

the love of virtue ;—if, I say, these are the advantages of studying the Grecian writers, then I shall feel no hesitation in declaring that I have accomplished a most honourable design in publishing the present work as well as in becoming an instructor in Grecian literature ; and I derive the greatest and most exquisite remuneration for having carried my design into effect, in perceiving that this course of study is every day becoming an object of greater interest than ever, with youth of liberal minds. And may this ardour in the cause not merely remain as great as it now is, but go on increasing ! Whatever may be the result, I shall myself enjoy the consciousness of having undertaken the honourable office of an instructor of youth, with the sincere design of being useful to the state ; for such an office it is, in the opinion of so great an authority as Cicero himself ; whose remarks on this subject will render it unnecessary for me to add any thing further to this preface : ‘ Quod enim munus (says he in *Divin. II. 2.*) reipublicæ afferre majus, meliusve possumus quam si docemus atque erudimus juventutem ? his præsertim moribus, atque temporibus, quibus ita prolapsa est, ut omnium opibus refrenanda ac coercenda sit. Neque vero id effici posse confido, quod ne postulandum quidem est, ut omnes adolescentes se ad hæc studia convertant : pauci utinam ! quorum tamen in re-pubicâ late patere poterit industria.’

Amsterdam, November 1793.



On the Use of Trisyllabic feet in Iambic verse.

THE only feet of three syllables which can be employed in English Iambics, are either those which have the two first short, and the third long, or those which have all three short—the anapest, and the tribrachys. A certain use of these feet, in that kind of verse, has been allowed from the very beginnings of English poetry. This takes place either when the two first syllables in these feet are vowels or diphthongs, as in the following instance—

To scorn | delights | and live | labo | ricōs dāys.

or when the letter *r*, only, is interposed between the vowels, as in the following—

And ev- | ery flower | that sad | embroid- | erj wēar.

or when the consonant *n* comes between the vowels, and the vowel preceding this letter is so obscurely or rapidly pronounced, as to leave it doubtful whether it may be considered as forming a distinct syllable, as in this instance.

Under | the op- | *ēnīng cȳ*- | lids of | the morn.

Sometimes the letter *l*, in a like position, gives the poet a like liberty, as in the following example.

Wafted | the trav- | *ällēr tō* | the beau- | tious west.

In all these cases, the three syllables were, until lately, written with a contraction which shortened them into two, and it came at length to be regarded as a rule, by most critics and authors, that no trisyllabic feet should be admitted in Iambic measure, where such a contraction was not allowed, or where the two first syllables might not, by some dexterity of pronunciation, be blended into one. This was, in effect, excluding all trisyllabic feet whatever; but they are now generally written without the contraction, and in reading poetry it is not, I believe, usually observed.

There is a freer use of trisyllabic feet in Iambic verse, of equal antiquity with the former, but which was afterwards proscribed as irregular and inharmonious, and particularly avoided by those who wrote in rhyme. I allude to all those cases where the two first syllables will not admit of a contraction, or which is nearly the same thing, refuse to coalesce in the pronunciation. These may be called pure trisyllabic feet, and the following is an example of this kind.

Impos- | tor, do | not charge | most in- | *nōcēnt nāture.*

In excluding liberties of this description, it is difficult to tell what has been gained, but it is easy to see what has been lost—the rule has been observed to the frequent sacrifice of beauty of expression, and variety and vivacity of numbers.

I think that I can show, by examples drawn from some of our best poets, that the admission of pure trisyllabic feet into Iambic verse is agreeable to the genius of that kind of measure, as well as to the habits of our language. I begin with those who have written in blank verse. The sweetest passages of Shakspeare—those which appear to have been struck out in the ecstasy of genius, and flow with that natural melody which is peculiar to him, are generally sprinkled with freedoms of this kind. Take the following specimen among

a thousand others—part of the eloquent apostrophe of Timon to gold.

Thou ever young, fresh, loved and *delicate wooer*
 Whose blush doth thaw the consecrated snow
 That lies in Dian's lap! thou *visible god*
 That solderest close impossibilities
 And mak'st them kiss!

Most of the older dramatists have done the same thing,—some more frequently than others,—but none appear to have avoided it with much care. I will next point to the most perfect master of poetic modulation perhaps in our language—a man to whom nature had given an exquisite ear, whose taste had been improved and exalted by a close study of the best models in the most harmonious tongues we know, and who emulated, in their own languages, the sweetness of the Latin and Italian poets. The heroic verse of Milton abounds with instances of pure trisyllabic feet. The following passage is certainly not deficient in harmony.

And where the *river of bliss*, through midst of heaven,
 Rolls o'er Elysian flowers her amber stream,
 With these, that never fade, the *spirits elect*
 Bind their resplendent locks inwreathed with beams.

Dryden sometimes admits feet of this kind in his tragedies in blank verse, and many other dramatic poets, his contemporaries and successors, have taken the same liberty. In the celebrated work of Young, I find no instance of this sort, and it is not hard to tell the reason. Young was a profound and blind admirer of Pope, nor is it to be wondered at that he, who, at the recommendation of his friend, gave his days and nights to the study of Thomas Aquinas, as a system of divinity, should take that friend for a model in poetry. Young, in his *Night Thoughts*, endeavoured to do that for which, of all things, his genius least fitted him—to imitate the manner of Pope; and the consequence was that he injured the fine flow of his own imagination by violent attempts at point and an awkward sententiousness. It was like sitting the Mississippi to spout little *jets d'eau* and turn children's water-wheels. He was probably afraid to use feet of three syllables, because he did not find them in the works of his master. About this time, and for some years afterwards, the exclusion of pure

and relieves me, like the sight of eminences and forests breaking the uniformity of a landscape.

If pure trisyllabic feet are allowed in blank verse, it would seem difficult to give any good reason why they should not be employed in rhyme. If they have any beauty in blank verse they cannot lose it merely because the ends of the lines happen to coincide in sound. The distinction between prose and verse is more strongly marked in rhymes than in blank verse, and the former therefore stands less in need than the latter, of extreme regularity of quantity, to make the distinction more obvious. Besides, the restraint which rhyme imposes on the diction is a good reason why it should be freed from any embarrassments which cannot contribute to its excellence. But whatever may be the reasons for admitting trisyllabic feet into Iambic rhyme, it is certain that most of our rhyming poets, from the time of Dryden, have carefully excluded them.

Spenser's verse is harmonious—but its harmony is of a peculiar kind. It is a long-drawn, diffuse, redundant volume of music, sometimes, indeed, sinking into languor, but generally filling the ear agreeably. His peculiar dialect has been called the Doric of the English language. I would rather call it the Ionic. It delights in adding vowels and resolving contractions, and instead of shortening two syllables into one, it often dilates one syllable into two. It is not in Spenser, therefore, that we are to look for frequent examples of pure trisyllabic feet in Iambic verse. They have an air of compression not well suited to the loose and liquid flow of his numbers. Yet he has occasionally admitted them, and without any apparent apprehension that he was sinning against propriety, for by a little variation of phrase he might have avoided them. In turning over his *Fairy Queen*, I meet, without any very laborious search, the following instances.

Unweeting of the *perilous* wandering ways.

The sight whereof so *thoroughly* him dismayed.

That still it breathed forth sweet *spirit* and wholesome smell.

When oblique Saturn sate in *the* house of agonies.

That Milton did not think the use of these feet in rhyme, incompatible with correct versification, is evident from the following passages in his *Lycidas*—no unworthy or hasty effort of his genius.

Fame is the spur that the clear *spiril dōth rāise*.
 Oh, fountain *Arēthuse!* and thou, honoured flood,
 Smooth-sliding Mincius—
 To all that wander in that *periloūs flood*.

Cowley employed pure trisyllabic feet in Iambics without scruple. Waller and Denham sometimes admitted them, but Dryden and his successors rigidly excluded them; or when in too great haste to do this, disguised them by some barbarous and almost unpronounceable elision. Pope, in one of his earlier poems, has an instance of this sort.

The courtier's learning, policy o' th' gown.

Who, at this day, would attempt to pronounce this line as it is written? I have observed some instances of pure trisyllabic feet in Garth's *Dispensary*; and a few even occur, at remote distances, to break the detestable monotony of Darwin's Iambics.

Some of our latest modern poets in rhyme have restored the old practice, and, as I think, with a good effect. Will the reader forgive me for setting before him an example of this kind, from one of those authors—an admirable specimen of representative versification?

Alone Mokanna, midst the general flight,
 Stands, like the red moon in some stormy night,
 Among the *fugitive clouds* that hurrying by
 Leave only her unshaken in the sky.

Here the anapest in the third line quickens the numbers, and gives additional liveliness to the image which we receive of the rapid flight of the clouds over the face of heaven.

The liberty for which I have been contending, has often been censured and ridiculed. The utmost favour which it has, at any time, to my knowledge, received from the critics, is to have been silently allowed—no one has openly defended it. It has not been my aim to mark its limits or to look for its rules. I have only attempted to show that it is an ancient birthright of the poets, and ought not to be given up.