich?

> Forward, nor turn from the old path one bit:
> This that you are I while I live shall be.[4]

But just as it is a considerable fault in diction wholly to neglect the pleasure of the ear, since verse, as we said, was devised to flatter it, so on the other hand those writers make a grievous mistake who have an immoderate regard for the ear, and pay no attention to the thought so long as they are satisfied with the sound. Out of such concern we get tuneful trifles and verses empty of substance. Writers who have by an attentive consideration of the poets achieved the faculty of poetic diction and rhythm quite often fall into this error. They abound in choice phrases and so are in effect content to smooth over the commonplace with a not indecorous make-up. You can see this in many poems and epigrams of Buchanan, Borbonius, and Barleius. If the reader is not quite attentive such poems will often deceive him, but being re-read and examined they beget a kind of distaste because of the thinness of the matter. Consequently, we have looked carefully for this fault, and have eliminated many poems that are melodious in this way and have nothing inside.

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How diction should be suited to subject-matter.

We come now to the question of conforming the diction and subject-matter to nature, in which, as was said above, nature must be considered in its double aspect: namely, in relation to the subjects of which we speak, and in relation to the audience by whom we are heard or read.

The agreement of words and subject consists in this: that lofty words should be fitted to lofty subjects, and lowly to lowly. It is true, of course, that every kind of writing demands simplicity, but the simplicity meant is such as does not exclude sublimity or vehemence. In fact, it is no less faulty to treat high and weighty subjects in a slight and unassuming style than it is to treat what is slight and unassuming in a high and weighty style. In both of these ways one departs from that agreement with nature in which, we have said, beauty resides. Therefore, not every piece of writing admits the rhetorical figures and ornaments, and likewise not every one excludes them. The answer lies wholly in whether there is throughout a complete harmony between diction and subject.

In addition, I wish you would carefully observe something that few do—namely, when you temper your diction to the subject, to regard it not only as it is in itself or in the mind of the writer, but also as it has been formed by your speech in the minds of your audience. Thus, the reader is assumed to be unacquainted with what you have to say at the beginning of a work, and hence you must use simple language to initiate him into your lines of thought. Afterwards you may build upon this foundation what you can. It follows that if you are to speak of some outrageous crime, you should not inveigh against it with a comparable violence of diction until your audience has achieved such a notion of the crime as will not be at odds with such force and violence.

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Thus Vergil begins in the best way with simple diction:

> Arms and the man I sing who first from Troy
> Banished by fate came to the Italian shore.

And Homer, too, who was praised for this by Horace:

> Speak to me, Muse, of him, when Troy had fallen,
> Who saw the ways of many and their cities.

But Statius begins badly, and sweeps the reader away too suddenly in these verses:

> Fraternal arms, and alternate rule by hate
> Profane contested, and the guilt of Thebes
> I sing, moved by the fiery Muse.

Claudian is even more at fault, and thrusts these bombastic lines on our unprepared attention:

> The horses of Hell's rapist, the stars blown
> By the Taenarian chariot, chambers dark
> Of lower Juno ...

But this rule should particularly be observed in the use of adjectives, which are always ill-joined with their noun when they disaccord with the impression the reader has in his mind. I have seen the opening of Lucan censured on this point:

> Wars through Emathian fields, wars worse than civil,
> And crime made legal is my song.

The critics urge that the epithet *worse than civil* could justly be employed after the depiction of the slaughter at Pharsalia, but that here it is out of order and suddenly attacks the reader who was thinking of no such thing. It offends against the precept of Horace:

Not smoke from brightness is his aim, but light
He gives from smoke.[5]

In what way diction should answer to man's inner nature. First, the grounds of the natural disaffection with unusual diction: how far this should be observed.

But it is not sufficient that diction answer to the subject-matter unless it also answers to the nature of man, in which may be discerned a kind of aversion to obsolete, low, and inappropriate words. I prefer to call this aversion a natural one rather than a result of opinion, though it is in a way based on opinion. For although the feeling that a particular word is more in common use and more civilized than another is purely a matter of men's judgement, nevertheless it is as natural to be displeased by the unusual and inappropriate as it is to be pleased with the usual and proper. Whatever is contrary to reason offends by the very fact that it is seen to lack reason. Certainly, to leave aside familiar terms and to search out unusual ones is wholly foreign to reason. However, there is added to this natural source of offense another that proceeds from opinion. Since such words are commonly condemned, there is associated with them a certain distaste and contempt such that it is scarcely possible to pronounce them without immediately arousing the associated feelings.

Consequently, the intelligent writer will willingly comply with usage so as not to give grounds for displeasure—whether this displeasure springs from nature or opinion. Though he is aware that usage is unstable and changes day by day, nevertheless he will prefer rather to please at one time than never. He will be careful, however, in his written work not to make use of the current jargon, especially of the French court and women's circles, or of any locutions that are not yet generally received. For the life of such expressions is too short to be bound into a lasting work—not to speak of the detestable affectation which detracts from the weight and dignity of the writing.

To conclude, there is a beauty and charm in propriety and elegance of diction which is not to be scorned, though it is but of a time, and, since it rests on opinion, by which usage is determined, will pass away with a change of opinion. Hence those who write not for an age but for all time should try to attain something else, something that has no admixture of opinion: Such is the agreement of words with nature, which we will now explain.

The inner and more intimate agreement of words and nature.

If one wishes to look deeply into the nature of the human mind and to search out its inner sources of delight, he will find there something of strength conjoined with something of weakness, and out of this circumstance arises variety and irregularity. The mind's vexation with a continual relaxation derives from its strength, while from its weakness stems the fact that it cannot bear a continual straining. Hence it is that nothing pleases the human mind very long, nothing that is all of one piece. So in music it rejects a wholly perfect harmony, and for this reason musicians deliberately intercalate discordant sounds—what are technically called dissonances. So, finally, it happens that physical exercise, even if it was at first undertaken for pleasure, becomes a torture when continued without interruption.

This point has its pertinence to literature, the more so since in that field nature reveals the greatest delicacy and cannot long endure what is lofty and excited. Yet on the other hand, whatever creeps close to earth and never lifts its head is, if it be prolonged, wearisome. To stand, to rest, to rise up, to be thrown down, this is what every reader or listener desires, and from this derives the driving necessity for variety, for the mingling of the majestic and slight, excited and calm, high and low. But it may seem that this consideration has little pertinence to the epigram, which is brief and so in less need of variety. However, I need not apologize for introducing these more general considerations since others of more immediate pertinence to the course of our discussion are derived from them, and particularly the question of the discriminate use of metaphors, which are of considerable effect in adorning or vitiating poetry.

For if we consider attentively why men are pleased with metaphors we will find no other reason than that already stated: the weakness of nature which is wearied by the inflexibility of truth and plain statement and must be refreshed by an admixture of metaphors which depart somewhat from the truth. This gives the clue to the proper and legitimate use of metaphors; they are to be employed specifically, as musicians employ discordant sounds, to relieve the distaste of perfect harmony. But how frequently and at what point they should be introduced is a matter of considerable caution and skill. One warning will suffice for the present: that metaphors, hyperboles, and whatever varies from the plain and natural way of saying something should not be sought for their own sakes but as a kind of relief for nauseated nature. They are to be accepted on grounds of necessity, and consequently a good deal of moderation must be observed in their use. Thus Quintilian rightly says, "A sparing and opportune use of these figures gives lustre to speech; frequent use obscures and fills with disgust."[6] You will discover this fault often in many epigrams, especially in those of contemporary writers as I shall show by several examples later on. However, lest this doctrine should issue in too strict an austerity of diction, it

should be noted that only those expressions are to be taken as metaphors that are remote from ordinary usage and offer the mind a double idea. Hence if a metaphor is so commonplace that it no longer has a figurative connotation and suggests nothing other than the notion itself for which it is used, then it should be numbered among proper rather than metaphorical expressions and does not fall in that class of tropes whose too frequent use is here censured.

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On a too metaphorical style. Certain epigrams rejected for this reason.

Though poets are granted a greater indulgence in the use of tropes, nevertheless they have their own mean, or, as Cicero says, their own modesty, and there is ever an especial ornament to be derived from simplicity. Consequently those writers stray pretty far from beauty for whom, as it were, all nature plays the ham to the point that they say nothing in an ordinary way, imagine nothing in the way in which it is perceived outside of poems, but instead elevate, debase, alter, and clothe everything in a theatrical mask. For this reason we have excluded from this anthology a number of epigrams as too metaphorical: for example, these two by Daniel Heinsius, a man otherwise eminent in scholarship and letters:

Driver of light, courier of the bright pole,
Surveyor of the sky, and hour-divider,
Servant of time, circler perpetual,
Cleanser of earth, disperser of the clouds,
Ever your chariot, fiery four-in-hand,
You curb fast; you who bear on the bright day
Steal from the world once more your countenance
And of your glowing hair conceal the flame;
Tomorrow from the arms of Tethys you
Return once more: but night has sealed my sun.

By my *sun* he means Douza. And again:

Sweet children of the night, brothers of fire,
Small cohorts, citizens of the fiery pole,
Who wandering through the cloudless fields of air
Lead the soft choruses with a light foot
When our tired bodies are stretched softly out
And gentle sleep invades our conquered sense,
Why now as then through the enamelled halls
From the recesses, still, and the clear windows
Of the gold arch bear off his hallowed face?
Farewell, at last; you shall not see your Douza.[7]

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In these epigrams, apart from the metaphors heaped up *ad nauseam*, and each of them harsh and absurd, a keen critic has noted another fault: namely, that nothing is more distant from the spirit of a man grieving and mourning for the death of a friend—and this is what Heinsius intended to depict—than such a wantonness of epithets. And so much for diction.

Truth, the primary virtue of ideas. How great a fault there is in untruth. Thence, of false epigrams.

We take up now the question of ideas, and postulate again that these too must conform both to the subject and to men's character. Ideas agree with the subject if they are true, if they are appropriate, and if they so to speak get into the insides of the thing. They are in accord with men's character if they fit in with natural aversions or desires.

The primary virtue of ideas is truth. Whatever is false is at variance with external reality, nor is there any beauty in falsity except in so far as it pretends to truth. From this you may gather that truth is the source of beauty, falsity of ugliness. The latter, in fact, is out of keeping not only with reality but also with human nature. For we possess an innate love of truth and an aversion to falsehood, so that what delights us when it seems to be true becomes disagreeable and unpleasant when its falseness is made manifest. This principle applies to those learned men whom we have mentioned several times now, and has led to the exclusion from this anthology of many epigrams in which the point rests on a falsehood: for example, there is the well-known one by Grotius, though simply as a poem it is noble enough:

On Joan of Arc, who is called "La pucelle d'Orleans"

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French Amazon of never-dying fame,
Virgin untouched by men and by men feared,
Nor Venus in her eyes nor young Desire
But Mars and Terror and the bloody Weird—
France owes the Salic Law to her alone,
And hers is the true king on the true throne.

Let none lament her death who was all fire
And never, or by fire alone, should die.[8]

I have ventured to cite this that the reader may see quite clearly what is involved in this kind of falsehood and how much it is repugnant to nature: namely, that something is alleged the contrary of which might as plausibly be affirmed. For Grotius might have written no less foolishly:

Justly lament her death: she who was fire
Should not by fire but by cold water die.

Actually, if we wish to get to the bottom of this fault we will find that men are not led to it by nature but driven to it by lack of skill. For they would not fly to the refuge of falsehood for any other reason than that they are not vigorous enough to elicit beauty from the subject itself. Truth, indeed, is limited and defined, but the realm of lies is unlimited and undefined. Hence the one offers difficulties for invention, the other is obvious and easy, and for that reason also is to be scorned.

Moreover, falsehood occurs not only in propositions but also in the delineation of feeling, as, for instance, when feelings are ascribed to a character other than those which nature and the subject-matter demand. You will find this fault in an epigram by Vulteius, which was for this reason rejected:

I viewed one day the marble stone
That hides a man in sin well-known.
I sighed and said, "What is the point
Of such expense? This tomb might serve
To house kings and the blood of kings
That now conceals a villainous corpse."
I burst in tears that copiously
Flowed from my eyes down both my cheeks.
A stander-by took me to task
In some such words, I think, as these:
"Aren't you ashamed, be who you may,
To mourn the burial of this plague?"
But I replied, "My tears are shed
For the lost tomb, not his lost head."[9]

It was surely foreign to nature to represent a man weeping copiously because a villain and scoundrel had been buried in a noble tomb, for the funeral honors paid to scoundrels excite anger and indignation rather than pity and tears. The poet, consequently, adopted an erroneous feeling when he wept where he should have been angry and wrathful.

On mythological epigrams.

Untruth, then, is a considerable fault, one that is quite widespread and one that embraces many sub-divisions. Under this category falls especially the use of mythological propositions, the common vehicle of poets when they have nothing to say. We have rejected many epigrams that are faulty in this kind, as, for example, Grotius on the Emperor Rudolph, which is too crowded with myths:

Not Mars alone has favored you, Invincible,
At whom as enemy barbarian standards shake,
But the Divine Community with gifts adore you,
And with this in especial from the wife of Zephyr:
She to the Dutch Apelles did perpetual spring
Ordain, and meadows living by the painter's hand.
Alcinous' charm is annual, and Adonis' gardens,
Nor do the Pharian roses bloom long in that air;
Antique Pomona of Semiramis has boasted,
And yet deep winter climbs the summit of her roof.
How shall your honors fail? The garlands that you wear
Beseem Imperial triumph, which time may not touch.[10]

I know there are other things to be censured in this epigram, but I note here only that one fault which it was quoted to illustrate.

On puns.

To the same general category may be referred most puns, the point of which usually rises from some untruth. For example, in Sannazaro's well-known epigram:

Happy has built twin bridges on the Seine:
Happy the Seine may call her Pontifex.[11]

If you take *Pontifex* in the sense of "builder of bridges" the thought is true, but pointless;

consequently, for there to be a point the word *Pontifex* must be taken in the sense of "Bishop", and in this sense it will be false that the Pontifex is happy. Similarly, in another epigram of some reputation:

> They say you're treating Cosma for his deafness,
> And that you promised, French, a definite cure;
> But you can't bring it off for all your deftness:
> He'll hear ill of himself while tongues endure.[12]

Take *audire* as referring to the sense of hearing and the thought is false, since that physical defect is curable; take it as referring to a good reputation, and the thought will again be false and inept, for it is false and inept that a doctor will labor in vain to cure a defect of the ears because he cannot medicine to a diseased reputation.

All puns are embarrassed by such faults, while on the other hand their charm is quite thin, or rather nonexistent. Formerly, it is true, in an earlier age there was some praise for that kind of thing, and so Cicero and Quintilian are said to have derived polished witticisms from the device of double-meaning; now, however, it is rightly held in great contempt, so much so that men of taste not only do not hunt for puns but even avoid them. They are, one must admit, more bearable, or at least less objectionable when they come spontaneously; but anyone who brings out ones he has thought up or indicates that he himself is pleased with them is quite properly judged to be inexperienced in society. Hence it is that epigrams whose elegance is derived from puns are held of no account. For since verses are only composed by labor and diligence he is justly considered to be a weak and narrow spirit who wastes time in fitting such trivial wit into verse. One should add, too, that there is another disadvantage in puns, that they are so imbedded in their own language that they cannot be translated into another. For these reasons we have admitted few punning epigrams into this anthology, and those only as examples of a faulty kind.

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On hyperbolical ideas.

In the category of false ideas must be reckoned the hyperbolical. These are not false in a given word, for we dealt with this above, but false in the whole train of thought. Of this kind is that epigram of Ausonius, the absurdity of which is unbearable:

> Riding in state, as on an elephant,
> Faustus fell backwards off a silly ant;
> Abandoned, tortured to the point of death
> By the sharp hooves, his soul stayed on his breath
> And his voice broke: "Envy," he cried, "begone!
> Laugh not at my fall! So fell Phaethon."[13]

Ausonius was imitating in this epigram the Greeks, who were quite open to this sort of bad imitation, as may be seen in their Anthology which is stuffed full of such hyperboles. A good many fall into the same fault either because their talent is weak or because they write for the unskilled —a consideration which should move those who have no compunction about reading, let alone praising, the silly tales of Rabelais which are filled with stupid hyperboles.

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On debatable and controvertible ideas.

Furthermore, debatable and double-edged ideas, about which the reader is in doubt whether they be false or true, fall under the same category of falseness. For this doubtfulness, since it takes away all pleasure, removes also the beauty. For this reason I have never approved the conclusion of Martial's epigram:

> Equal the crime of Antony and Photinus:
> This sword and that severed a sacred head—
> The one head laurelled for your triumphs, Rome!
> The other eloquent when you would speak.
> Yet Antony's case was worse than was Photinus':
> One for his master moved, one for himself.[14]

The reader is bothered by a sort of quiet annoyance that the poet should so confidently take a dubious idea for a certain one. He might easily argue against the poet that on the contrary it seemed to him that a man who commits a crime for his master is more at fault than one who commits it for himself, and he could support his position with rational arguments. For one who sins for his own advantage is driven to his deed by such emotions as rage, lust, and fear, and these as they diminish the power of willing in like measure diminish the magnitude of the offence. But one who effects a crime at another's behest comes coldly to the deed, a fact that convicts him of a far greater depravity. One could allege these and similar lines of argument against Martial's position, and could reverse the sense of his distich so that it read no less irrationally:

> Yet Antony's case was better than Photinus':
> One for his master moved, one for himself.

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Hence this whole category of controvertible ideas lacks literary merit and should be studiously avoided by those who aim at beauty, which in the last analysis is to be found in truth alone, and in truth of such a sort that as soon as it is proposed the reader recognises as true and accepts it.

The second virtue of ideas, that they should agree with the inner nature of the subject; and thence on ideas foreign and accidental to the subject.

The second virtue of ideas with respect to the subject-matter is that they should agree with its inner nature: that is, that they should be elicited out of the very inners of the subject and not far-fetched or drawn from external accidents which are only the accompaniments of things. By this rule we have been delivered from numerous frigid epigrams, of which I subjoin a few examples:

Foreign and far-fetched is Owen's on a lyre:

> That there is concord in so diverse chords
> Discordant mankind some excuse affords.[15]

As if nothing were more pertinent for making men ashamed of their discords than the concord of strings on a lyre.

From concomitant accidents, and not from the very heart of the subject itself, is drawn this epigram of Germanicus Caesar, though the verses are otherwise sufficiently polished:

> The Thracian boy at play on the stiff ice
> Of Hebrus broke the waters with his weight
> And the swift current carried him away,
> Except that a smooth sherd cut off his head.
> The childless mother as she burned it said:
> "This for the flames I bore, that for the waves."[16]

Certainly the mother had a deeper and more native cause of grief than that her son was destroyed partly by water and partly by fire; she would have grieved no less had he perished wholly in water or wholly in fire. The whole reason for grief, then, ought not be sought in such a slight circumstance, which was an accompaniment of and not the grounds for grief.

Negative descriptions labor under the same fault, namely those in which are enumerated not what the endowments of the subject are but what they are not. This is justly censured in one of Barlaeus' epigrams, which is in other respects quite polished:

> Of royal Bourbon blood, by whose aid once
> Belgium believed that God inclined to her;
> For sceptered fathers famed, more famed for war,
> And by Astraea's doom of rare renown;
> Whom War as general, Peace lauds unarmed,
> To whom so many lands and seas are slaves;
> Neither the fleece drinking barbarian dye
> I send you, nor Sidonian artifice,
> Nor Indian ivory, Dalmatian stone,
> Nor the choice incense that delights grave Jove,
> Nor warring eagles, no, nor cities stormed,
> Nor plundered canvas from the conquered sea;
> Louis, I give you Christ as King and Lord,
> Titles not foreign to the ones you bear:
> For I would send you, greatest of all kings,
> Than which I cannot more, I send you God.[17]

Surely it is a long way around to enumerate what you will not give the King in order to make clear how slight your gift is. Besides, the conclusion is harsh in that a book about Christ is called God and Christ, as if Christ and a book about him were the same thing. But this is a commonplace absurdity of what one may call the dedicatory *genre*, in which writers almost always speak of their book as if there were no difference between the book itself and its subject: thus, if they write about Caesar or Cato, "Caesar and Cato," they say, "prostrate themselves before you;" If about Cicero, "Look," they say, "Cicero addresses you and takes you as patron:" all of which are correctly to be reckoned in the category of false statements.

In what way ideas are to be made agreeable to men's character. On avoiding offense; and, first, on obscenity.

The harmony of idea and subject is a matter fairly easy to understand, but the attuning of idea and men's character is more difficult to grasp and requires more painstaking treatment. For in this inquiry the whole scope of human nature must be thoroughly examined, and our silent inclinations and aversions must be laid open so that we will know how to avoid the one and comply with the other. For it cannot be that anything should please that offends nature, or

anything displease that complies with natural inclinations. We will touch briefly on some of these points, but only on those that suffice to our purposes.

In the first place, there is in the nature of man an aversion to the shameful and the obscene, and this the more powerful in the best and well-educated natures. All obscene ideas offend this sense of shame to such an extent that they are regarded as alien to nature, ugly, and uncivilised. Nor does it matter that some corrupt souls laugh at them. For civilization, as we have said, does not consist in agreement with a corrupt, but with a virtuous and moral, nature. Consequently, absolutely nothing of this kind is to be found in the conversation of respectable men, and is only resorted to by those who lack any feeling for Christianity as well as for genuine society and civilization.

Therefore we have excluded all shameful and licentious epigrams not only in deference to morals and religion but also to good taste and civilization. Of this Catullus and Martial in Antiquity witness that they had no perception at all, for they filled up their works with a good deal of ill-bred filth, and on that account must be regarded not only as dissolute but also as vulgar, uncultivated, and, to use Catullus' own phrase, "goat-milkers and ditch-diggers."[18]

On the cheap subject-matter of some epigrams.

But it is not only faulty and unpolished to offer the reader a shameful and obscene picture but also in general to depict whatever is cheap, ugly, and unwelcome. Hence those epigrams cannot be regarded as beautiful and polished whose subject is a toothless hag, a poetaster with a threadbare cloak, a rank old goat, a filthy nose, or a glutton vomiting on the table—all of which are a fertile ground of jokes for actors—since ugliness of that sort can never be redeemed by the point.

For this reason we have admitted none of such kind in the epigrams of Martial which we have subjoined to this treatise, and a good many epigrams that we have run across we have put aside, such as Buchanan's in which he depicts the unattractive and unpleasant picture of a lank old man:

While Naevolus yells he can outbellow Stentor,
And roars and roars, "All men are animals,"
He has slipped by almost his ninetieth year
And bent senility shakes his weak step.
Now three hairs only cling to his smooth head,
And he sees what a night-owl sees at dawn.
The snot is dripping from his frosty nose,
And stringed saliva falls on his wet breast—
Not an odd tooth in his defenceless gums,
Not an old ape so engraved with wrinkles.
Naevolus, for shame leave this frivolity
And no more cry, "All men," since you are none.[19]

Again, the baseness of the subject and the hardly pleasant or civilized image of a hanging man is a fault in this epigram of Sannazaro's, although it has an element of humor:

In your desire to learn your fortune, sir,
You questioned every tripod, every rune;
"You'll stand out above gods and men," at last
Answered the god in truth-revealing voice.
What arrogance you drew from this! You were
Immediately lord of the universe.
Now you ascend the cross. God was no cheat:
The whole world lies spread out beneath your feet.[20]

This is fairly respectable and merely low. But the cynical license of Martial and Catullus, by which they speak of many things that are not simply morally foul but such as decent society demands be removed from sight and hearing, must be regarded as altogether shameless and vulgar. For this reason men of taste never mention favorably Catullus' *Annales Volusi cacata charta*, or Martial's

et desiderio coacta ventris
gutta pallia non fefellit una[21]

And there are many others a good deal more despicable which cannot be adduced even as examples of a fault. Assuredly Antiquity was too forbearing toward this sort of thing, and I have often wondered how Cicero could have been tolerated in the Roman Senate when he inveighed against Piso:

> Do you not remember, blank, when I came to see you about the fifth hour with Gaius Piso, you were coming out of some dirty shack, slippers on your feet and your face and beard covered; and when you breathed on us that low tavern air from your fetid mouth, you apologized on grounds of ill health, saying that you were taking a kind of wine treatment? When we had accepted your explanation—what else could we do?—we stood a while in the smell and fume of the joints you

patronize until you kicked us out by the impudence of your answers and the stench of your belches. [22]

On spiteful epigrams.

Men with some gentleness of nature have an inborn hatred of spite, especially of such as mocks bodily flaws or reversals of fortune, or, finally, anything that happens beyond the individual's responsibility. For, since no man feels himself free of such strokes of chance, he will not take it easily when they are torn down and laughed at. The Vergilian Dido spoke with human feeling when she said: *Not unaware of ill I learned to aid misfortune.*[23] and the good will of the reader rises quietly in her favor. Likewise, Seneca says nicely: *It is not witty to be spiteful.*[24] On the other hand they act inhumanely who triumph over misfortune and upbraid what was not guiltily effected, to such an extent that they arouse a feeling of aversion and alienation in the hearts of their readers.

Accordingly we have admitted only a few of this kind, and have rejected a great many, as, for example, Owen's frigid and spiteful epigram:

Look, not a hair remains on your bright skull.
The hairs on your inconstant brow are null.
With every last hair lost behind, ahead,
What has the bald man left to lose? His head.[25]

Nor do we greatly care for many of the same kind in Martial, which nevertheless were not omitted for the reasons given above.[26]

On wordy epigrams.

It would be a long task to assemble all the natural aversions, nevertheless we may add a few more which have removed a whole host of epigrams from this anthology. Beyond those already mentioned, nature finds distasteful long circumlocutions and the piling up of a single point with varying phrase; for nature burns with a desire to find out, ever hastens to the conclusion, and is impatient at being detained by much talk unless there is a special reward. Consequently wordy epigrams beget a good deal of loathing, especially those that do not sufficiently balance their length with the magnitude of the idea. Some of Martial's are burdened with this fault; sometimes they accumulate too many commonplace compliments or are too petty in enumeration. For example, in this epigram to what point are so many trite similes piled up?

Her voice was sweeter than the agëd swan,
None would prefer the Eastern pearl before her,
Or the new-polished tooth of Indic beasts,
Or the first snow, lilies untouched by hand;
She who breathed fragrance of the Paestan rose,
Compared with whom the peacock was but dull,
The squirrel uncharming, and unrare the phoenix,
Erotion, is still warm on a new pyre.[27]

Similarly, why in another well-known epigram is the same idea repeated again and again?

Oh not unvalued object of my love,
Flaccus, the darling of Antenor's hearth,
Forego Pierian songs, the sisters' dances:
No girl among them ever gave a dime.
Phoebus is nought; Minerva has the cash,
Is shrewd, is only usurer to the gods.
What's there in Bacchus' ivy? The black tree
Of Pallas bends with mottled leaves and weight.
On Helicon there's only water, wreaths,
The divine lyres, and profitless applause.
Why do you dream of Cirrha, bare Permessis?
The forum is more Roman and more rich.
There the coins clink, but round the sterile chairs
And desks of poets only kisses rustle.[28]

In the same way that nature is displeased with wordiness, she is displeased with ideas that are too commonplace, for it is a kind of loquacity to bubble on with the commonplace and trite, since it is the purpose of speech to reveal what isn't known, not to repeat what is known and worn-out. Countless epigrams have been excluded from this selection for this fault, but since there is nothing more common I will omit offering examples.

On trifling wit, and plays on words.

Not a little displeasing, also, is an assiduity in trifling which withdraws the mind from solid

subject-matter out of which true beauty springs. Plays on words, puns and other playing around of that kind, unless they come to the judgement of the pen within the bounds of art, are not so much figures of speech as faults of style, and in those epigrams where the point rests solely in these there is nothing thinner, especially when they are so peculiar to one language that they cannot be translated into another. On this basis we have passed over such frivolous witticisms as Owen's:

> Rope ends the robber, death is his last haul;
> The gallows gets the gangster—if not all,
> If many get away, God gives no hope:
> It's an odd thief dies with no coffin rope.[29]

A little more humorous is that of another poet on the Swiss killed at night, though it too is faulty:

> Annihilated in night snow by a nut stick,
> I snow, night, nut, now, and annihilation know.[30]

In what way natural inclinations are to be gratified.

We must carefully avoid all these natural sources of aversion and no less gratify natural inclinations if we wish to attain that beauty we aim at. For self-love is so strong in men that they can hear nothing with pleasure unless it flatters them with their own feelings. For which reason those epigrams have correctly been judged best that penetrate deeper into those feelings and present to the reader's mind an idea recognised not only by the interior light but also by the interior feeling as quite true, so that he can be seduced into embracing it: for example, Martial's:

[Pg 26]

> I scorn the fame purchased with easy blood
> And praise the man who can be praised alive.[31]

For, since everyone hates death and longs for praise and glory, there is no one who would not be glad if he could be praised without dying. Another example is that of the old poet:

> Put high disdain, deciduous hope put by:
> Live with yourself who with yourself must die.[32]

For nature has, as Quintilian said, a kind of elevation intolerant of anything above it[33] that fawns on anyone who bids it be contemptuous of a pride in riches.

This much on the general sources of beauty and ugliness will be sufficient for passing judgement on any *genre* of poems. Nevertheless, this should be adapted to the particular nature, laws, and principles of the epigram, and so it will not be out of point to add a few remarks on the epigram itself.

The origin of the name epigram. Its definition, form, and laws.

"Epigram", as Scaliger observes, is the same thing as "inscription"; but since there are inscriptions of a good many things the former word has been applied to short poems inasmuch as epigrams of that sort used to be inscribed on monuments and statues;[34] and from this the word has been extended generally to short poems. The epigram is defined, then, as a short poem directly pointing out some thing, person, or deed.[35][Pg 27]

There are those who locate its formal principle in the serious or witty idea that forms the conclusion, and so insist on this that they deny anything is an epigram that lacks such a conclusion.[36] But this is an error. There are some epigrams, and highly cultivated ones, that have an equable elevation throughout and nothing of especial note in the conclusion, as in this of a contemporary writer:

> That on insurgent serpents breathing peace,
> On unplumed eagles trembling, on tame pards,
> And lions whose low necks accept the yoke,
> Louis looks out, sublime on a bronze horse,
> Nor fingers shaped this nor the craftsman's forge
> But worth and God's fortune accomplished it.
> The armed venger of faith, trustee of peace,
> Ordained, for all to reverence, this, and bade
> Rise in the royal place the reverend bronze,
> That, the long perils past of civil strife,
> And enemies subdued by prosperous arms,
> Louis should ever triumph in the master city.[37]

Again, in some epigrams there is a straightforward neatness and a gentle and dry humor that pleases, as may be seen in some of Catullus' epigrams which we have put in this anthology.

Some go to the contrary extreme and not only do not require such conclusions but even scorn them. These are for the most part the outrageous lovers of Catullus who, as long as they finish off some limp little dirge in hendecasyllabics, feel that they are marvellously charming and polished, although there is nothing more empty than such verses or nothing easier to do if a man has acquired a little practice in Latin.

How little effort, for instance, shall we imagine the conclusion of this epigram cost Borbonius, fashioned as it is according to the model of Catullus? [Pg 28]

> Wherefore come, O Roman muses,
> Full of honey and of graces,
> Learned verses of good Pino;
> I embrace you, just Camenae,
> All day long I read you gladly
> In this mortifying season,
> Time of tears and time of penance,
> Harsh and troublesome, by Jupiter![38]

You can see where the perverse imitation of Catullus has conducted a Christian, in other respects devout, so that in discussing a Christian fast day he had no fear of using the profane name of Jove. But, leaving this aside, what is more inept than the verse *Harsh and troublesome, by Jupiter!*, however Catullan. Nevertheless, Borbonius thought his epigram concluded elegantly in that line because he found in Catullus a similar one.[39] But, leaving aside such spiritless imitators, one can truly affirm of those ideas that conclude epigrams that there is a good deal of elegance in them when they are themselves distinguished and nicely cohere with the preceding chain of thought. For, since nothing so sticks in the reader's mind as the conclusion, what is better than to put there what especially you want to fix in his soul. Consequently, those epigrams are rightly censured as faulty that go in the order of anti-climax or in which the conclusion is sort of added on or appended to the rest and does not neatly develop out of the preceding verses. This fault is discernible in the following epigram, though in other respects it is distinguished:

> You that a stranger in mid-Rome seek Rome
> And can find nothing in mid-Rome of Rome,
> Behold this mass of walls, these abrupt rocks,
> Where the vast theatre lies overwhelmed.
> Here, here is Rome! Look how the very corpse
> Of greatness still imperiously breathes threats!
> The world she conquered, strove herself to conquer,
> Conquered that nothing be unconquered by her. [Pg 29]
> Now conqueror Rome's interred in conquered Rome,
> And the same Rome conquered and conqueror.
> Still Tiber stays, witness of Roman fame,
> Still Tiber flows on swift waves to the sea.
> Learn hence what Fortune can: the unmoved falls,
> And the ever-moving will remain forever.[40]

The last four verses are completely unnecessary and contain a frigid point by which the lustre of the preceding is dimmed.

The material of epigrams; thence the division into different kinds. The first kind and the second.

The material of epigrams comprises any subject and anything that can be said on it—in fact, there are as many kinds of epigrams as there are kinds of things that can be said. We will notice here particularly those kinds from which the special powers of each can be understood.

There is, then, a kind of epigram that is elevated, weighty, sublime, pursuing a noble subject in noble lines and concluding with a noble sentiment. Such is Martial's on Scaevola:

> That hand that sought a king and found a slave
> Was thrust to burn up in the sacred fire:
> So cruel a portent the good enemy
> Appalled, who bade him carried from the fire.
> The hand the regicide endured to burn,
> The king could not endure to see it done.
> Greater the glory of the hand deceived!
> Had it not erred it had accomplished less.[41]

Of the same sort are Grotius' epigrams on Ostend and on the sailing carriages, and Barclay's on Margaret of Valois.[42]

There is another sort somewhat lower in style but weighty and profitable in idea: for example, that truly distinguished one of Martial: [Pg 30]

> In that you follow the strict rules of Cato

And yet are willing to remain alive
And will not run bare-breasted on the sword
You do exactly as I'd have you do:
I scorn the fame purchased with easy blood
And praise the man who can be praised alive.[43]

And this:

In private she mourns not the late-lamented;
If someone's by her tears leap forth on call.
Sorrow, my dear, is not so easily rented.
They are true tears that without witness fall.[44]

And that genuinely golden epigram:

That I now call you by your name
Who used to call you sir and master,
You needn't think it impudence.
I bought myself with all I had.
He ought to sir a sir and master
Who's not himself, and wants to have
Whatever sirs and masters want.
Who can get by without a slave
Can get by, too, without a master.[45]

However, of all kinds of epigram that kind is generally thought to be most properly epigrammatic which is distinguished by a witty and ingenious turn that deeply penetrates the soul. Martial excels in this kind, as in this one:

You serve the best wines always, my dear sir,
And yet they say your wines are not so good.
They say you are four times a widower.
They say ... A drink? I don't believe I would.[46]

and in this:

Though you send presents to old men and widows
Why should I call you, sir, munificent?
There's nothing lower, dirtier than you only
Who can denominate enticements gifts.
These are the sly hooks for the greedy fish,
These are the clever baits for the wild beasts.
I will instruct you what it is to give
If you are ignorant: give, sir, to me. [47]

Some are lower in style but witty and pleasant, and have a glowing simplicity, as can be illustrated by another of Martial's:

"An epic epigram," I heard you say.
Others have written them, and so I may.
"But this one is too long." Others are too.
You want them short? I'll write two lines for you:
As for long epigrams let us agree
They may be skipped by you, written by me.[48]

And, indeed, of all the special capabilities of the epigram none is more difficult to realise or more rarely achieved than the adroit handling, the suitable and easy unfolding, of the subject so that nothing is redundant, nothing wanting, nothing out of order, obscure, or tangled up in verbiage, and yet at the same time nothing too unexpected, nothing not adequately prepared for. Martial is pre-eminent in this; he develops his subjects so aptly, clearly, and perceptively that he obtains for ideas of no special note otherwise a good deal of distinction by the charm of the handling. For example, what could be more resourcefully developed than this epigram?

Believe me, sir, I'd like to spend whole days,
Yes, and whole evenings in your company,
But the two miles between your house and mine
Are four miles when I go there to come back.

You're seldom home, and when you are deny it,
Engrossed with business or with yourself.
Now, I don't mind the two mile trip to see you;
What I do mind is going four to not to.[49]

And what would the following epigram be if it had not been perfected and prepared for by the handling?

That no one meets you willingly,

That where you come they go, that vast
Areas of silence circle you—
Why so? you ask. Too much the bard.
This makes it terribly, terribly hard.
Who would put up with what I do?
You read verse if I stand or sit;
You read it if I run or sing;
And in the baths you read me verse;
I try the pool, and swim in verse;
I haste to dine, you go my way;
I order, and you read me out;
Worn out, I take my rest with verse.
You want to know what harm you do?
Just, upright, harmless, you're a pest.[50]

The conclusion is pleasantly witty, but the special charm of the poem derives from the preceding enumeration.

This finishes the account of what we looked to in selecting these epigrams. You will find what else is pertinent to this book in the preface.

Notes

I have silently emended a few passages; otherwise the text translated is that of *Epigrammatum Delectus*, Paris, 1659. It is regrettable that the Latin text, at least of the poems cited, could not be printed with the translation.

[1] *De nat. deor.* 2.2.5

[2] *Aen.* 5.481 and 8.596

[3] 177-8, 173

[4] All three passages are from epigrams by Gaspar Conrad in Janus Gruter, *Delitiae poetarum germanorum*, 6 v., Frankfort, 1612: II, 1065-6, lines 1-6 of a twelve line epigram, "In symbolum Iacobi Monavi"; II, 1077, the concluding lines of an eight line epigram, "Ad Valentinum Maternum"; and II, 1079, the concluding couplet of a six line epigram, "Ad Georgum Menhadum Philophilum." The second passage is hardly construable.

[5] *Ars. poet.* 141-2, the paraphrase of Homer, and 143-4. The other quotations in this passage are from the opening of the *Aeneid*, *Thebaid*, *Rape of Proserpine*, and the *Pharsalia*.

[6] *Inst. orat.* 8.6.14

[7] "Manes Dousici," IV "Ad solem" and V "Ad sidera," *Poemata*, Leyden, 1613, p. 166. Nicole reads *tandem* for *rursus* in the last line of the second poem. Douza is the younger Janus Douza (1571-1596).

Nicole's criticism of these poems is just but superficial. The difficulty with such poems lies in the method, which consists in the establishment by amplification of one pole, followed by the briefest statement of the contrary pole. But the latter is of personal concern and is the essential subject of the poem. Thus the subject is deliberately avoided for the greater part of the poem, and hence there is in the amplification no principle of order to control the detail and its accumulation. This accounts for the features Nicole censures; however, he himself makes a similar point below in condemning negative descriptions.

[8] I have been unable to find this among Grotius' poems.

[9] Joannes Vulteius (c.1510-1542), "De ignobili Aruerno in sepulchro nobili posito," *Hendecasyllaborum libri iv*, Paris, 1538, Ni., p. 97.

[10]"Ad Rudolphum Imp. florum picturae dedicatio," *Poemata*, Leyden, 1637, p. 326.

[11]Epig. 1.50, "De Jucundo architecto," *Poemata*, Pavia, 1719, p. 189.

[12]I have been unable to identify this epigram.

[13]A translation of *Anth. Pal.* 11.104 and printed as Ausonius in the Renaissance, but probably by Girogio Merula (c.1424-1494): see James Hutton, *The Greek Anthology In Italy to the year 1800*, "Cornell Studies in English," XXIII (1935), pp. 23-4, 102-5, and Ausonius, *Opuscula*, ed. Rudolphus Peiper, Leipzig, 1886, p. 428. The younger Scaliger strongly condemns this epigram on the same grounds: Joseph Scaliger, *Ausoniarum lectionum libri ii*, 2.20, Heidelberg, 1688, p. 204.

[14]3.66

[15]Epig. libri tres, ad D. Mariam Neville, 2.211. *Epigrammata*, Amsterdam, 1647, p. 47.

Translated by Thomas Harvey, *John Owen's Latin Epigrams*, London, 1677, p. 36: "Sith th' Harps discording Strings concording be, / Is't not a shame for men to disagree?" and by Thomas Pecke, *Parnassi puerperium*, London, 1659: "Can there be many strings; and yet no Jars? / And are not men asham'd of dismal wars?"

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[16]Nicole's text follows what are now regarded as inferior mss: see Germanious Caesar, *Aratea*, ed. Alfred Breysig, 2nd. ed., Leipzig, 1899, p. 58. The poem corresponds to *Anth. Pal.* 7.542. Nicole's comment recalls Dr. Johnson on Gray's cat.

[17]The dedicatory poem, addressed to Louis XIII, to Caspar Barlaeus' *Poematum editio nova*, Leyden, 1631, sig.*8.

[18]22.10

[19]Epig. 1.25, *Opera Omnia*, 2 v., Leyden, 1725, II, 365. Nicole's text presents several variants and cuts the next to the last couplet, which I translate: "Already at the tomb, He beats the gates / Of Dis, and Libertina waits his torches."

[20]Epig. 3.5, *op. cit.*, p. 233.

[21]Catullus 36 and Martial 1.109. 10-11

[22]*Pis.* 13

[23]*Aen.* 1.630

[24]*Anthologia Latina*, ed. Alexander Riese, 412.17, Leipzig, 1894, I, 1, p.319. The epigram, from which this phrase is quoted, was ascribed to Seneca by Pithoeus.

[25]Epig.... ad ... Neville, 2.126, *op. cit.*, p. 38. Harvey, p. 36, translates: "Lo, not an hair thine heads bald Crown doth crown: / Thy Faithless Front hath not one hair thine own: / Before, Behind thine hair's blown off with Blast, / What's left thee to be lost? thine Head at last."

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[26]In the preface, *Delectus*, Paris, 1659, ch. 2. The problem was whether to print a large collection of epigrams, rejecting merely the obscene ones, or to choose only the best. A middle way was taken for these reasons: 1) there are so few first-class epigrams that a reader who had his own opinions might think the selection too choosy; 2) the best shines out only in comparison with what is not so good, and examples of vice are as useful as examples of virtue, since judgement in large measure consists in knowing what to avoid; 3) finally and principally, the curiosity of young men would not be sufficiently satisfied by the selection if they knew that a good many witty and polished epigrams were to be found elsewhere. Since it was especially necessary to keep youth from the unspeakable filth of Catullus and Martial, who are at the same time the best writers, everything of theirs is included except the cheapest odds and ends and filthiest obscenities. For the writers after Martial stricter standards were applied, for the book would have grown beyond bounds if everything tolerable had been admitted.

[27]Martial 5.37, 1, 4-6, 9, 12-14. The lines that Nicole cuts contain only more of the same.

[28]Martial 1.76

[29]Epig. libri tres ad Henricum ... ded. 1.67, *op. cit.*, p. 131.

[30]Unidentified. The text reads: "In nive nocte vagans nuceo cado stipite nectus, / Sic mihi nix, nox, nux, nex fuit ante diem."

[31]1.8. 5-6.

[32]The conclusion of an epigram of ten lines, ascribed to Seneca in *Delectus*, pp. 326-7. Lines 1-8 correspond to *Anth. Lat.*, *op. cit.*, 407. 5-12. The younger Scaliger had begun a new epigram with line 5, as also with lines 9 and 11 (ed., Vergil, *Appendix, cum supplemento* ..., Lyons, 1572, pp. 196-7.) The concluding sententia, however, which Nicole quotes here and praises later in the notes to the anthology, is from the conclusion of the next epigram, *Anth. Lat.*, 408. 7-8, which is a response to the preceding one. But the first two-thirds of the couplet has been rewritten with the aid of something like a *Gradus ad Parnassum*. The ms reads, "nunc et reges tantum fuge! vivere doctus / uni vive tibi nam moriare tibi." Nicole reads, "Mitte superba pati fastidia, spemque caducam / Despice: vive tibi, nam moriere tibi." *superba pati fastidia* corresponds to Vergil, *Ecl.* 2.15; *spem ... caducam* to Ovid, *Epist.* 15 (sive 16, "Paris Helenae"). 169 (sive 171).

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The epigram as it stands in the anthology, then, is a result of Scaliger's disintegration of *Anth. Lat.* 407, which suggested beginning with line 5 and adding 408. 7-8 from the responsory poem. But this couplet is subjected to improvement to adjust it to the sense, to sustain the level of feeling, and to enhance the sententious point. Thus, with the aid of phrases from Vergil and Ovid, using *mitte* and *despice* as fillers and helpers, the epigram is concluded "with a noble, exalted and true thought," as the editor says in the notes.

[33]*Inst. orat.* 11.1.16.

[34]J. C. Scaliger, *Poeticas libri vii*, 3.125, 5th. ed., 1607, p. 389.

[35]*loc. cit.*, p. 390: "An epigram, therefore, is a short poem directly pointing out some thing, person, or deed, or deducing something from premises. This definition includes also the principle of division—so let no one condemn it as prolix." Nicole, however, uses only the first half of the definition, since he rejects the principle of division.

[36]*loc. cit.*: "Brevity is a property; point the soul and, so to speak, the form." For a full account of the Renaissance theory of the epigram and the contemporary controversies, see Hutton, *op. cit.*, pp. 55-73, and *The Greek Anthology in France and in the Latin writers of the Netherlands to the year 1800*, "Cornell studies in classical philology," XXVIII (1946), *passim*.

[37]Anon., "In statuam equestrem Ludouici XIII positam Parisiis in circo regali," *Delectus*, pp. 409-10.

[38]Nicolas Borbon, the younger, *Poematia exposita*, Paris, 1630, pp. 144-5, the concluding lines (lines 23-30) of an epigram, "In versus v.c. Iacobi Pinonis."

[39]Catullus 1.7

[40]Ianus Vitalis Panomitanus (c.1485-1560), "Antiquae Romae ruinae illustres," *Delectus*, p. 366; see also *Delitiae delitiarum*, ed. Ab. Wright, Oxford, 1637, p. 104, with textual variants.

[41]1.21

[42]*Delectus*, pp. 396-7, 399-400, and 405. See Grotius, *op. cit.*, pp. 341-2, and 383.

[43]1.8

[44]1.33

[45]2.68

[46]4.69

[47]4.56

[48]6.65

[49]2.5

[50]3.44. 1-5, 9-18. The lines cut, 6-8, read in translation: "No tigress wild for her lost cubs, / No viper burned by the noon sun, / No scorpion begets such fear." In line 11, line 8 of the translation, Nicole reads *canenti* for the received *cacanti*. The latter reading will yield in translation a rhyme with the preceding line.

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Transcriber's Notes

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On p. 23, a letter was missing in one of the words;
it was changed as follows:

  From: "when they are  orn down and laughed at."
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   To:   "when they are torn down and laughed at."

 On p. 35, footnote #24, removed the repeated word "is":

   From: "from which this phrase is is quoted"
   To:   "from which this phrase is quoted"
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*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK AN ESSAY ON TRUE AND APPARENT BEAUTY IN WHICH FROM SETTLED PRINCIPLES IS RENDERED THE GROUNDS FOR CHOOSING AND REJECTING EPIGRAMS ***

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