The Word, the Workman, and the World

Creative imagination in the trope of ‘Poet as Creator’

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The connection between poetry and the divine stretches back at least to the origin of Western poetic theory. Plato talks in the *Phaedrus*, the *Ion*, and the *Symposium* about *furor*, a state of divine frenzy induced in mortal poets by the Muses. Poets in this state ‘are merely interpreters of the gods, according as each is possessed by one of the heavenly powers,’ and the poetry they produce is not to their credit: it is ‘not human or the work of men, but divine and the work of gods.’[[1]](#footnote-1) The chief word used for ‘poet’ in classical Latin was *vates*, which has the secondary meaning of ‘prophet.’ This conception of poetry as being divine rather than human in origin remained influential throughout the Renaissance, repeated (to name but a few instances) in the influential *De arte poetica* (1527) of Marco Girolamo Vida and in Francesco Patrizi’s *Della poetica* (1586), by French theorists of the*Pléiade*and their adherents, such as Pierre de Ronsard and Jean Vauquelin de la Fresnaye, and in English works on poetics by William Webbe and George Puttenham.[[2]](#footnote-2)Indeed, it survives in part to this day, in our concept of artistic ‘inspiration.’ In the Christian tradition, Augustine likens the universe, in the harmony and beauty of its composition, to a poem, a comparison repeated by his admirers, such as Bonaventura.[[3]](#footnote-3)

This association between poetry and divinity rose to new heights in the works of the quattrocento Florentine humanist, Cristoforo Landino. In a sort of neo-Platonic fusion of the two traditions, Landino likened the poet to God in his capacity as creator of the universe. This idea first appears in Landino’s commentary on Dante’s *Comedia*.

The Greeks say ‘poet’ from the verb ‘*poiein*’: which is halfway between ‘creating’ (*creare*), which is proper to God when he brought everything into being from out of nothing: and ‘making’ (*fare*) which is proper to men when in each art, they compose from material and form. For this reason, although the poet’s figment is not entirely out of nothing, yet he departs from making and approaches quite near to creating. And God is a poet, and the world his poem.[[4]](#footnote-4)

This metaphor, combining as it did the classical and Christian traditions with a healthy dash of Ficinian exaltation of man, was well suited to the temper of the times, for it steadily rose in popularity until, by the seventeenth century, it had become a commonplace in works of poetics.[[5]](#footnote-5)

Landino’s semi-deification of the poet was more than a pretty statement of poetic puissance, however. The distinction between ‘creating’ and ‘making’ taps into a major source of contention for early modern poetic theorists, what Joel Elias Spingarn in his seminal work on Renaissance literary theory called the ‘fundamental’ or ‘first problem of Renaissance criticism[:] … the justification of imaginative literature.’[[6]](#footnote-6) During the middle ages, the judgement of imaginative literature, as Spingarn points out, was not really a *literary* issue.[[7]](#footnote-7) But with the Renaissance came the revival of Plato, who condemned art and fiction as being inherently deceptive and therefore banished poets from his ideal society, and the rediscovery of Aristotle’s *Poetics*, which made imitation the soul and centre of poetry. Where, then, was the space for imagination? How far could imitation stretch? How could the poet justify the inclusion in his work of forms not found in nature? How, indeed, could this even be possible?

This question of invention vs. imitation of forms is at the heart of Landino’s distinction between creating and making. According to Aristotle’s conception, all objects are made up of matter and form: matter is the stuff of which objects are made, and form is that which they are made into. Plato particularly emphasizes the perfect nature of the forms, which are unvarying and eternal. When God created the universe, according to the Judeo-Christian tradition, he created it *ex nihilo*—out of nothing. There was neither matter to shape nor form by which to shape it before God created them. Every work made by man, on the other hand, involves the application of (pre-existing) form to (pre-existing) matter. This is the difference between ‘creating’ and ‘making.’ The poet, whose creations are not material, insofar as he imitates, still makes use of pre-existing forms. Any imaginative power which he possesses, therefore, must rest either in the manipulation or invention of forms.

E. N. Tigerstedt was the first to write a detailed study of the origin of this metaphor, and others have followed in his wake.[[8]](#footnote-8) Likewise, there are many excellent works that examine Renaissance conceptions of invention and imagination and their place in literature, but there has yet to be a broader study focusing on connecting the two tropes.[[9]](#footnote-9) To this end, I have selected for study four works of Renaissance criticism: Julius Caesar Scaliger’s *Poetices Libri Septem* (1561), Sir Philip Sidney’s *The Defence of Poetry* (pub. 1595, written c. 1580), George Puttenham’s *Arte of English Poesie* (1589), and Torquato Tasso’s *Discorsi del poema eroico*, (1594). The first work, by the Franco-Italian Scaliger, was written in Latin; the other three, in the vernacular, Sidney and Puttenham in English and Tasso in Italian. I have selected these particular works as they all stem from roughly the same time (the latter half of the sixteenth century); all are (to varying degrees) eclectic; all were fairly influential in and following their own time; and, most importantly, all of them include passages likening the poet to God the Creator. In examining the use of this trope in these four works, and contextualising it within each author’s theories on the nature of poetry, this essay seeks to better understand the precise nature of the poet’s ‘creative’ powers relative to the divine and the relevant cosmological and/or ontological implications thereof, and the implications regarding the place of fiction in poetry.

*Poetry v. Reality: The classical tradition and its revival in the Renaissance*

For Renaissance theorists, the main classical sources on the nature of poetry—those which followed the so-called ‘formal’ approach, as opposed to the ethical/rhetorical approach found in Roman writers such as Horace—were Plato and Aristotle.[[10]](#footnote-10) Of the two, Aristotle was the more influential, particularly because he espoused a unified theory of poetics, unlike Plato, whose admirers were obliged to try to cobble together a coherent position from various and often contradictory passages in the *Ion*, the *Phaedrus*, and the *Republic*. Yet it is Plato we shall discuss first, as Aristotle’s *Poetics* was developed at least in part in response to Plato’s ideas, and because these ideas were more troublesome, both for us and for their Renaissance interpreters.

We have already mentioned Plato’s idea of divine furor. This theory was often called upon by Renaissance theorists in support of the truth and morality of poetry: as Bernard Weinberg puts it, ‘How could anything coming from God and the Muses and made by the inspired poet be false?’ or, for that matter, immoral?[[11]](#footnote-11) That the truth or morality of poetry was in doubt, however, is largely due to Plato’s credit. Indeed, for detractors of poetry, Plato was an ideal source, while those neo-Platonists who were in favour of poetry were often forced into quite complex hermeneutical gymnastics, for Plato had banished poets from his *Republic* on the grounds that poetry is both false and immoral. Both of these problems stemmed from Plato’s idea of *mimesis*.

*Mimesis* (*μίμησις*, or, in Latin, *imitatio*) is usually translated into English as ‘imitation,’ although, as Richard Janko points out in his introduction to Aristotle’s *Poetics*, Plato’s use has more of the connotation of ‘copying’ or ‘impersonating,’ rather than ‘representing,’ as in Aristotle.[[12]](#footnote-12) It is *mimetic* poets in particular that Plato wishes to exclude, as is explained in Book X of the *Republic*,but as Plato counts as *mimesis* anything which involves making an image, this does not seem to offer much in the way of leeway. The basic problem with *mimesis* lies in Plato’s theory of the world of forms, upon which we have already briefly touched. The world of forms, for Plato, the ultimate reality, that realm of perfect and unchanging ideas of which our material reality is but a shadow. Everything which exists in our world is a kind of shadow or image of its true and eternal form. But when the painter makes an image, he is painting only the appearance of an object—the relation of a painted image to its subject is the same relation that the object itself has to the truth. The image produced by imitation is thus at two removes from the truth. The chief danger is that the viewer of the image may be deceived into taking the image for the thing itself, resulting in ‘a corruption of the mind of all listeners who do not possess, as an antidote a knowledge of its real nature.’[[13]](#footnote-13)

Aristotle, on the other hand, regards *mimesis* quite positively. Unlike his teacher, he does not believe in a separate world of forms, and promotes the learning of truth through examination of the natural world. *Mimesis* is useful because it is part of the learning process natural to mankind—when man looks at a representation, the process of recognising what it represents allows him to better understand that thing.[[14]](#footnote-14) Poetry is a particularly valuable form of representation because unlike history, which is confined to the ‘particulars’ of what has actually happened, poetry deals with ‘universals’—that is, what *may* or *should* happen. For this reason, Aristotle considers poetry to be more philosophical than history.[[15]](#footnote-15)

Aristotle places two limiting factors upon the construction of drama: the requirement for ‘probability,’ and the requirement for ‘necessity.’ The two terms were closely related. ‘Necessity’ related chiefly to the structure of the plot—events should follow one another in a logical causal sequence. ‘Probability’ had a slightly wider scope. If poetry for Aristotle dealt with things which *may* or *should* happen, the requirement for probability simply required that the plot and characters remain within those bounds—that everything said or done over the course of the play was likely given the contingent circumstances.[[16]](#footnote-16)

In the Renaissance, probability and necessity were often lumped together under a general requirement for ‘verisimilitude.’ This, as Bernard Weinberg observes, marked a shift in focus from the internal structure and integrity of the work and onto its reception by its audience. The need for the probable becomes instead a need for the plausible or credible.[[17]](#footnote-17)

It is not entirely without justice that J. K. Newman accuses Renaissance critics of using verisimilitude as ‘a handy stick with which to beat any author whose imagination soared,’ for the requirement for verisimilitude placed a far greater restraint on the poetic imagination than Aristotelian probability.[[18]](#footnote-18) Aristotle required only that the actions and words of the characters seem likely, but some Renaissance critics such as Robortello understood by verisimilitude that the play or poem should be realistic enough that the audience might mistake it for truth.[[19]](#footnote-19) In others, as we shall see in Tasso, the pseudo-Aristotelian requirement for verisimilitude became joined to the Platonic passion for truth and hatred of falseness.

*The word, the workman, and the world: Scaliger’*s Poetices Libri Septem (1561)

The place of Julius Caesar Scaliger’s *Poetices Libri Septem* (1561) in the history of Renaissance poetics is pretty well assured. Luc Deitz talks about how it was ‘quoted and quarried all over Europe … from Italy to England, and from Portugal to Russia’ in the century and a half following its publication. Even if it is, as he claims, a work ‘often quoted, but seldom read,’ its fame alone ensures its inclusion in any significant study of early modern European poetics.[[20]](#footnote-20)

The passage which concerns us is perhaps one of the *most* quoted, at least in modern literary theory. Scaliger’s description of the poet’s divine powers comes early in his treatise, at the end of the first chapter of the first book of the *Poetices Libri Septem*. Most of the chapter is given over to an examination of the different forms of speech, chiefly divided into philosophical exposition, oratory, and narrative, the last of which is further sub-divided into history and poetry.[[21]](#footnote-21) History and poetry, though they both are narrative forms and use much ornamentation, differ in that history speaks only of things which have actually happened, while poetry ‘renders into speech not only the things which are, but indeed even those things which are not, as if they were, and represents how they could or should be,’ a distinction that is entirely orthodox in its Aristotelianism.[[22]](#footnote-22) He continues, focusing mainly on the similarities between the different types of speech: all, for a start, share the common goal of persuasion. Explaining the relationship between the speaker and the audience, he explains that all types of speech require the use of a character. The philosopher introduces speakers, as Plato does Socrates; the orator uses personifications; the historian features historical characters. But poetry has an advantage over all these other arts:

Poetry alone encompasses all of this, by so much more excellent than those arts, because the rest (as we said) represent real things (*res ipsae*) as they are, like some sort of picture for the ears, but the poet represents another nature and many fortunes, and eventually in that very way makes himself just as another God.[[23]](#footnote-23)

Following this rather startling transition, Scaliger elaborates the distinction: all other sciences are *actores* for all that God (designated as the ‘opifex,’ or ‘workman’) established. The word ‘*actor*’ could mean ‘administrator’, or, according to Padelford’s rendering, ‘overseer,’ which places man and man’s sciences in a position of authority over nature, though still subordinate to God, who set up the system that man oversees.[[24]](#footnote-24) An alternative translation is ‘actor’ in the English sense of ‘performer,’ which is the sense Luc Dietz seems to favour in his translation.[[25]](#footnote-25) This meaning is foregrounded because a substantial portion of the chapter up to this point focuses on oratory, and ‘actor’ is also a rhetorical term, referring to one who delivers a speech, opposed in Cicero to the ‘inventor’ and the ‘compositor.’[[26]](#footnote-26) This same comparison may be found in Sidney, who describes most human sciences as being ‘actors and players … of what nature will have set forth.[[27]](#footnote-27) In this sense, we understand that the sciences of man are merely performers whose scripts have been invented and composed by God. This distinction is particularly illuminating as Scaliger goes on to contrast these sciences with poetry: ‘Poetry, since it sets forth the appearance of both those things which are not, and those things which are more beautifully than they are, seems indeed not, as the other sciences, such as History, to narrate real things (*res ipsae*), but like another God to construct them.’[[28]](#footnote-28) Just as the actor recites his text, the historian narrates his—the poet alone has the power to change the script.

 Scaliger’s use of the term *res ipsae* here is significant, and not a little confounding. This term is key to Scaliger’s semiotic theory of language, which is built on a basic dichotomy between words (*verba*) and real things (*res ipsae*). In the first chapter of the book titled *Idea*, Scaliger explains that ‘words themselves are both the parts and the material of speech, … but the end of speech is real things (*res ipsae*), of which words are the sign. For this reason, they take from real things the form by which they are what they are.’[[29]](#footnote-29) Thus, words, or *verba*, are merely signs pointing to real things, or *res ipsae*, and depend upon real things for actual meaning. In this sense, just as a portrait requires a subject, words may be said to be imitations of reality: ‘imitation is in all speech, because words are images of things.’[[30]](#footnote-30) Poetry is just the material by which an image of a real thing is crafted, just as a bronze statue of Caesar has bronze for its material and is an image which has Caesar for its object.[[31]](#footnote-31) In this, Scaliger follows Plato’s understanding of the relationship of form/idea to object to image. The hierarchy is as follows:

The separate, imperishable Idea; the perishable thing (*res*) produced by this, which exists as an image of the same Idea; in the third place, the picture or speech, which indeed have reference [to the higher tier] in the same way, and are images of appearances. So, just as the Idea is the form of the thing which shares our level of reality, so should the thing be regarded as the form of the picture, the statue, and the speech.[[32]](#footnote-32)

This theory he associates with Aristotle’s idea that ‘the image of the bath is in the mind of the architect, before he builds the bath, where it is both form and end.’[[33]](#footnote-33) He does not, however, appear to follow Plato in considering this relationship to be to poetry’s discredit.

This is not to say that Scaliger, whose general distaste for Plato is well-documented in the *Poetices*, bought into the idea of the world of forms, which he refers to as ‘an error of the Platonists.’ [[34]](#footnote-34) He is clear that words were not created together with *res ipsae*, but that the imitation which words produce is effected by the writer of the words, rather than being a function of the things they imitate.[[35]](#footnote-35) It seems that the creative power which Scaliger assigns to the poet here is only the creation of an imitation through the medium of words.

Yet returning to our earlier passage, we see that Scaliger assigns a much greater creative power to the poet than seems to fit with this notion of ‘language as mimesis.’ Scaliger quite clearly distinguishes poetry from all other areas of knowledge, which can only ‘narrate’ (*narrare*) real things (*res ipsae*), in that poetry ‘seems’ capable ‘as another God to construct (*condere*) [them].’ Following Scaliger’s careful definition of *res ipsae*, we must understand from this passage that the poet is capable of creating not merely *images* of reality, but real things which exist in an alternative world (*altera natura*) on the same level as reality itself—a godlike power indeed. The causal hierarchy Scaliger establishes in the first chapter of *Idea* is upended—rather than a speaker or writer fashioning words to express reality, the poet uses words to construct reality. The signifier produces that which it signifies.

This idea is not only in contradiction to the system Scaliger elaborates throughout the rest of the work—it is wrong as a point of fact. Man—no matter how accomplished a wordsmith he be—cannot speak an alternative universe into material being. That its being would have to be material is clear from the fact that poetry is said to be able to create both *res ipsae* and an *altera natura*, as opposed to other arts, which can merely represent them—nature, was has material being, is made up of *res* which likewise have material being.

But the use of a technical term whose precisely established definition is part of the foundation of Scaliger’s entire philosophical system gives the statement a weight beyond the merely figurative. The claim that the poet is able to create *res ipsae* means that the analogy between the poet and God cannot be understood, as Tasso seems originally to suggest, as an analogy between two craftsmen, assembling worlds—the former imaginary, the latter real—according to a pre-existing pattern.[[36]](#footnote-36) We cannot, as in Sidney, understand the ‘second nature’ which the poet creates as a more perfect vision of our own world.

Our ability to reconcile Scaliger’s conception of *res ipsae* and his depiction of a godlike poet capable of creating reality hinges on the word ‘seems’ (*videtur*): ‘poetry *seems* as if another God, to construct real things.’[[37]](#footnote-37) This statement of poetic power thus comes to describe the experience of consuming poetry, rather than the actual effect of the poetry itself. Bernard Weinberg explains how Scaliger conceives of language as ‘enter[ing] into two distinct relationships: (1) the relationship with the things which are signified by the words employed and (2) the relationship with the audience for whom the signification is intended.’[[38]](#footnote-38) It is in relation to the audience that the poet’s godlike powers manifest, rather than in relation to the object. The poet uses language, which necessarily has a mimetic relationship to reality, in such a way that his audience processes his words as if they were describing a reality other than our own.

We have established that Scaliger’s definition of poet as creator reverses the *res/verba* hierarchy, and that this paradox exists not in reality but only in the audience’s perception. In accordance with this paradox, the poet’s words must seem to his audience to create real things and ‘another nature,’ terms which may or may not be synonymous. The relationship between *res* and *uerba* as described in II.1 and III.1 works in both directions: words take their meaning from objects, while ‘objects themselves are the end [or goal] of speech,’ which is to say, words in their turn direct the audience back to their objects.[[39]](#footnote-39) Since the poet affects not the relationship between object and word, but between word and man, the poet’s words still derive their meaning from *res ipsae*. If the poet describes a tree, the audience understands what a tree is because ‘words take that form from the real things by which they are what they are’—it is the existence of trees which gives the word ‘tree’ its meaning.[[40]](#footnote-40) It is the second part of the dual relationship which is affected. For the audience to perceive an alternative reality, the poet’s words must direct them not back to their real-world object, but to an imaginary referent. Thus, while the sign ‘tree’ takes its meaning from the *arbor ipse*, for the audience, that sign in the poem will not point to the real tree but to an imaginary tree in the imaginary world created by the poet. Because the poet is figured as a creator-God, we must understand that the imaginary world is a product of his art, and not his audience’s mind.

This imaginary world is the ‘other nature’ which the poet produces with his godlike powers of creation. His words, as does all language, imitate things which are, but purport to be images of things which are not, which exist only in this second, solely intelligible reality. When we read the poem, these images give us glimpses of a world different from—and perhaps superior to—our own.

That the poet’s imaginary world *is* indeed superior to our own, Scaliger suggests more than once. One of poetry’s semi-divine attributes, as we have already mentioned, is its ability to ‘set forth the appearance … of those things which are more beautifully than they are.’[[41]](#footnote-41) Later, he discusses artists who, in imitating nature, ‘translate the most excellent quality they find in anything out of many objects into their own single work, so that they seem not to have been taught by nature, but to have rivalled her, or rather, to have been able to give laws to her.’[[42]](#footnote-42) Such an ability he ascribes to Virgil. Scaliger—having previously established that the Virgilian corpus is an adequate substitute for nature, since ‘all these things which you may imitate, you have within another nature, that is, within [the works of] Virgil’—explains that he has thus far been drawing examples from Virgil as if they are examples from nature herself.[[43]](#footnote-43) In fact, he goes on to explain, the products of art are often superior to those of nature, who always falls short of the ideal:

Who could believe that there was ever a woman of such beauty that a discerning judge did not find wanting in some way? For even though there is universal perfection in the standards and dimensions of nature, nevertheless the mixture of the two parents, the time, the heavens, and the place cause many impediments.[[44]](#footnote-44)

Herein lies Virgil’s ‘divine power,’ for ‘we have been unable to extract from one work of nature herself the examples we are lent from one Virgilian idea.’[[45]](#footnote-45) The opposition of the ‘work’ to the ‘idea’ suggests a partial explanation—Virgil’s ‘second nature,’ existing only as an idea, is inherently more perfect than any object, which is the realization of an idea, a process which is subject to the many and complex laws and workings of nature, processes which inevitably miscarry before the idea can be brought to term. Art can achieve perfection because it does not require ‘realisation,’ and since we process it in the same way we process nature, as we have seen above, we can learn more from it than reality.

Art, too, is a readier teacher than nature, as Scaliger’s choice of verbs emphasizes. From nature, we must seize our examples—the verb used is *capio*, which connotes a forceful taking. But by Virgil, we are lent examples—the use of the passive and the choice of the word *mutuo* (‘to lend’) suggests that far from having to actively seek examples, we need only receive those which are already being offered us. This idea of art being inherently more instructive than nature, together with the parallel between the ‘one work of nature’ and the ‘one Virgilian idea,’ is strongly evocative of Aristotle, both in that the idea that representation can be used to learn about reality, whose claim that poetry is more philosophical than history rests in the fact that history deals with particulars and poetry, with universals. Hence the emphasis on the one to one correspondence—we can learn from one work of art what we would have to extrapolate from many works of nature. Indeed, the broader idea that representation can be used as a way to learn about reality comes from Aristotle, who holds it to be a fundamental part of the maturation process.[[46]](#footnote-46)

 The benefit of poetry, as with other forms of art, is that through imitation, it can provide us with a more perfect version of nature than the one in which we live. The relationship between the real world and the poet’s *altera natura* is so close that the former may be exchanged for the latter. This is a severe constraint upon the poet’s inventive powers. The poet may construct an alternative universe, but its workings and contents are restrained to those which exist in reality. He may not, in short, invent new forms, but must content himself with perfecting those which exist (imperfectly) in nature. Yet this power, most perfectly embodied by Virgil, Scaliger terms ‘divine.’ In this case at least, the divinity must rest in the execution—the ability of the poet to create so thorough a model—rather than in the conception, since the poet is only working from pre-existing patterns. In saying that the poet ‘builds another nature,’ Scaliger does not seem to be attributing him with any greater creative power than does Aristotle, who credits him with the ability to portray things as they ‘might’ or ‘should’ be.

In fact, Scaliger’s idea of mimesis and its use in poetry is overall fairly orthodox. His chief innovation lies not in the idea itself, but in his understanding of its place in the formal system by which poetry is produced. Scaliger is very insistent that mimesis is *not* the end of poetry, nor even a necessary condition for it. Poetry may have been ‘entirely founded upon imitation, [but] this end is intermediate to the ultimate goal, which is pleasurable instruction.’[[47]](#footnote-47) This is one of his most marked deviations from Aristotle, who uses the word ‘poet’ to refer to the maker of all kinds of ‘literary representation’ (that is, representation using words or verses), rejecting the popular definition of poetry as ‘anything using metre.’[[48]](#footnote-48) As Richard Janko observes in his introduction to the *Poetics*, what Aristotle calls ‘poetry’ is just about synonymous with what we would now call ‘fiction.’

Scaliger rejects this definition on two counts. Firstly, that ‘if imitation is the sole end of poetry, anyone who imitates is a poet.’ The orator is a poet; the peddler in the marketplace is a poet; Plato in his *Laws*, even as he excludes poets from those laws, is himself a poet. [[49]](#footnote-49) Secondly, if Aristotle defines poets only by their use of verbal imitation, not only are historical and philosophical poets, such as Empedocles, ‘robbed of the name of poet,’ but so, presumably, too are the writers of a multitude of genres—lyrics, elegies, satires, hymns, to name but a few—which contain no imitation but only an explanation of the thoughts and feelings in the voice of the author, rather than that of a fictional character.[[50]](#footnote-50)

Nevertheless, imitation features prominently in Scaliger’s theory of *Poetics*, enough so that his repeated attacks on the idea of imitation as the end of poetry are perhaps better explained as posturing designed to distance his ideas from Aristotle’s than by a major conceptual divide between the two theories. Imitation is not only the basis of poetry, as we have mentioned, but ‘the greatest part of art.’[[51]](#footnote-51) We have seen Virgil, a poet who Scaliger favours far above all others, praised for his imitative skill, which is so great that he alone is worthy of the name of poet.[[52]](#footnote-52) Imitation is so important to poetry that even the structure of certain poems should imitate nature: the epicist is instructed to ‘divide the whole book in smaller books, in imitation of nature, who makes parts out of parts, by which the structure of a whole body is accomplished,’ a prodigious feat of imitation which, too, may be seen in the work of the ‘divine Virgil.’[[53]](#footnote-53)

Nor will just any kind of imitation do. Scaliger insists several times upon the importance of verisimilitude, which was, as we discussed previously, the prevailing interpretation of Aristotle’s requirements for probability and necessity throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. In describing the uses of imitation, he explains that ‘that which belongs to nature must be described in such a way that nothing does not seem verisimilar.’[[54]](#footnote-54) When it comes to things made by art, the poet is allowed a little more leeway to embellish his representations, just as ‘coats [may be] embroidered by a needle.’[[55]](#footnote-55) The metaphor establishes the limits of his creativity—the poet may alter superficial details, but basic form and function must remain the same. That this license is *only* given to imitations of man-made things shows just how little the poet is permitted to vary from nature—he may not alter the natural world so much as a tailor might by embroidery alter a coat. ‘Anything described which is beyond credibility must be attributed to some god.’[[56]](#footnote-56) Thus, he may permit his invention to stray beyond the bounds of verisimilitude only if he can provide a credible excuse which *itself* does not break verisimilitude: only God may break the laws of nature, a rule which apparently holds in poetry as in reality. That there is some irony in the fact that the poet is not permitted to exercise his godlike powers of creation so far as the gods he himself creates, Scaliger does not appear to notice.

This insistence on verisimilitude does not necessarily indicate a deficit in the poet’s creative powers—indeed, if the poet were not capable of inventing improbable things, there would be no need to discourage him from doing so. Unfortunately for us, Scaliger’s goal is not to investigate the ontological implications of imaginative literature—it is to determine what makes good poetry, and verisimilitude is one of the requirements. When it comes to serious works, for example, verisimilitude is required in order for the poem to achieve its goal. Imitation is, after all, only a means to an end—in poetry, to the end of ‘pleasurable instruction’—and we can only take pleasure in serious poetry which is ‘quite near the truth, for the vast majority of men hate lies.’[[57]](#footnote-57) Indeed, according to Scaliger, all types of discourse have the same ultimate end: persuasion, and the ‘form’ of persuasion—that higher thing which persuasive speech imitates and from which it takes all its meaning—is the truth. Fiction in poetry—insofar as it is untrue—is counter-productive, and should therefore be avoided.

We have talked a great deal about where Scaliger limits fiction in poetry, but where does he permit it? It is not entirely prohibited. In the first chapter of the *Poetices*, before he determines that verse is the only necessary condition of poetry, Scaliger follows Aristotle in making fiction the distinguishing factor which separates poetry and history: ‘the one according to its certain creed professes and declares the truth, … [while] the other either adds fiction to truth, or imitates the truth with fiction.’[[58]](#footnote-58) By the seventh book, however, he has eliminated this association. The defining characteristic of poetry is ‘not fiction and lying, for poetry does not lie, or that which lies, always lies, and therefore would at the same time be poetry and not poetry.’ [[59]](#footnote-59) This conflation of fiction (*fictio*) and lying (*mendacium*) bodes ill for the place of imagination in literature. As he explains his assertion that poetry is neither *fictio* or *mendacium* by asserting that poetry ‘does not lie,’ this suggests that to use fiction in poetry is to lie. Perhaps in distancing himself from Aristotle, Scaliger finds himself in better accord with Plato, who criticized poetry for being inherently mendacious in the *Republic*. While Scaliger still seems to allow a place in his scheme for ‘poetry which lies,’ he suggests that its lying makes it not poetry. Furthermore, his claim that all poetry which lies ‘always lies’ renders impossible the sort of mingling of truth and fiction which he earlier claimed was poetry’s defining characteristic. This portrayal of fiction as ‘unpoetical,’ however, directly contradicts his statement only a few lines previous of how ‘fiction things’ were introduced into comedies to the great pleasure of the spectator, who delighted in their novelty. From this he concludes that while both truth and signification are proper to speech, neither is necessary.[[60]](#footnote-60) It is possible, then, that Scaliger’s exclusion of fiction from poetry was partly for rhetorical effect (it does, after all, come as part of the conclusion to the chapter), and his actual opinion aligned with some of his more moderate statements on fiction. More likely, these inconsistencies are due to the fact that the *Poetices* was published after Scaliger’s death—had he lived, he would, perhaps, have edited his work to express a more consistent philosophy.

Returning to Landino’s distinction of ‘creating’ and ‘making,’ we must conclude that Scaliger’s poet comes far closer to the latter than the former. Scaliger’s understanding of poetry, despite his claims to the contrary, is in practice still largely tied to mimesis. The poet is bound to imitate nature, and to imitate it pretty closely at that—he is more worthy of praise the closer his imitation approaches to a perfect image of the natural world. Any flexibility herein is, as in Aristotle, corrective rather than creative—the poet’s great power is to envision and depict a more perfect version of reality. This is the sense in which the poet is divine—he is able to create an imaginary world which seems real to the reader—that is, an imaginary world which is processed by the reader as if it were real. As for the poet’s power of fiction or invention, inventing new events and characters is largely frowned upon, as it is frequently, at best, counterproductive, and at worst, hateful to the audience. As for inventing new forms, this is a power quite beyond the capabilities of poetry.

*The Maker of the maker: Sidney’s* Defense of Poetry

The *Defence of Poetry*, written by the much-romanticised Elizabethan courier and poet, Sir Philip Sidney, has long held a place of high regard in the corpus of English literary theory. Its influence at the time of its writing/publication (the treatise, published in 1595 after Sidney’s death, was likely written at least a decade earlier, and circulated in manuscript form for some years) was admittedly less than Scaliger’s, although in the light out of Scaliger’s astounding success, this says very little to its discredit.[[61]](#footnote-61)

Some critics have attempted to downplay Sidney’s use of the trope of ‘poet-as-creator.’ Ronald Levao claims that Sidney is markedly more ‘oblique’ in comparing the poet to God, suggesting that Sidney may have been uncomfortable with the ontological implications of the metaphor: a plausible, if unsubstantiatable, hypothesis.[[62]](#footnote-62) E. N. Tigerstedt, in his seminal essay on the origin of this metaphor in western criticism, mentions Tasso, Scaliger, and Puttenham, but excludes Sidney from his list of examples of the tropes, pointing out that Sidney never calls the poet a ‘creator’ in so many words.[[63]](#footnote-63) This distinction is something of a strange one, as Sidney does refer both to God and the poet as ‘makers,’ a word which hardly seems to imply less creative power than ‘artificer,’ Tasso’s chosen term, or ‘workman’ (*opifex*), which is Scaliger’s.[[64]](#footnote-64) Indeed, Sidney’s description of poetic powers and creative potential far outstrips Tasso’s in approximating the divine, as we shall see. In contrast, Ullrich Langer in his essay on invention in the Renaissance for the *Cambridge History of Literary Criticism* claims that Sidney’s description of the poet’s semi-divine capacity for invention is ‘the most hyperbolic description of invention as a pseudo-creative imagination before the seventeenth century.’ [[65]](#footnote-65) How Sidney stacks up against other contemporary examples of this trope we shall see; certainly he had a much stronger conception of the poet’s inventive power than had Scaliger.

Sidney details the divine associations of poetry fairly early on in his treatise, noting, as we have done above, that the Roman word for poet was ‘vates,’ which also meant ‘prophet.’[[66]](#footnote-66) He suggests that the Pslams should be considered divine poetry, insofar as they are songs (the conflation of ‘songs’ and ‘poems’ dating back to the ancient world; *cf*. the Roman ‘carmina’[[67]](#footnote-67)), they are written in metre, and they are prophetic, a prophecy which ‘is merely [in the sense of ‘entirely’ or ‘completely’] poetical.’[[68]](#footnote-68) Sidney follows Scaliger and Landino in deriving the word ‘poet’ from the Greek verb *poiein*, which means ‘to make,’ and points out a possible etymological connection with the English term ‘maker,’ which can mean ‘poet.’[[69]](#footnote-69) He later explains the appropriateness of that term: ‘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.’[[70]](#footnote-70)

That this capacity for invention is unequalled by any other science Sidney demonstrates by example. Sidney follows Aristotle in claiming that ‘there is no art delivered to mankind that hath not the works of nature for his principal object, without which they 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.’[[71]](#footnote-71) He has yet to introduce the notion of mimesis into his treatise, nor does he directly refer to it here, and none of his subsequent examples of arts bound to nature are what might be might today be called ‘creative’ or ‘representational.’ But his description of the sciences as being ‘actors and players … of what nature will have set forth’ suggests a mimetic aspect to all the sciences given. Following the theatrical metaphor, we understand that every ‘art delivered to mankind’ must follow the rules and dictates of nature, and by doing so, produce a representation. Thus, when the astronomer ‘doth … look upon the stars, and, by that he seeth, set down what order nature hath taken therein,’ what he sets down may be considered not only a description of nature, but also a representation or imitation of nature.[[72]](#footnote-72) In their turns, ‘the lawyer saith what men have determined; the historian what men hath done.’ Scaliger, whose *Poetices* Sidney cites several times over the course of his *Defence*, would certainly have adjudged the historian an imitator: even before he expanded his definition of imitation to include all language, he understood that history, along with all other forms of discourse save poetry, ‘represent[s] things in themselves.’ In thus distinguishing history from poetry, which may represent things other than as they truly are, Scaliger is, as we have mentioned, following Aristotle. [[73]](#footnote-73) Following Sidney’s parallel, if we understand the historian to represent the deeds of men, we must likewise understand the lawyer to represent their words. Sidney’s avowed reason for listing these examples is to demonstrate how poetry’s capacity for ‘making’ is ‘a high and incomparable … title’ by ‘marking the scope of other sciences,’ (implicitly) to the latter’s disparagement. We can already surmise, therefore, that poetry’s exceptional powers somehow relate to representation and its relationship to nature.

We have noted that Sidney, in listing examples of arts bound to nature, does not include painting, sculpture, dance, drama, or any other of the ‘creative’ or ‘representational’ arts. The only exception is music, which was held, in accordance with the earlier Greek tradition, to be an imitation of celestial harmony, a quality of imitation which it shared with poetry.[[74]](#footnote-74) Yet music was traditionally grouped with mathematics, and indeed, in Sidney’s list the musician directly follows the geometrician.[[75]](#footnote-75) This omission does leave some ambiguity as to whether poetry is the only exception to the rule laid down by Aristotle and repeated by Sidney (that all art ‘hath nature as its principle object’), or whether any other arts share some of poetry’s transcendent power.[[76]](#footnote-76) Sidney’s later analogy between painting and poetry suggests the latter.[[77]](#footnote-77)

Having finished his list, Sidney comes to his point: poetry is set above all the other sciences (with the possible exceptions mentioned), for ‘only the poet, disdaining to be tied to any such subjection, 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.’[[78]](#footnote-78) What makes the poet powerful seems to be not merely the flexibility in representation which Aristotle allows for—the ability to portray reality as it *might* or *should* be, rather than as it is—but the ability to create another reality, not merely imitative but partly original. For rather than being subjected to nature, the poet operates on the same level: ‘he goeth hand in hand with nature, not enclosed within the narrow warrant of her gifts, but freely ranging only within the zodiac of his own wit.’[[79]](#footnote-79)

That Sidney has been directly influenced by Scaliger is obvious even from his sentence structure. Scaliger’s poet ‘sets forth the *appearance* both of those things that are more beautifully than they are, and of things that are not,’ while Sidney’s poet ‘make[s] things either better than nature bringeth forth, or, quite anew, forms such as never were in nature.’[[80]](#footnote-80) But the very parallelism reveals crucial differences. In Scaliger, poetry’s great power is to ‘*represent* another nature and many fortunes’; the poet does not create *res ipsae* but merely ‘seems’ to do so, by ‘set[ting] forth the appearance’ of imaginary things, or of more perfect versions of real things.[[81]](#footnote-81) Sidney’s poet ‘doth grow in effect another nature’—the phrase ‘in effect,’ according to the usage of the time, means ‘in fact’ (as opposed to ‘in words’), rather than indicating equivalence, as it does in modern usage.[[82]](#footnote-82) This constitutes a far stronger expression of inventive power than that which may be seen in Scaliger’s corresponding passage.

To be sure, this is probably due at least in part to differences of style: Scaliger’s straightforward claim that ‘poetry… sets forth the appearance of both of those things which are not, those things which are more beautifully than they are’ inevitably palls next to Sidney’s rhapsodising: ‘Nature never set forth the earth in so rich tapestry as divers poets have done… Her world is brazen, the poets only deliver a golden.’[[83]](#footnote-83) Ullrich Langer’s accusation of hyperbole is not groundless.

But the differences run deeper than can be ascribed to style or rhetoric. While Scaliger stops short of giving his poet the ability to create new forms, Sidney’s is free to dream up ‘the Heroes, Demigods, Cyclops, Chimeras, Furies, and such like.’[[84]](#footnote-84) And while, as we have seen, Scaliger’s demand for verisimilitude constrains the poet to keep his imitations as close to nature as possible, allowing very little room for imagination, Sidney celebrates the ability of the poet to escape nature’s ‘narrow warrant.’

Yet for all that the poet is bound not by nature but only by the limitations of his own wit, that same wit does appear to be a fairly substantial constraint. Sidney describes the power and virtue of the poetic imagination, but only insofar as it constitutes an improvement upon nature, rather than an alternative. The poets enrich their imagined worlds with ‘whatsoever … may make the too much loved earth more lovely.’[[85]](#footnote-85) His comparison of nature’s ‘brazen’ world to the poet’s ‘golden’ one calls to mind the ‘golden age,’ the first age of man according to classical legend, in which men lived in peace and virtue and abundance—an age which has many similarities to the prelapsarian period in Judeochristian theology.[[86]](#footnote-86) And indeed, the ability of the poet to imagine a world more perfect than nature is attributable to the fall of Adam, ‘since our erected wit maketh us know what perfection is, and yet our infected will keepeth us from reaching unto it.’[[87]](#footnote-87) The superior world imagined by the poets is therefore due less to the inventive power of the poetic imagination, and more to an understanding of what the world *ought* to be like. Like Scaliger before him, Sidney strays very little from the orthodox Aristotelian conception of poetic invention.

Here, then, is the superiority of poetry over all the other sciences, for while the astronomer is confined to observe and note the stars which actually are, the poet can envisage the stars that should be. And while the historian can only speak of those men who have actually lived, the poet can depict heroes whose virtues far outstrip those of any man born to this imperfect earth: nature has never ‘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, so excellent a man every way as Virgil’s Aeneas.’[[88]](#footnote-88)

That these men are imaginary is not really an issue. The second, ideal nature created by the poet does not suffer in comparison to nature prime—that which we might call the ‘real world’—because ‘the works of one [nature] be essential, the other [the poet] in imitation or fiction; for any understanding knoweth the skill of each artificer standeth in that *idea* or fore-conceit of the work, and not in the work itself.’[[89]](#footnote-89) This is putting Plato to a use that Plato himself would surely not approve, for, as we have discussed above, while Plato holds the idea to be superior in every case to the object, according to his scheme, art does not take for its model the idea, but the object, which is itself modelled on the idea. It is primarily for this reason—that it is at two removes from the ultimate truth of the world of forms or ideas—that Plato condemns poetry. When Sidney says that, because of the excellence of the poet’s idea, the poetic world may in some sense be placed on the same footing as the natural world, he suggests that both nature and poetry have the same relationship to ultimate truth.

And indeed, as if the poet’s power to create an imaginary world as valid as the real one were not impressive enough, Sidney ascribes to him a still greater power—that of bringing the imaginary into reality. By imagining a hero—Sidney uses Xenophon’s Cyrus as an example, ‘so right a prince’ as nature never produced—the poet is not only superior to nature in that his ‘idea’ is superior to that of nature’s. When the poet ‘deliver[s] [his idea] forth in such excellency as he hath imagined,’ the idea is ‘not wholly imaginative,’ but ‘so far substantially it worketh’ that the poet creates not only a Cyrus, but inspires men to emulate him, and by ‘bestow[ing] a Cyrus upon the world … make[s] many Cyruses, if they will learn aright why and how that maker made him.’ The idea that poetry inspires men to greater virtue is ubiquitous in the Renaissance, stretching back both to classical Roman and Greek theorists, but Sidney applies it here to reverse the hierarchy between poetry (which even he considers to be imitation) and nature: rather than poetry being entirely dependent upon nature, which is the object for its imitation, poetry is able to imitate ideal things beyond the bounds of nature and in some part to bring those things into existence. This power of words to bring into being their own referents is only hinted at in Scaliger, and later recanted.

Now we understand why Sidney deemed ‘maker’ such an appropriate name for poets. In his ability to ‘make’ an alternative nature filled with characters of his own invention, the poet is similar to God, who is referred to as ‘the heavenly Maker of that maker.’ This is not, Sidney hastens to add, ‘too saucy a comparison,’ for said ‘heavenly Maker’ has ‘made man to His own likeness,’ a likeness best displayed in poetry, ‘when with the force of a divine breath [man] bringeth things forth—surpassing [nature’s] doings.’[[90]](#footnote-90)

This is not the same as giving the poet creative powers, in Landino’s sense of the word. Nature, with all her complex processes and her powers of generation and corruption, is set into motion by God. The poet, in surpassing nature’s doings, is not surpassing God, but merely doing a better job of executing his patterns and designs. Indeed, no small part of the difficulties nature has in producing the perfect ideal is due to man’s own folly, an association which is foregrounded when Sidney brings up Adam and original sin, for it was the fall of man which signalled the entrance into the world of death and decay. While, as Sidney says, ‘our erected wit maketh us know what perfection is,’ our ‘infected will’ not only prevents us, but also nature, from achieving it.[[91]](#footnote-91) Man is elevated and given dominion over ‘that second nature,’ meaning the physical world, but the phrase ‘second nature’ implies the existence of a first, higher nature over which man does *not* have dominion—one, perhaps, over which God rules in an immediate sense, just as man has dominion over the first. If we understand this first nature in a Platonic sense, then we must understand it to be origin of forms, which suggests that man cannot create anything not already patterned within it.

This ‘divine’ power of figuring forth a perfect nature is not given to all poets. Having passed quickly over divine poetry and philosophical/scientific/historical poetry, Sidney distinguishes amongst the remainder two different classes of poet. The first is like ‘the meaner sort of painter, who counterfeit only such faces as are set before them.’ But the second, and far superior, class of poets are those who have ‘no law but wit, … and to imitate borrow nothing of what is, hath been, or shall be; but range, only reined with learned discretion, into the divine consideration of what may be and should be.’[[92]](#footnote-92) These latter are the poets with power over nature, a power which the superior sort of painter apparently shares, since he too is credited with the power to depict a possible or ideal vision of reality.

While both Sidney and Scaliger base their understanding of mimesis on Aristotle, and while both seem to have the same basic conception of what the poet’s mimetic powers *are*, they take almost opposite positions when it comes to determining which of these powers are most valuable. For Scaliger, the poet’s ability to create via art a more perfect version of the universe is certainly both useful and admirable, but in giving practical instructions for how and what to imitate, he emphasizes that above all, the poet should stick as close to nature as possible—the value of the perfect universe also lies in the fact that it is a perfect (or near perfect) *image* of the real world. It is, in a sense, in his very fidelity to nature that the poet is able to surpass it. Sidney, on the other hand, reacts with scorn to the idea that the poet should seek to confine himself to imitating the natural world. For him, the creation of the possible or ideal is an imaginative process, one which comes from the superior reach of the poet’s wit, which is capable of seeing outside of and above the natural world.

Thus, the higher form of imitation is always ideal, but it not necessarily always beautiful. Sidney defends comedy as ‘an imitation of the most common errors of our life, which [the poet] 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.’[[93]](#footnote-93) Poetry does possess the power to make ugly things beautiful, however: ‘That imitation whereof poetry is, hath the most conveniency to nature of all other, insomuch that, as Aristotle saith, those things which in themselves are horrible, as cruel battles, unnatural monsters, are made in poetical imitation delightful.’[[94]](#footnote-94) In this case, it is the *lack* of fidelity of its product to its subject that poetry has the most ‘conveniency’ to nature. To be sure, if we follow Aristotle, the pleasure that is produced even by representations of ugly things comes not from the content of the representation than the fact that it *is* a representation, and representations are pleasurable. But Sidney ascribes the pleasure produced by poetry not to representation in general, but to the specific kind of ‘imitation whereof poetry is.’ This suggests that something in the *way* ugly things are imitated makes those imitation delightful, since according to Aristotle, the pleasure that we derive from representation comes chiefly from our ability to recognise that it *is* a representation. We can therefore infer that it is possible to represent ugly things in which they, true to life, do *not* produce pleasure, or produce less pleasure, since it is in the capacity to make things pleasurable that Sidney claims that poetic imitation excels. Such undelightful imitations would therefore be closer to nature—it is in its difference from nature that this form of poetic representation is worthy of praise.

Sidney’s treatise was originally published under two titles, both of which are in use today—‘The Defence of Poesie’ and ‘An Apologie for Poetrie.’[[95]](#footnote-95) Henceforth, Sidney has only discussed poetry to praise it and thereby prove its worth—the apology—and later, to enquire further into its nature and varieties. Now, he earns his treatise the title of ‘Defence’ by taking up the cudgels against poetry’s detractors.

He identifies four major accusations frequently levelled against poetry. The first, that poetry is a waste of time, is speedily answered: he simply summarises his previous proofs that poetry is the best form of learning. The fourth, that Plato banished the poets, he solves with some interpretive legerdemain and by pointing out Plato’s inconsistencies on the subject of poetry. It is the second and third charges which interest us, because both of them have to deal with the supposedly-degenerate nature of fiction.

The second charge is straightforward enough: poetry ‘is the mother of lies.’ Scaliger’s solution in VII.ii was to disassociate poetry as much as possible from fiction, which he (like the critics Sidney now addresses) conflated with lying.

Unlike Scaliger, Sidney does not consider fiction to be the same as lying. Indeed, he claims 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.’[[96]](#footnote-96) According to Sidney, ‘to lie is to affirm that to be true which is false.’[[97]](#footnote-97) The astronomer or geometrician may make a miscalculation, and therein lie. The historian frequently lies, through no fault of his own, since he relies on ‘the cloudy knowledge of mankind’ for information. But the poet ‘nothing affirms, and therefore never lieth.’ Herein lies a key difference between Sidney and Scaliger, as the latter defines truth as ‘the conformity of ideas to those things whose ideas they are.’ Any discrepancy between idea and reality, therefore, is untrue, and Scaliger, as we have seen, makes no real distinction between ‘lack of truth’ and ‘lies.’[[98]](#footnote-98)

This may explain why Sidney, unlike Scaliger, makes no demands for verisimilitude: he does not consider it necessary. The idea that the poet is not a liar because he ‘nothing affirms’ suggests that Sidney belongs to the school of Buonamici in his understanding of reader response. According to the commentaries of Castelvetro and his followers, the audience is unable to distinguish between truth and fiction; Buonamici, responding chiefly to Castelvetro, asserts that the audience is perfectly aware that the play is a ‘sign,’—no matter how verisimilar the poet’s work, only an idiot would be unable to distinguish representation from reality.[[99]](#footnote-99) Scaliger’s requirement for verisimilitude comes hand in hand with his insistence that ‘men hate lies,’ suggesting that he follows more closely the ideas of Castelvetro, rather than assuming that the poet and his audience share a tacit understanding of the nature of fiction.[[100]](#footnote-100) Sidney, on the other hand, like Buonamici, expects a grown adult to be well aware ‘that the poets’ persons and doings are but pictures what should be, and not stories what have been,’ something men learn in childhood. ‘And therefore, as in history looking for truth, they may go away full fraught with falsehood, so in poesy looking but for fiction, they shall use the narration but as an imaginative ground-plot of a profitable invention.’[[101]](#footnote-101) In Scaliger, fiction is a hindrance to the aim of poetry; in Sidney, it is an aid.

The third charge is that poetry instils vice, ‘infecting us with many pestilent desires, with a siren’s sweetness drawing the mind to the serpent’s tale of sinful fancies.’[[102]](#footnote-102) The reference to the ‘serpent’s tale’ suggests that, not only can poetry weaken us morally, but it is inherently deceptive. That poetry may potentially be used unethically, Sidney admits, but he maintains that this is not the fault of poetry: one should say rather ‘not … that poetry abuseth man’s wit, but that man’s wit abuseth poetry.’[[103]](#footnote-103)

In his response, Sidney makes distinction between two different kinds of poetic art. Poetry *ought* to be *eikastike*, which Sidney follows some unnamed scholar(s) in defining as ‘figuring forth good things.’ It may, however, be abused and made to be *phantastike*, ‘which doth, contrariwise, infect the fancy with unworthy objects.’[[104]](#footnote-104) The terms come from Plato, in which the former, defined as ‘the art of copying or portraying’ in LSJ, refers to art which imitates real things, while the latter refers to art that produces ‘phantom’ images, which may appear real but are not so.[[105]](#footnote-105) The former is an acceptable art; the latter is not.

While these words, in their original Platonic context, suggest the same association between deception and immorality found in the original accusation, Sidney appears to borrow the moral distinction—some art is good and some is bad—without taking up Plato’s idea that non-imitative or invented art is inherently bad, since his definitions of *eikastike* and *phantastike*, far from emphasizing Plato’s distinction between the imitative and the fantastic, entirely obscures it, figuring the distinction only in moral terms. This suggests that Sidney is rejecting Plato’s privileging of the imitative over the fantastic, although it could just mean that Sidney did not understand it. In either case, nowhere in this section does Sidney distinguish between imaginative poetry and imitative poetry in terms of puissance or inherent morality, which suggests that he did not consider truth/fiction to be a relevant factor in determining the moral quality or the power of a work.

The comparison of God and the poet which feature’s in Sidney’s *Defence* is a gorgeously crafted tribute to poetic power designed to elevate poetry above all other human art forms. Given that Sidney’s primary goal is persuasive than (like Scaliger’s) analytical, it is unsurprising that in comparison, Scaliger’s adaptation of the trope should seem as dry as dust on a library bookshelf, and about as exciting. Yet in practice, the two men share very similar conceptions of what exactly the poet’s inventive capabilities *are*. Both see the likeness in terms not of invention, but of construction—in both, the poet uses imitation to construct a complex and persuasive imaginary world, one which constitutes an alternative and improved version of nature—nature, to use the Aristotelian formulation, as it *should* and *could* be, rather than as it is. Indeed, both men are almost entirely Aristotelian in their understanding of poetic mimesis. The chief difference lies in the application. For Scaliger, imitation is a tool in the poet’s arsenal, but not the be-all and end-all of his craft. Indeed, it is a tool that should be exercised with restraint and caution, lest it lead him away from reality and truth and into fiction, which is the close cousin to falsehood. Sidney, on the other hand, focuses almost exclusively on the way the poet is able to use imitation to transcend the limits of nature and the perceptible world. Poetic imitation, in its best and most sublime form, uses the poet’s own wit and imaginative faculties to create a version of nature which is always superior to the world in which he dwells.

*The poet as a creating god: Puttenham’s* Arte of English Poesie

Puttenham opens his *Arte of English Poesie* with an etymological examination of the word poet. He follows the tradition of deriving the word ‘poet’ from *poiein*, and, like Sidney, links this with the English term ‘maker.’ This latter derivation, as Heninger demonstrates in his chapter on ‘Poet as Maker,’ apparently introduced in E.K.’s commentary on Spenser’s *Shepheardes Calendar*, soon became a commonplace in English poetic theory.[[106]](#footnote-106) Heninger attributes the spread of its popularity to Sidney; Puttenham may have been drawing on Sidney here, or he may have taken the idea from its source.[[107]](#footnote-107) Whether or not Puttenham had even read Sidney is unclear. While Sidney’s *Defence* was not published until 1595, six years after the *Arte of English Poesie* (1589), it is estimated to have been written circa 1580 and was in circulation by 1591, when it was referenced in John Harington’s ‘Apology for Ariosto.’[[108]](#footnote-108) Certain similarities in Sidney’s *Defence* and Puttenham’s *Arte* make it tempting to suppose that the former directly impacted the latter, but it is equally possible that the two works simply share an intellectual genealogy. Indeed, Vickers suggests that a large part of the *Arte of English Poesie* dates from the mid-sixteenth century, and a draft may have been in circulation as early as 1569.[[109]](#footnote-109)

Puttenham continues on to note the ‘resemblance’ of the poet, insofar as he is a ‘maker’, to God, ‘who without any travail to his divine imagination made all the world of nought, nor also by any pattern or mould, as the Platonics with their Ideas do fantastically suppose.’[[110]](#footnote-110) In likening the poet-as-maker to God the creator, Puttenham is of course following exactly in the footsteps of Scaliger before him, just as Sidney did. It is in his understanding of the precise nature of the ‘making’ in which the likeness consists that Puttenham departs—rather dramatically—from Scaliger’s example. The chief similarity between God and the poet is not—as for Scaliger—that both are capable of constructing a universe: although this is certainly a power that they both share, it is a likeness of secondary importance. It is not even—as for Sidney—that both have dominion over nature. The resemblance between God and man lies in their capacity for invention. Puttenham emphasises that God created the world ‘of nought,’ which we may take in the physical sense—nothing existed, and God created the world out of nothingness—but goes on further to specifically attack the Platonic idea that the Creator made the world according to some pattern. *This* is the sense in which God is a ‘maker,’ and hence, it is also the sense in which he and poets are similar. It is only Plato Puttenham specifically targets, but this statement constitutes a significant break from the Aristotelian tradition, as it directly contradicts the idea of poetry as mimesis. The poet, Puttenham tells us, ‘makes and contrives out of his own brain both the verse and matter of his poem, and not by any foreign copy or example.’[[111]](#footnote-111) This part at least seems to aim at refuting literary imitation, with ‘matter’ understood as ‘what the story as about,’ since Puttenham goes on to contrast the poet with translator, who is dismissed as a mere ‘versifier.’[[112]](#footnote-112) But considering that this follows directly the refutation of the Platonists and their belief that God create the universe according to some pattern, and given that in Scaliger—whom Puttenham is certainly imitating—and Sidney—whom Puttenham is possibly imitating=—and Landino—who originated the torpe—the likeness between the poet and God has a cosmological aspect, Puttenham’s claim that the poet ‘makes and contrives out of his own brain … [the] matter of his poem’ has an ontological connotation as well as a literary one.

This is not to say that there is no place for imitation. Puttenham acknowledges that ‘a poet may in some sort be said a follower or imitator, because he can express the true and lively of every thing is set before him, and which he taketh in hand to describe.’[[113]](#footnote-113) Even here, however, the emphasis is on choice. A poet *may*, if he chooses, imitate something, and a damn fine job he’ll do of it. ‘In that respect [a poet] is both a maker and a counterfeiter, and poesy an art not only of making, but also of imitation.’Unlike Sidney, who undertakes to unify the idea of creation with that of imitation by limiting man’s creative powers to within the bounds of his imagination, which itself can’t stray beyond an ideal version of the world that is, Puttenham conceives of the poetic power of imitation as separate from—and undoubtedly lesser than—the poetic power of ‘making.’ This hierarchy is emphasized when he distinguishes between the different types of poets. If poets are ‘able to devise and make all these things of themselves, without any subject of verity, … they be (by manner of speech) as creating gods.’[[114]](#footnote-114) But if they create things ‘by any precedent or pattern laid before them, then [they are] truly the most excellent imitators and counterfeiters of all others.’[[115]](#footnote-115) It is *only* in respect to the imaginative power that the poet is divine. At its most basic definition, and at its greatest heights, therefore, poetry is not imitation, but fiction.

Moreover, in offering making and imitation as different sources for poetic material, Puttenham suggests a much greater creative and imaginative power than we have yet seen. Cristofero Landino, when he first suggested the connection between God and the poet, carefully skirted heresy by emphasizing that while the poet’s power lay somewhere between God’s power of creation (that is, inventing the pattern as well as constructing it) and man’s power of making, the poet did *not* create *ex nihilo* and thus his power was still inferior to God’s.[[116]](#footnote-116) In Puttenham, God’s creation *ex nihilo* is precisely the power which the poet emulates. In Scaliger, all communication is inherently imitative, and the most the poet can achieve—the accomplishment for which he may be considered divine—is to use those powers of imitation to construct an imaginary, alternative vision of reality, and even this is bound by the law of verisimilitude to stick as closely to nature as may be contrived. But for Puttenham, the poet’s divinity lies solely in his originality. Sidney allows poetic invention to ‘rang[e] freely within the zodiac of [the poet’s] own wit,’ which appears to provide similar latitude to that which Puttenham’s poet possesses, who ‘makes and contrives out of his own brain … [the] matter of his poem.’ Yet Sidney, as we have seen, limits the poet’s wit to an idealized or potential (or both) vision of nature, so that the products of his imagination are still a form of imitation. Puttenham, on the other hand, credits the greatest of poets with being able to invent things without ‘foreign copy or example,’ just as God used *his* imagination to invent everything in the world, which he did not ‘by any pattern or mould.’ It is only by imagining things without imitation and with no basis of truth that poetry is like the divine.

On the other hand, Puttenham in a sense offers his poet a far less ambitious scope: he discusses imagination and invention only when it comes to the ‘matter’ of poetry, whereas both Sidney and Scaliger envision the poet as able to create a new—if imaginary—universe. Puttenham’s poet is no cosmographer, except perhaps by inference, in comparison with God, or with Scaliger, from whom he borrows this trope. Nor does he particularly concern himself with the ontological implications of imagination and invention.

This is not to say that all imagination is divine. In defending poets against the popular charge of being ‘fantastical,’ Puttenham draws a distinction between *phantastici* and *euphantasiotoi*. Just as Sidney described the *phantastike* to be that which ‘infect[s] the fancy with unworthy objects,’ a *phantastikos* is he whose fancy has been so infected—that is, he in whom ‘the evil and vicious disposition of the brain hinders the sound judgment and discourse … with busy and disordered fantasies.’[[117]](#footnote-117) But the same faculty which produces the twisted imaginings of the madman, ‘being well affected, … represent[s] unto the soul all manner of beautiful visions, whereby the inventive part of the mind is so much helped as without it no man could devise any new or rare thing.’[[118]](#footnote-118) This faculty is therefore critical not only to the poet, but also to the strategian, the artisan, the engineer, and the law-maker, among others, the most excellent among whom ‘are called by learned men not *phantastici* but *euphantasiotoi*’—that is, in Vickers’ translation, ‘having strong imagination’ rather than ‘subject to fantasy.’[[119]](#footnote-119)

The fact that Puttenham, unlike Sidney, does not follow Plato in making the *eikastike* the positive counterpart of the negative *phantastici* is indicative of how much more important imagination is in Puttenham’s conception. The word ‘*eikastike*’ (εἰκαστική) is related to the noun *eikon* (εἰκών), which means ‘image’ or ‘likeness’—thus, the imaginary, represented by *phantastici* is inherently bad, and only true images are good. Puttenham’s *euphantasiotoi*, on the other hand—a word which appears to be Puttenham’s own invention, as I can find no earlier usage, and precious few later ones—shares a stem with *phantastici* but changes the suffix and adds the prefix *eu*, meaning ‘well.’ Thus instead of a contrast between bad ‘fantasies’ and good ‘likenesses,’ we have a distinction between men who are ‘fantastic’ and men who are ‘well-fantasied.’ Sidney, moreover, when confronted with the accusation that fantasy is immoral, neatly sidesteps the issue, focusing on the morality of the medium at large (poetry) rather than the material, while Puttenham counters by arguing for fantasy’s moral value and practical utility.

In ‘well-fantasied’ men, the imaginative faculty, being ‘nothing disorderly …, but very formal, and in his much multiformity uniform, that is, well proportioned,’ may be likened to ‘a glass or mirror’ through which these ‘beautiful visions’ pass.[[120]](#footnote-120) Indeed, ‘this phantasy may be resembled to a glass… whereof there be many tempers and manner of makings, … for some be false glasses and show things otherwise than they be indeed, and others right, as they be indeed’—some ‘that show things exceeding fair and comely; others that show figures very monstrous and ill-favoured.’[[121]](#footnote-121) A disordered fantasy, as in a distorted mirror, produces ‘chimeras and monsters,’ images ugly and twisted, but a well ordered fantasy is ‘a representer of the best, most comely, and beautiful images or apparances[sic] to the soul and according to their very truth.’[[122]](#footnote-122) Thus, the best poets, as well as the best tacticians, politicians, artificers, etc, are those who are ‘illuminated with the brightest irradiations of knowledge and of the verity and due proportion of things.’[[123]](#footnote-123) The beauty of their visions may thus be attributed to their ability to perceive a higher truth and ideal perfection. A great poet is truly distinguished, therefore, not by his capacity for imaginative fictions—the ability to create original ideas from whole cloth—but by a kind of inspired—almost divine—perspicacity. The likening of the imagination to a mirror may be found in the works of Plato and Plotinus, but particularly in the context of the poet’s relation to the divine, the choice of metaphor calls to mind Paul’s Epistle to the Corinthians, and that celebrated passage in which he describes how our understanding will change ‘when that which is perfect is come’: ‘now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face.’[[124]](#footnote-124) The distinction likewise calls to mind Sidney’s dichotomy between man’s ‘erected wit’ and ‘infected will.’[[125]](#footnote-125) The glass of the poet, being less dark than his less enlightened fellows, more truly reflects the nature of things; his wit being more ‘erected’ and his judgement less ‘infected,’ he is better able to comprehend the ideal.

In practice, therefore, it seems Puttenham’s understanding of the poet’s creative capabilities is far more similar to Sidney’s than it seemed at first. While Puttenham clearly distinguishes the idea of poetic creation—in the sense of imagination—from the poetic capacity for imitation or representation, the very faculty of imagination functions by means of representation, being a mirror which reflects truth with varying degrees of accuracy. There is in a sense even less of a range for poetic imagination than in Sidney, as Sidney at least talks about the poet’s ability to range into what *might* or *should* be, whereas Puttenham’s poets can only work with what really *is*.

Towards the end of his treatise, Puttenham discusses ‘where art ought to appear and where not, and when the natural is more commendable than the artificial in any human action or workmanship,’ and in doing so, breaks down the relationship between art and nature into four basic categories.[[126]](#footnote-126) ‘Art’ and ‘nature’ here are understood in their Aristotelian senses of *tecne* and *physis*: art may be understood broadly as any category of human skill or deliberate action which effects change in the world. Thus, gardening and medicine are as much arts as painting or sculpting. These categories are relevant to our discussion not only insofar as they are later applied to poetry, but also in that they reflect several prominent schools of thought on the relation between poetry and nature.

The first two categories that Puttenham gives fit nicely into the Aristotelian tradition. In the first type of relationship, ‘art is an aid and coadjutor to nature, and a furtherer of her actions to good effect, or peradventure a mean to supply her wants, by reinforcing the causes wherein she is impotent and defective.’[[127]](#footnote-127) Alternatively, art may be ‘not only an aid and coadjutor to nature in all her actions, but an alterer of them, and in some sort a surmounter of her skill.’[[128]](#footnote-128) For both types of art, Puttenham uses the examples of a physician and a gardener. A physician may use his art to aid certain bodily functions in a sick patient, in which case he is both aiding natural processes and making up for their deficiencies. He may also ‘by the cordials he will give his patient, … prolong the term of his life many years over and above the stint of his first and natural constitution,’ thereby improving upon nature. A gardener waters, weeds, and prunes his plants, aiding them in their natural processes so that ‘never or very seldom any of them miscarry, but bring forth their flowers and fruits in season.’[[129]](#footnote-129) He may also improve upon nature by altering the shape, colour, flavour, or composition of his plants, bringing forth double marigolds from single ones, red roses from white, and sour apples from sweet, or cultivating stoneless cherries and coreless pears. By illustrating both types of relationship with the same examples, Puttenham suggests that art as coadjutor and art as surmounter are different aspects of what is fundamentally the same role.

As a ‘coadjutor,’ art has some power, but it can hardly be considered creative, as it is still entirely subordinated to nature: the greatest change it may wreak is to help nature achieve its potential. The gardener and physician in fulfilling this role may be called ‘good and cunning artificers’—this, Puttenham emphasizes, is ‘no small praise,’ and by transference we must understand that those who practice art of this variety are still worthy of praise, even if what they do is not divine.[[130]](#footnote-130)

The second category is certainly creative in part; just as the gardener’s cunning causes nature to bring forth plants that ‘nature … could not … without man’s help and art,’ so the artist may bring things forth that do not exist in nature.[[131]](#footnote-131) The hierarchy between art and nature seen in the previous category is reversed: art is a ‘surmounter’ of nature in as much as ‘by means of it [nature’s] own effects shall appear more beautiful, or strange and miraculous.’[[132]](#footnote-132) The actions of this art ‘are most singular, when they be most artificial.’[[133]](#footnote-133) Whether ‘singular’ is used here in the sense of ‘outstanding’ or in the sense of ‘peculiar’ is unclear, but in either case, the more artificial something is, the better it surpasses nature, either in beauty (by the first definition) or strangeness (by the second). [[134]](#footnote-134)

Nevertheless, this type of art is still quite closely bound with nature, as, it can only change that which already exists: the gardener may breed a yellow rose, but in doing so, he is merely giving an existing thing (a rose) an existing quality (the colour yellow) that was previously foreign to it. As such, it is still a kind of imitation of nature, but in the sense that we see in partly in Scaliger, and especially in Sidney, in that it is free to depart from that which it imitates. The example of the gardener is especially appropriate to Sidney, who talks about the ‘fruitful trees, [and] sweet-smelling flowers’ by which poets ‘set forth the earth in so rich tapestry’ as nature has never yet achieved—trees and flowers both exist in nature, but in their variety and quality they first differ from and then surpass their original model.

Indeed, this kind of art accords almost perfectly with the Aristotelian conception of poetry. Poetry, as an imitation of reality, is capable of surpassing the world it imitates. Thus, even as it borrows the forms which exist in nature, it alters them in their execution, either simply by making them more perfect (as does the physician when he uses his art to boost man’s bodily systems and lengthen his life) or by changing them in such a way as to bring forth things as were seen in nature.

The third relationship between art and nature follows the more iconoclastic Platonic tradition. In this aspect, ‘art is neither an aider nor a surmounter, but only a bare imitator of nature’s works, following and counterfeiting her actions and effects, as the marmoset doth many countenances and gestures of man.’[[135]](#footnote-135) The comparison to the marmoset suggests a certain disdain towards this use of art: the gestures and expressions have great meaning to humans, but the marmoset in mimicking them does not understand their significance. Thus, this sort of imitation is portrayed as being inherently superficial. Indeed, Puttenham lists painting alongside carving as examples of this kind of art: ‘whereof one represents the natural by light, colour, and shadow in the superficial or flat, the other in a body massive expressing the full and empty, even, extent, rebated, hollow, or whatsoever other figure or passion of quantity.’[[136]](#footnote-136) The juxtaposition of both examples subtly emphasizes the insufficiency of art of this type—paintings may imitate, light, shadow, and colour, but being flat, are unable to truly capture depth or dimension; carvings *only* use depth and dimension in their imitation. Of the same ilk are the alchemist, who counterfeits metals, and the lapidary who use glass and other materials to counterfeit precious jewels. Such men ‘also be praised for their craft, and their credit is nothing impaired to say that their conclusions and effects are very artificial.’ Which is to say: whoever it is that praises these counterfeiters—Puttenham’s use of passive voice distances himself and his own opinions—does not think less of them for being producing artificial things. Scant praise, indeed. While it may not be detrimental to call this art or its practitioners ‘artificial,’ the art itself—and presumably the artificiality which is its most distinctive feature—is something Puttenham regards with poorly disguised distaste.

Plato sees art as adding nothing to truth, but only detracting from it. It ‘counterfeits’ the works of nature, but its copies are inferior. The same accusation, though Puttenham does not explicitly voice it, may be made against the lapidary, who fashions things with the superficial appearance of gemstones, but with none of their truth—or, indeed, any of their qualities beyond their mere appearance. Puttenham is far from condemning all art, as Plato does, but he seems to at least to agree with him that *this* kind of art—the kind of art which Plato conceives of and against which he speaks—has little worth.

Of the authors we have examined, Puttenham has shown thus far the greatest interest in that which deviates most from nature, nor does he here disappoint. His last category figures art as ‘an encounterer and contrary to nature, producing effects neither like to hers, nor by participation with her operations, nor by imitation of her patterns, but makes things and produceth effects altogether strange and diverse, and of such form and quality (nature always supplying stuff) as she never would have done of herself.’[[137]](#footnote-137) He offers as examples the carpenter, the joiner, the tailor, and the smith. All of these take their materials from nature, but their ideas from outside her, and using their materials, fashion shapes never seen in nature. In this, he not only differs from Plato, but directly contradicts Aristotle, who held that all art is based in nature.[[138]](#footnote-138) Sidney applies this rule to all arts save poetry, although in practice, as we have seen, he seems at least to exempt painting as well.[[139]](#footnote-139) Scaliger takes Aristotle even further, claiming that every product of art—excepting only immaterial arts, such as dance, which make use of no natural materials—is an imitation of nature. ‘If the horse was put together by nature for the purpose of carrying, threshers actually imitate the horse, when in phalanxes they bear the chaff to the hayloft. Indeed, a house seems to be a sort of image of a cave.’[[140]](#footnote-140)

It is to this last category that Puttenham’s conception of divine poetic creativity seems best to belong. While these craftsmen are bound insofar as they must look to nature to supply the materials for their creations, in terms of conception and execution, they are free. But as Puttenham explains, ‘because our maker or poet is to play many parts and not one alone,’ he in fact spans all of the aforementioned categories.[[141]](#footnote-141) He is like the craftsmen when he constructs his meter. When he borrows his subject matter from history or literature, he is like the painter or carver (we may surmise that Puttenham’s disfavour for the painter and the alchemist extends to literary imitation). When he argues, or speaks figuratively or persuasively, he is like the gardener, in that, ‘using nature as a coadjutor, [he] furthers her conclusions and many times makes her effects more absolute and strange.’[[142]](#footnote-142)

But what makes the poetic art—which before was likened to the divine—transcend above all others is its ability to create things ‘naturally’—that is, without using artifice. In his various tools he is like various artists and craftsmen.

But for that in our maker or poet which rests only in device, and issues from an excellent sharp and quick invention, holpen by a clear and bright fantasy and imagination, he is not as the painter, to counterfeit the natural by the like effects and not the same; nor as the gardener, aiding nature to work both the same and the like; nor as the carpenter, to work effects utterly unlike but even as nature herself, even as working by her own peculiar virtue and proper instinct, and not by example or meditation or exercise, as all other artificers do, is then most admired when he is most natural and least artificial.[[143]](#footnote-143)

He is unlike the gardener in that he does not work by aiding nature; unlike the painter, in that he does not merely imitate nature’s works another medium; and unlike the carpenter in that he does not create works which are utterly unlike nature. Thus, we understand that he is able, of his own power, to create works that are similar to but not copies of nature’s, in a medium that is similar to her own. And this power of ‘device’ comes from his ‘sharp and quick invention’ and his ‘clear and bright fantasy and imagination,’ which, put into practice, allows him to create ‘by instinct,’ just as nature does.

This is a notion of the poet strikingly unlike that we’ve seen before in either Scaliger or Sidney—both are able to create works which are like nature, but neither are like *themselves* like nature. Indeed, their creative ability stems from the fact that they are *not* like nature, but closer to God. Sidney’s poet is only specifically likened to God in that he is set by God *over* nature. God, as Scaliger observes, is, in a sense, nature, because he *causes* nature.[[144]](#footnote-144) Nature, as it is *other* than God, we understand to operate not as an anthropomorphized being capable of imagination, choice, or understanding, but as a system of processes at work in the world. Thus, to make ‘as nature does’ seems to be to make without understanding, but only mechanically following through an assigned task.

This closest idea of the poet to which Puttenham’s description approaches is Plato’s *furor*, the divinely-induced creative frenzy. The frenzied poet, like nature, is the terrestrial instrument of the divine, without volition, moved by an internal (inhaled or ‘inspired’) divine impulse. While this, on the one hand, does explain how the poet can act according to instinct in the same way that nature does, it hardly squares with Puttenham’s earlier claim that the poet ‘makes and contrives out of his own brain.’ Nor does it explain how the poet could on one hand be operated by the divine, and on the other hand act according to the help of his own invention and imagination.

The key to this puzzle comes early on in the treatise. Having concluded that ‘poesy [is] an art not only of making, but also of imitation, he continues:

And this science in his perfection cannot grow but by some divine instinct—the Platonics call it *furor*; or by the excellency of nature and complexion; or by great subtlety of the spirits and wit; or by much experience and observation of the world, and of course of kind; or peradventure, *by all or most of them*.[[145]](#footnote-145) [my emphasis]

We have been able to understand Sidney and Scaliger by following Landino, and trying to locate the poet on a scale somewhere between mortal ‘making’ and divine ‘creating.’ But this model does not hold for Puttenham. Puttenham’s varying suggestions about the source of poetic power is not indicative of inconsistency, but of an attempt, as Heninger observs, ‘to devise a poetics which is syncretic.’[[146]](#footnote-146) Puttenham’s poet partakes not only of both man’s ‘making’ and God’s ‘creating,’ but also nature’s ‘generating.’ Thus, the poet is able to produce fluidly and without conscious planning or effort because the divine spirit moves in him, as in nature, but that which he devises is shaped in large part by his own invention and imagination, in which sense he is like a God, because he produces without form or material.

More so than either Sidney’s or Scaliger’s, Puttenham’s ideas about the poet and poetic creation are contradictory and inconsistent. In one moment we are told that the poet’s ability to think up the matter for his poems without recourse to pattern or example makes him a creator, as was God, *ex nihilo*; in the next, we see that this imagination at its most perfect is no more than a mirror, reflecting back to him the images of the world. At one moment he imitates, at the next moment he invents, and at the next he produces things neither by imitation nor imaginative power but according to a force outside his own control. Ultimately, Puttenham only suggests a synthesis between these various different versions of poetic creation, rather than working out a system by which this synthesis might be achieved. On the one hand, this allows us a glimpse at the multifarious ways in which poetic making/creation/fashioning can function; on the other hand, as none of these ideas fully worked out either on their own, or in respect to any of the others, it is difficult to evaluate how any of them might work with relation to our subjects. Puttenham certainly suggests a vision of the poet which comes far closer to the creative powers of an actual God than in any of our other subjects, but we are left wondering whether his powers are merely the result of a loophole in a theory but half-complete.

*God the Artificer: Torquato Tasso’s* Discorsi del poema eroico

Percy Bysshe Shelley, in his *Defence of Poetry*, cites ‘the bold and true words of Tasso—“Non merita nome di creatore, sed non Iddio ed il Poeta.”’[[147]](#footnote-147) The boldness of these words must go to Shelley’s own credit, as this exact phrase appears nowhere in Tasso’s works; whether their ‘truth’ may be found in Tasso’s writings, we shall see.[[148]](#footnote-148) In the introduction to Book III of his *Discorsi del poema eroico*, published in 1594, Tasso describes the intellective process whereby ‘we go about forming the idea of artificial things, in which operation we seem to be almost divine, and to imitate the first artificer,’ which is to say, God.[[149]](#footnote-149) In this case, the comparison to God is generalised to all humans in their capacity for imagination and artifice, rather than being specific to the poet. The process to which he refers is that of ‘look[ing] to things verisimilar,’ and forming an understanding of them based on our knowledge of the truth.[[150]](#footnote-150) Out of the authors we have thus far examined, Tasso’s understanding of this process differs only from Puttenham’s, who is the only one to suggest that (non-artistic) human creations may be conceived and developed in any other way than by imitation. To be sure, Tasso is rather more Platonic in formulation and sentiment than either Sidney or Scaliger, both of whom use Aristotle both in this instance and as one of the main sources of their poetic theory, and neither of whom are likely to be caught rhapsodizing in the same way about the superiority of the intelligible to the physical, as Tasso does: ‘How much more stable, true, and sure are things intellectual to which we direct the intellect!’[[151]](#footnote-151) Nor have any of our other subjects termed man ‘divine’ simply for his ability to create artificial things. But this idea is not so extraordinary. Cristofero Landino, who originated the trope of poet-as-God, placed the poet’s power halfway between ‘making’ (as men ‘compose in each art from matter and form’) and ‘creating’ (as God did the universe *ex nihilo*).[[152]](#footnote-152) Tasso merely continues Landino’s extension of divinity all the way through to making.

But the poet has an additional claim to divinity, beyond that common to all men, as Tasso later reveals: he ‘is called divine for no other reason than that as he resembles the supreme Artificer in his workings he comes to participate in his divinity.’[[153]](#footnote-153) The working in which he resembles ‘the supreme Artificer’ is a poem, in which, ‘as in a little world,’ the occurrences are many and varied, yet taken as a whole are ‘one in form and soul; and … so combined that each concerns the other, corresponds to the other, and so depends on the other necessarily or verisimilarly that removing any one part or changing its place would destroy the whole.’[[154]](#footnote-154) This is analogous to ‘this marvellous domain of God called the world’, whose various features are likewise inextricably bound together and interrelated.[[155]](#footnote-155)

Of all the examples of this trope we have examined so far, Tasso appears to have the least regard for the poet’s creative powers. Puttenham all but credits the poet with the ability to create *ex nihilo*. Sidney gives his poet the power to depict things better or even other than those seen in nature. Even Scaliger’s poet *seems* to be able to create *res ipsae*. But Tasso does not in any way suggest that the poet’s ability to fashion a world in microcosm is a creative process, rather than an artificial one.

Indeed, he seems from the very start to suggest the opposite. God, when compared to man, is referred to on both occasions as the great ‘Artificer’ (*artefice*). This is a far cry from Shelley’s misquotation of ‘*creatore*.’ Puttenham likens the poet to ‘the Creator’ in his bold—if epistemologically dubious—assertion of poetic power. Sidney, somewhat more tempered in his willingness to ascribe the poet ontological powers on a level with God’s, opts for the more ambiguous ‘Maker.’ Even Scaliger’s ‘opifex,’ which typically means ‘workman’ in the sense of ‘craftsman’ or ‘mechanic,’ provides a little bit of etymological wiggle-room—it’s root ‘opus’ does not necessarily have to refer to physical work, although it is most often used that way. But the ‘artificial,’ as we have seen in Scaliger, Sidney, and Puttenham, refers to that which is created by man, in opposition to the ‘natural.’ What’s more, every art, according to Sidney, ‘hath … the works of nature for his principal object,’ upon which they are dependent and ‘without which they could not consist,’ an idea which stems from Aristotle and which we have seen repeated in both Scaliger and Puttenham.[[156]](#footnote-156) Whatever else we are to understand from the title ‘Artificer,’ it is certainly *not* that the poet’s powers are similar to God’s power of *creation*. It seems to suggest rather that the poet resembles God in terms of assembly and construction.

 Tasso further emphasizes the mechanical nature of this likeness when he sums up his comparison between the universe, created by God, and the poem, created by the poet, by noting that ‘the art of composing a poem resembles the plan of the universe, which is composed of contraries, as that of music is.’[[157]](#footnote-157)

In the end, the chief likeness is not even between the poem and the universe, but between the means by which each functions and is produced. Indeed, apart from referring to the poem briefly as ‘a little world,’ Tasso does not appear to view the poem as having any sort of cosmological integrity, unlike Scaliger, for whom the ability to create a superior nature to that which exists in the real world is one of poetry’s greatest qualities, or Sidney, who claims that the poet ‘doth grow in effect another nature.’ The comparison between the various components of the natural world and the various components of the poem seems at first to suggest a kind of conception of poem-as-world, but upon further examination, the natural features of the natural world are compared not to imaginary features, but to plot points: ‘brooks, springs, lakes, meadows, fields, forests, and mountains’ held up against ‘tempests, fires, prodigies, … discord, wanderings, adventures, enchantments’ and the like.[[158]](#footnote-158) It is the internal relationship between the various constituent parts of each which is comparable, not the parts themselves. Thus, in Tasso’s conception, the idea that the poet is like God is less an actual resemblance than it is an analogy—what God is to the universe, the poet is to his poem. It seems that Shelley has not only misquoted but grossly mischaracterised Tasso’s words.

What *is* Tasso’s end, then, in likening the poet to God? Certainly the poet is not a creator in any divine sense of the term, and while both God and the poet ‘make’ in the sense of ‘construct,’ this likeness is shared by the broomstick, the baker, and the candlestick maker. The chief similarity—the one expressed by the comparison between the ‘brooks, springs, [and] lakes’ and the ‘tempests, fires, and prodigies’—is in that both of their products are characterised by *variety*. The poet’s plot is as diverse, as crowded and complex as is the natural world of God’s creation, and the relationships between its elements as complex, since everything which the poet includes in his poem should fulfil Aristotle’s requirements for probability and necessity, so that to remove one piece would be to destroy the whole.[[159]](#footnote-159) In his ability to use art to create something so elaborate, so complicated, and yet so pleasing and beautiful, the poet may be compared to God in his capacity as ‘Artifcer.’

This fits in well with Tasso’s broader ideas about the nature of poetry, for any poetic creation that was truly comparable to divine creation must surely be classed as fiction, and Tasso is broadly against the use of the fictive in poetry. Like the vast majority of his contemporary theorists, Tasso follows the Platonic-Aristotelian tradition in centring his conception of poetry on the idea of imitation. In the first book of the *Discorsi dei poetica eroico*, Tasso begins by giving the orthodox definition of art as imitation and poetry as a subcategory thereof, namely imitation in verse, and moves on to interrogating the Stoic idea that the proper subject for poetic imitation is human and divine action. This definition, on the one hand, not only excludes those such as Lucretius who write about nature from the category of poets (an objection he shares with Scaliger), it also excludes works whose narrative centres on animals, such as Homer’s description of the war between the frogs and the mice. This he easily gets around, however, by pointing out that ‘since all acts of nature are governed by divine providence, whoever describes them would be a poet.’[[160]](#footnote-160) On the other hand, he points out an essential problem with the idea that poetry is the imitation of divine actions: ‘it seems to me that no divine action is imitated as such, since, so far as it is divine, it cannot be imitated by any of the means proper to poetry.’[[161]](#footnote-161) Certainly, people such as Homer and the early tragedians did portray the gods, but they did it so as to give them human characteristics. Likewise, when Homer discusses the frogs and the mice, he attributed to them human qualities. Therefore, Tasso ‘conclude[s] that poetry is nothing but an imitation of human actions, which are properly imitable, and that all others are imitated not in themselves but by accident, and not as principal but as accessory. In this manner it is also possible to imitate the actions not only of animals, … but also of nature…’[[162]](#footnote-162) This conclusion helps to explain the disinterest with the world-building capacities of the poet which distinguishes Tasso’s conception of the poet as god from those of his contemporaries: poetry is concerned above all else with action, and the only *things* or *features* depicted are those which are directly relevant to the plot. The imitation of things is only an accident to the imitation of people and action, except in those circumstances where things themselves take on human characteristics in the role of actors, as in portrayals of ‘sea storms, pestilence, floods, fire, earthquakes, and the like.’[[163]](#footnote-163) In this, Scaliger is far more faithful to Aristotle’s *Poetics*, which likewise concern itself only with plot and character, than either Scaliger or Sidney.

What little creative power—if any—the poet wields over the natural world is therefore largely irrelevant. For this reason, Tasso allows poets a little more leeway when it comes to depicting setting. Virgil, at least, is suffered to include a description of a port in Carthage which historically existed not in Carthage, but in the city of New Carthage in Spain, and even to add such ahistorical details as a grotto for nymphs. While ‘this invention would perhaps incur greater objections if it were in geography,’ as it is in poetry, and an example of *toposthesia*, it is adjudged worthy of praise.[[164]](#footnote-164) Moreover, Tasso observes, changes may occur in geography over time, which lends the description probability and therefore verisimilitude, and caves in particular have allegorical significance which may justify its inclusion. While it may require no little justification, invention in terms of setting is permitted in service to the greater ideal of beauty (and, perhaps, of allegory). This is a far cry from Sidney and his comparison of nature’s bronze world to the poet’s golden one, or Scaliger’s celebration of Virgil’s creation in poetry of a perfect nature. Moreover, the degree of verisimilitude Tasso demands makes Scaliger look positively liberal.

As concerns the ‘material’ of poetry, Tasso admits that invention is theoretically permissible. Discussing the difference between the poet and the orator, Tasso comments on the greater ‘freedom’ of the poet with regards to material: ‘with the orator, … it is often chance or necessity that offers his matter; with the poet it is choice: he is even permitted to feign his matter, and such feigning is considered invention.’[[165]](#footnote-165) But this ‘freedom’ of choosing seems hardly desirable, as it is only mentioned in the context of possible cause for censure, should the poet choose his matter poorly. This quickly becomes a theme in Tasso’s discussion of poetic ‘feigning’ or invention—while it is to a certain extent *permissible*, it is almost never advisable. In this he is similar to Scaliger, who likewise permitted fiction in poetry, but repeatedly counselled against it.

The ‘material’ or ‘argument’ of a poem, Tasso explains, ‘is either invented—in which case the poet would seem to have a great role not only in its choice but also its discovery—or taken from history.’[[166]](#footnote-166) Since poetry is older than history, poets before Homer ‘followed either the accounts of those who had themselves witnessed events, or report, or common opinion.’ Since Homer, however, all poets have based their works on history. Tasso himself concludes that it is ‘much better that the argument be taken from history, as it would not be if it were wholly invented.’[[167]](#footnote-167) In support of this statement, he sites Stynesius, who decries ‘fictitious arguments,’ and Macrobius, who condemns fables in which ‘the poet wishes only to please the ear and makes almost a profession of fiction and falseness,’ and, while accepting that some fables, like those of Aesop, have some value, in these cases ‘truth—which the poet’s art intermixes with fictions of his own composing—ought not to be hidden under a cloak of the opposite kind of sordid inventions and debased words, but piously veiled in honourable things and magnificent illustrious names.’[[168]](#footnote-168) Thus, fiction is in itself a base and disreputable—even repugnant—thing, and even when it is useful, it ought to take on the guise and trappings of truth as far as possible. These are, of course, the very charges against which Puttenham and Scaliger are obliged to defend poetry, and even Scaliger’s distaste for fiction does not extend so far as to consider fiction immoral or debased—merely inefficacious.

Tasso stresses that the truth is ‘a more suitable basis’ for heroic poetry specifically.[[169]](#footnote-169) Since the poet must ‘pursue the verisimilar,’ and since it’s extremely unlikely that the sort of great deed that serves as the topic of epic poetry would not be noted by a historian, the poet can hardly get away with inventing such a deed. ‘Where [great and eventful action] are not recorded, from this fact alone men argue their falsity,’ and if people assume a story is false, it has far less power to move them.[[170]](#footnote-170) Tasso’s notion of verisimilitude is quite different from Scaliger’s, who advocates verisimilitude mainly on the principle that poetry should stick as close to the truth as possible, since the truth is more powerful. Tasso’s idea quite similiar to Robortello’s: both critics held that the aim of verisimilitude is not to make a poem realistic enough to avoid violating what we might today term suspension of disbelief, but to make a poem realistic enough to actually deceive the audience into believing it is true, a goal which the truth-loving Scaliger would hardly endorse. The poet’s goal, therefore, is ‘to persuade us that what he treats deserves belief and credit.’[[171]](#footnote-171)

And while Tasso acknowledges earlier in his text that ‘imitation is by its nature linked not with truth, but with verisimilitude,’ it must have truth as its object since the false does not exist, and what does not exist cannot be imitated—verisimilitude describes the relation between the truth and its imitation.[[172]](#footnote-172) Thus, ‘those who write what is wholly false, then, not being imitators, are not poets, and their compositions are not poems but rather fictions; hence they either do not deserve, or deserve far less, the name of poet.’[[173]](#footnote-173) Fiction in Tasso’s conception is fundamentally unpoetical: poetry *must* have a basis in truth, or it is not poetry. Here, Tasso departs from Aristotle and his tradition, including Sidney and Scaliger, for Aristotle’s conception of imitation was far more flexible, allowing—even enjoining—the poet to treat not what is or was but what *should* or *might* be: he requires not truth, but only plausibility. Sidney defends the use of fiction in poetry, and even Scaliger acknowledges that fiction can have a place in poetry. Likewise, while Aristotle mentions that an invented fable provides the pleasure of novelty, Tasso largely dismisses this, asserting that ‘a poem’s novelty primarily consists not in the factiousness of a subject unheard of before, but in the fine complication and resolution of its fable.’[[174]](#footnote-174)

While fiction is forbidden as a subject for poetry, Tasso does maintain the Aristotelian idea that poetry requires verisimilitude, not truth, acknowledging that ‘poetry is an art or faculty of telling the true *and* the false, but principally the true.’[[175]](#footnote-175) Indeed, Tasso considers that while fiction is a very unfit subject for poetry, it *is* a necessary part of poetry, because to treat something poetically requires ‘fiction and artifice’—thus, the poet cannot take anything for his subject which is so well known that he has no room to alter it.[[176]](#footnote-176)

Tasso groups poetry with rhetoric, whose ‘function [is] to consider not the false but the probable.’[[177]](#footnote-177) Rhetoric may treat the false, ‘not in so far as it is false, but in so far as it is probable. The probable in so far as it is verisimilar belongs the poet.’[[178]](#footnote-178) Some falseness is allowable therefore, to the extent that it is verisimilar—that is, as we have previously determined, to the extent that it may be mistaken for true. One of the few places in which fiction is permitted is in tales about ‘faraway peoples and unfamiliar lands’—since these are largely unknown to the audience, any invention may seem plausible and thus not ‘cost the fable its credibility.’[[179]](#footnote-179)

Where poetry treats historical events, since the main difference between poetry and history is that poetry ‘consider[s] things not as they were but as they ought to have been, with regard rather to the universal than to the truth of particulars,’ the poet ‘may without regard to truth or history change and rechange … at will’ any event which he thinks might be more marvellous or verisimilar, or otherwise more delightful, if altered, ‘mingling the true and the fictitious, but in such a way that the true remains the basis of the fable.’[[180]](#footnote-180) Herein lies a sort of poetic agency, but it has far less to do with the poet’s creativity and far more to do with his judgement. His alterations are more corrective than inventive—the truth is subjected to the ideal, or to aesthetic considerations, but the poet is still bound to make his alterations in accordance with laws which exist outside himself. Moreover, ‘the poet should not stretch his license so far that he dares to change the outcome of the enterprises he undertakes to treat, or to narrate contrary to actuality any of the main and best-known events which are accepted as true in the world's opinion.’[[181]](#footnote-181) He is to leave the beginning and the end of his story untouched, as well as all the more famous events, and is permitted only, ‘if he pleases, [to] change the means and the circumstances, shift the times and sequence of other things’—herein only may he ‘show himself rather an artistic poet than a veracious historian.’[[182]](#footnote-182)

Imagination and creativity thus are permitted almost no role in poetry. While some license is allowed in describing circumstances and settings, the poet is still bound only to portray such things as may be mistaken for the truth; in describing characters and events, he has much less flexibility, as he should take historical events for his topic to be properly verisimilar, and cannot diverge from history as commonly known or accepted.

Since Tasso holds fiction to have almost no place in poetry, he speaks very little about imagination or invention. In one rare instance, Tasso touches on the distinction between the inventive powers of God versus those of man in the beginning of his discourse, when he explains why he will examine many examples of poetry in the exposition of his theory. We must extrapolate the singular ‘end’ from many particulars: as an illustration, Tasso references the tale of the painter Zeuxis who, being hired to paint the likeness of Helen of Troy, had his clients bring forth all the most beautiful maidens in the city to model for him, from whom he was able to extrapolate and paint a more perfect beauty than existed in any one particular maiden.[[183]](#footnote-183) Tasso explains this process as being fundamental to human, as opposed to divine, understanding of abstract ideas: ‘This is perhaps the difference between the ideas of natural things in the divine mind and those of artificial things which the human intellect figures to itself: with one the universal exists before, and with the other after the things themselves.’[[184]](#footnote-184) This too may explain why his comparison of the poet to God is less comprehensive than other examples of the trope: unlike God, man *cannot* create things out of whole cloth, nor even invent exempla of pre-existing ideas without first extrapolating those ideas from multiple cases in reality. It suggests, too, that Tasso views the imagination to be far less powerful than it appears in Sidney or Puttenham. In Sidney and in Puttenham, the poet’s great power is the ability to envision and create an image of the ideal form of nature—in doing so, Sidney’s poet extends his ‘wit’ outside the bounds of nature as it exists. But according to Tasso’s rather anti-Platonic understanding, man’s mind cannot stray outside the bounds of nature—he has no recourse to the Ideal, which he can only comprehend as an amalgamation of all that he has seen and experienced. As such, Tasso’s strong stance against fiction and his emphasis on verisimilitude seem unnecessary, for it is hard to imagine how any kind of imaginative invention is possible.

**A world in a word**

By now, we have seen God and the poet classed together variously as ‘workmen,’ ‘makers,’ ‘creators,’ and ‘artificers,’ titles which, behind their superficial similarities, conceal a wide range of ideas which in some cases are in a very real sense worlds apart. Our four writers vary greatly in their use of the trope: the strength with which they state it, and the lengths to which they extend the metaphor. All four draw from the same tradition—use the same vocabulary, call upon the same authorities, and cite the same texts—yet their applications of those authorities, that vocabulary, and those texts is strikingly different. We see in these texts a tension between the idea of fiction as a product of the imagination, a semi-divine capacity whose scope of understanding was far greater than the perceptible world around it; and at the same time, we see fiction as a pernicious lie which may draw us away from the world into error, confusion, and immorality. We see too the same tension, articulated by Landino, between ‘maker’ and ‘creator,’ man and God. And it seems to me not coincidental that it is in Sidney and Puttenham—the texts which are most welcoming of fiction—that we see the strongest and most confident articulation of the trope, and the most liberal estimation of man’s creative powers. The basic issue at stake is the question of truth—where it lies, how we perceive it, and how we stray from it. Tasso, who has the lowest estimation of man’s imaginative powers, holds truth as fundamental to perceive even in reality—any attempt to deviate from reality would only obfuscate things further. But in Sidney, Puttenham, and even, to an extent, Scaliger, we see the idea that we may better understand the truth by ranging outside of its bounds, and through is imagination, when allied with the poet’s creative powers, that we may first locate those bounds, and then surpass them.

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2. B. Weinberg, *A History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance,* Vol. II, Chicago, 1961, pp. 716, 771. J. E. Spingarn, *A History of Literary Criticism in the Renaissance*, London, 1899, pp. 194, 227, 263, 265. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. E. N. Tigerstedt, ‘The Poet as Creator: Origins of a Metaphor,’ in *Comparative Literature Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 4, 1968, pp. 456-467. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. ‘Et i Greci dicono poeta, da questo uerbo piin, il quale è tra creare, che è proprio di Dio quando di niente produce in essere alcuna cosa, & fare, che è de gli huomini in ciascuna arte, quando di materia, & di forma compongono. Percioche, quantunque il figmento del poeta non sia al tutto di niente, pure si parte dal fare, & al creare molto s’appressa. Et è Iddio sommo poeta, & è il mondo suo poema.’ C. Landino, ‘Discorsi del Landino. Che cosa sia poesia et poeta, et della origine sua divina, Et antichissima,’ in *Dante con l’espositioni di Christoforo Landino, et d’Alessandro Vellutello,* Venice, 1578, np. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. S. K. Heninger, *Touches of Sweet Harmony*, San Marino, 1974, pg. 288. For the influence of Ficino on Landino’s comparison, see Tigersted, ‘The Poet as Creator,’ *passim*. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Spingarn, *History of Literary Criticism*, pg. 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Spingarn, *History of Literary Criticism*, pg. 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
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9. See especially M. W. Bundy, ‘‘Invention’ and ‘Imagination’ in the Renaissance,’ in *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, Vol. 29, No. 4, 1930, pp. 535-545; E. Kushner, ‘The concept of invention and its role in Renaissance literary theory,’ in *Neohelicon*, Vol. 8, No. 1, pp. 135-146; and for a thorough overview, U. Langer, ‘Invention,’ in *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, Vol. 3, ed. G. P. Norton, Cambridge, 1999. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
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13. Plato, *Republic*, 10.595b in *Plato in Twelve Volumes,* Vols. 5 & 6, trans. P. Shorey, London, 1969. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Aristotle, *Poetics*, 48b5-17. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Aristotle, *Poetics*, 51a35-51b30 [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. M. Malm, *The Soul of Poetry Redefined: Vacillations of Mimesis from Aristotle to Romanticism*, Copenhagen, 2012, pp. 34-35. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. qtd. in M. Malm, *The Soul of Poetry Redefined*, pg. 77. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
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21. J. C. Scaliger, *Poetices Libri Septem*, 1561,I.i.1-3. Textual citations in Scaliger are given in the form of book, chapter, page, and (where appropriate) column number and section. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. ‘non solum redderet vocibus res ipsas quae essent, verum etiam quae non essent, quasi essent, & quo modo esse vel possent vel deberent, reprasentaret.’ Scaliger, *Poetices*, I.i.1(2B). [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. ‘Sola poesis haec omnia complexa est, tanto quam artes illae excellentius, quod caeterae (vt dicebamus) res ipsas, vti sunt, repraesentant, veluti aurium pictura quadam at poeta & naturam alteram, & fortunas plures etiam: ac demum sese isthoc ipso perinde ac Deum alterum efficit.’ Scaliger, *Poetices*, I.i.3(1). [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. J. C. Scaliger, *Select Translations from Scaliger’s Poetics*, trans. F. M. Padelford, New York, 1905, 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Deitz translates *actor* into German as ‘Darsteller,’ which means performer or actor (in the most common English usage), and is derived from the verb meaning ‘to depict’ or ‘to represent.’ J. C. Scaliger, *Poetices libri septem / Siebe Bücher über die Dichtkunst*, Vol. I, ed. and trans. L. Deitz, Stuttgart, 1994, pg. 71. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Cicero, *Orator*, 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. P. Sidney, ‘A Defence of Poetry,’ in *English Renaissance Literary Criticism*, ed. B. Vickers, Oxford, 1999, pg. 342. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. ‘Poetica vero quum & speciosius quae sunt, & quae non sunt, eorum speciem ponit: videtur sane res ipsas, non vt aliae, quasi Histrio, narrare, sed velut alter deus condere.’ Scaliger, *Poetices*, I.i.3(1) [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. ‘Verba ipsa & partes sunt & materia orationis, … [sed] res autem ipsae finis sunt orationis, quarum verba notae sunt. Quamobrem ab ipsis rebus formam illam accipiunt, qua hoc ipsum sunt, quod sunt.’ Scaliger, *Poetices*,III.i.80(1B). [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. ‘imitationem esse in omni sermone, quia verba sint imagines rerum.’ Scaliger, *Poetices*,VII.ii.347(2D). [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. ‘Rem ipsam quae scribitur, Poematis ipsius esse materiam… Nam quemadmodum statua Caesaris est Caesaris imago, ita et poema quod ipsum describet. At statuae materia aes est aut marmor, non autem Caesar. Caesar autem obiectum, ut vocant philosophi, et finis.’ Scaliger, *Poetices*,II.i.55(1B). [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. ‘Ideam incorruptibilem separatam. Rem ab ea depromptam corruptibilem, quae ipsius Ideae imago existat. tertio loco picturam aut orationem: eodem enim modo referuntur: & sunt imagines specierum. Quare sicuti Idea erit forma rei nostratis, ita res debuerit haberi pro forma picturae, & statuae, & orationis.’ Scaliger, *Poetices*,II.i.55(1C). Weinberg translates ‘rei nostratis’ simply as ‘terrestrial thing’—a neater, if less precise, translation. B. Weinberg, ‘Scaliger versus Aristotle on Poetics,’ in *Modern Philology*, Vol. 39, No. 4, May 1942, pg.342. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. ‘Est enim consentanea eo ipso Aristotelicae demonstrationi, qua intellegimus balnei speciem esse in animo architecti, antequam balneum aedificet, ubi idem sit et forma et finis.’ Scaliger, *Poetices*,II.i.55(1C). [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. As it seems to me a shame to go through an essay about Scaliger the Elder without providing a single sample of his celebrated invective, I refer the reader to the passage on I.ii.5(1B), in which Scaliger takes Plato soundly to task for the ‘foolish and filthy tales’ and ‘stinking opinions’ to which the ‘Greek scoundrel’ subjects his readers. ‘Respiciat ipse sese quot ineptas, quot spurcas fabellas inferat: quas Graecanicum scelus olentes sententias identidem inculcet.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. ‘non … eum Platonicis eo verser in errore, vt putem a rebus ipsis verba natura sua concreata esse: sed … res ipsae quales quantaeque suunt, talem tan tamque non illae, sed nos efficimus orationem.’ III.i.80(1C).’ [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. See below. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. ‘Poetica ... videtur sane res ipsas ... velut alter deus condere.’ Scaliger, *Poetices*, I.i.3(1). [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. He also provides a simpler graphic representation of this relationship: ‘Things ← Words → Men.’ Weinberg, ‘Scailger vs. Aristotle,’ pg. 342. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. ‘res autem ipsae finis sunt orationis.’ Scaliger, *Poetices*,III.i.80(1B). Also, ‘real things are our end, insofar as their appearances are imposed in poetic speech.’ ‘Erunt igitur res ipsae finis noster, quatenus earum species imponuntur in materiam poeticae orationis.’ Scaliger, *Poetices*,II.i.55(1C). [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. ‘verba … ab ipsis rebus formam illam accipiunt, qua hoc ipsum sunt, quod sunt.’ Scaliger, *Poetices*,III.i.80(1B). Cf. ‘For names (*nomina*) themselves are the concepts (*notions*) of objects, whence the appellation [‘nomen’] is also drawn,’ ‘Rerum namque sunt notiones ipsa nomina. unde etiam ducta est appellatio.’ Scaliger, *Poetices*,VII.ii.346(2D)-347(1A). [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. ‘Poetica vero quum & speciosius quae sunt ... eorum speciem ponit.’ Scaliger, *Poetices*, I.i.3(1). [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. ‘Quod in quibusque praestantissimum inueniunt, e multis in unum opus suum transferunt: ita ut non a natura didicisse, sed cum ea certasse, aut potius illi dare leges potuisse videantur.’ Scaliger, *Poetices*, III.xxv.113(1B). [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. ‘Haec omnia quae imiteris, habes apud alteram naturam, id est Virgilium.’ Scaliger, *Poetics*, III.iv.86(1B). See also III.ii, in which Scaliger equates nature and Virgil by declaring that ‘those things which belong to nature must investigated in Nature’s bosom’ before they may be ‘excavated, and laid bare before the eyes of men,’ and then announcing that, in order to make this process easier, he will draw the subjects of his investigation from Virgil. ‘Haec quae natura ita constant, in Naturae sinu inuestiganda, atque inde eruta sub oculis hominum subiicienda erunt. id quod ut quam commodissime faciamus, petenda sunt exempla ab eo, qui solus Poetae nomine dignus est. Virgilium intelligo.’ Scaliger, *Poetices*, III.ii.83(1C).

‘Hactenus rerum ideae quemadmodum ex ipsa natura exciperentur Virgilianis ostendimus exemplis.’ Scaliger, *Poetices*, III.xxv.113(1B). [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. ‘Quis enim putet ullam unquam talem fuisse foeminae cuiuspiam pulchritudinem, in qua aliud non desideraretur ab iudice non vulgari? Nam tametsi in ipsis naturae normis atque dimensionibus uniuersa perfectio est: tamen utriusque parentis mistio, tempus, caelum, locus multa afferunt impedimenta.’ Scaliger, *Poetices*, III.xxv.113(1B). [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. ‘Itaque non ex ipsius naturae opere uno potuimus exempla capere, quae ex una Virgiliana idea mutuati sumus.’ Scaliger, *Poetices*, III.xxv.113(1B). [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Aristotle, *Poetics*, 48b5-17. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. ‘[Poesis] tota in imitatione sita fuit. Hic enim finis est medius ad illum ultimum, qui est docendi cum delectatione.’ Scaliger, *Poetices*, I.1.1(2B). Cf. ‘It is now too often said that imitation is the end of all poetry.’ ‘Nimis iam saepe dictum est, imitationem uniuersae poeseos finem esse.’ Scaliger, *Poetices*, I.v.11(1D). ‘Imitation is not the end of poetry, but pleasant teaching, by which the habits of the mind may be diverted to proper thinking.’ ‘Non est poetices finis, imitatio: sed doctrina iucunda, qua mores animorum deducantur ad rectam rationem.’ Scaliger, *Poetices*, VII.ii.347(1D). [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Aristotle, *'Poetics' I with the 'Tractatus Coislinianus': A Hypothetical Reconstruction of 'Poetics' II. The Fragments of the 'On Poets.'* Trans. and ed. R. Janko. Indianapolis, 1987, 47a28-57b24. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. ‘Quod si sola imitatio poeseos finis est: si quicunque imitatur, is poeta est: … etiam orator poeta fiet in Prosopopoeiis: etiam Plato poeta erit in suis Legibus, quibus excludit a suis legibus poetam: etiam in mercatu erit institor poeta.’ Scaliger, *Poetices*, VII.ii.347(1D). [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. ‘Ad haec, multa sunt genera carminum, multa poematum, quorum nullum iam hoc in censu reponeretur, Lyrica, Scolia, Paeanes, Elegiae, Epigrammata, Satyrae, Syluae, Epithalamia, Hymni, alia: in quibus nulla extat imitatio, sed sola nudaque ἐπαγγελία, id est enarratio aut explicatio eorum affectuum, qui ex ipso prosciscuntur ingenio canentis, non ex persona picta. nam quod poetae nomine defraudat Empedoclem: minus recte fit.’ Scaliger, *Poetices*, VII.ii.347(1D-2A). [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. ‘Maxima ergo atrium pars imitation est.’ Scaliger, *Poetices*, VII.ii.346(2B). [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Scaliger professed many controversial opinions in his time, but among the most notorious was his preference for Virgil over Homer. See V. Hall, *Life of Julius Caesar Scaliger (1484-1558)*, Philadelphia, 1950, pg. 153 [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. ‘Diuides autem universum librum in libellos, naturae imitatione: quae partium partes facit, quibus confiat totius corporis constitutio.’ Scaliger, *Poetices*, III.xcvi.144(1D). [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. ‘Quae naturae sunt, ita describenda erunt, ut nihil non verisimile videatur.’ Scaliger, *Poetices*, III.iv.85(2D). [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. ‘Quae vero arte fiunt, etiam cultus plurimus iis adhiberi potest, ut: Pictus acu tunicas.’ Scaliger, *Poetices*, III.iv.85(2D)-86(1A). [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. ‘Quae autem supra fidem describuntur, ea cuipiam deo sunt attribuenda.’ Scaliger, *Poetices*, III.iv.86A. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. ‘Vero sint propiores, nam mendacia maxima pars hominum odit.’ Scaliger, *Poetices*, III.xcvi.145(2A). [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. ‘Alterius fides certa verum & profitetur & prodit, ...: altera aut addit ficta veris, aut fictis vera imitator.’ Scaliger, *Poetices*, I.i.1(1A). [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. ‘Non fictione ac mendacio: non enim mentitur poesis, aut quae mentitur, mentitur semper. esset ergo poesis eadem, & non poesis.’ Scaliger, *Poetices*, VII.ii.347(2D). [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Scaliger, *Poetices*, VII.ii.347(2B-C). [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. B. Vickers, ‘Sir Philip Sidney, A defence of poetry (1595),’ in *English Renaissance Literary Criticism*, ed. B. Vickers, Oxford, 1999, pg. 336. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. R. Levao, *Renaissance Minds and their Fictions: Cusanus, Sidney, Shakespeare*, Berkeley, 1985, pg. 405n7. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Tigerstedt, ‘The Poet as Creator,’ pg. 477n5. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Scaliger, *Poetices*, I.i.3(1). C. Landino, ‘Discorsi del Landino,’ *np*. Quoted above. Sidney, ‘Defence of Poetry,’ pg. 342. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Langer, ‘Invention,’ pg. 140. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. Sidney, ‘Defence of Poetry,’ pg. 341. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. Sidney also derives from *carmina* the word ‘charms,’ which he attributes to the belief that poetry was so great that by it, ‘spirits were commanded.’ Sidney, ‘Defence of Poetry, pg. 341. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. Sidney, ‘Defence of Poetry, pg. 341. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Sidney, ‘Defence of Poetry,’ pg. 342. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. Sidney, ‘Defence of Poetry,’ pg. 366. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. Sidney, ‘Defence of Poetry,’ pg. 342. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. Sidney, ‘Defence of Poetry,’ pg. 342. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. Scaliger, *Poetices*, I.i.1(1A). [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. Heninger, *Touches*, pp. 3-5 [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. Weinberg, *Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance*, Vol. I, 3ff. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. See Aristotle, *Physics*, II.ii. For this idea in Scaliger, see above. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. Sidney, ‘Defence of Poetry,’ pg. 346. See below. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. Sidney, ‘Defence of Poetry,’ pg. 343. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. Sidney, ‘Defence of Poetry,’ pg. 343. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. ‘Poetica … & speciosius quae sunt, & quae non sunt, eorum speciem ponit.’ Scaliger, *Poetices*, I.1.3. Sidney, ‘Defence of Poetry,’ pg. 343. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. Scaliger, *Poetices*, I.i.3(1). [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. For development of the phrase ‘in effect,’ see ‘effect, n.’ in the *OED Online*. The *OED* records no instances of the phrase in its modern meaning before the 18th century, nor of the equivalent adverb ‘effectively’ until the 19th. [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. Sidney, ‘Defence of Poetry,’ pg. 343. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. Sidney, ‘Defence of Poetry,’ pg. 343. [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. Sidney, ‘Defence of Poetry,’ pg. 343. [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. J. Delumeau, *History of Paradise: The Garden of Eden in Myth and Tradition*, trans. M. O’Connell, New York, 2000, pp. 6-9. [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. Sidney, ‘Defence of Poetry,’ pg. 344. [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. Sidney, ‘Defence of Poetry,’ pg. 343. [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. Sidney, ‘Defence of Poetry,’ pg. 344. [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. Sidney, ‘Defence of Poetry,’ pg. 344. [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. Sidney, ‘Defence of Poetry,’ pg. 344. [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. Sidney, ‘Defence of Poetry,’ pg. 346. [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. Sidney, ‘Defence of Poetry,’ pg. 362. [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. Sidney, ‘Defence of Poetry,’ pg. 358. [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. Vickers, ‘Sir Philip Sidney,’ pg. 336. [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. Sidney, ‘Defence of Poetry,’ pg. 369 [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. Sidney, ‘Defence of Poetry,’ pg. 370. [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. ‘Veritas … est adaequatio notionum cum iis rebus, quarum notiones sunt.’ Scaliger, *Poetices*, VII.ii.347(2C). [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. Weinberg, *Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance*, Vol. II, pg. 695. [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. Weinberg, *Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance*, Vols. I & II, pp. 695-96, 802. [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. Sidney, ‘Defence of Poetry,’ pg. 370. [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
102. Sidney, ‘Defence of Poetry,’ pg. 369. [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
103. Sidney, ‘Defence of Poetry,’ pg. 371. [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
104. Sidney, ‘Defence of Poetry,’ pg. 371. [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
105. Plato, *Sophist*, 236b-c. [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
106. Heninger, *Touches*, pp. 287-288. [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
107. Heninger, *Touches*, pg. 288. [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
108. B. Vickers, ‘George Puttenham, English poetics and rhetoric (1589),’ in *English Renaissance Literary Criticism*, ed. B. Vickers, Oxford, 1999, pp. 190, 191n1. [↑](#footnote-ref-108)
109. Vickers, ‘George Puttenham,’ pp. 190-91. [↑](#footnote-ref-109)
110. G. Puttenham, ‘English poetics and rhetoric,’ in *English Renaissance Literary Criticism*, ed. B. Vickers, Oxford, 1999, pp. 191-92. [↑](#footnote-ref-110)
111. Puttenham, ‘English poetics,’ pg. 192. [↑](#footnote-ref-111)
112. Puttenham, ‘English poetics,’ pg. 192. [↑](#footnote-ref-112)
113. Puttenham, ‘English poetics,’ pg. 192. [↑](#footnote-ref-113)
114. Puttenham, ‘English poetics,’ pg. 192. [↑](#footnote-ref-114)
115. Puttenham, ‘English poetics,’ pg. 193. [↑](#footnote-ref-115)
116. Tigerstedt, ‘The Poet as Creator,’ pg. 458 [↑](#footnote-ref-116)
117. Sidney, ‘Defence of Poetry,’ pg. 371. Puttenham, ‘English poetics,’ pg. 200. [↑](#footnote-ref-117)
118. Puttenham, ‘English poetics,’ pg. 201. [↑](#footnote-ref-118)
119. Puttenham, ‘English poetics,’ pg. 201. Vickers, ‘George Puttenham,’ pg. 201, n. 24. [↑](#footnote-ref-119)
120. Puttenham, ‘English poetics,’ pg. 201. [↑](#footnote-ref-120)
121. Puttenham, ‘English poetics,’ pg. 201. [↑](#footnote-ref-121)
122. Puttenham, ‘English poetics,’ pg. 201. [↑](#footnote-ref-122)
123. Puttenham, ‘English poetics,’ pg. 201. [↑](#footnote-ref-123)
124. A. Sheppherd, ‘*Phantasia* in *De insomniis*,’ in *On Prophecy, Dreams, and the Human Imagination*, ed. Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen, 2014, pg. 100. 1 Corinthians 13:10,12, King James Version. [↑](#footnote-ref-124)
125. Sidney, ‘Defence of Poetry,’ pg. 344. [↑](#footnote-ref-125)
126. Puttenham, ‘English poetics,’ pg. 292. [↑](#footnote-ref-126)
127. Puttenham, ‘English poetics,’ pg. 292. [↑](#footnote-ref-127)
128. Puttenham, ‘English poetics,’ pg. 292. [↑](#footnote-ref-128)
129. Puttenham, ‘English Poetics,’ pg. 292. [↑](#footnote-ref-129)
130. Puttenham, ‘English Poetics,’ pg. 293. [↑](#footnote-ref-130)
131. Puttenham, ‘English Poetics,’ pg. 293. [↑](#footnote-ref-131)
132. Puttenham, ‘English Poetics,’ pg. 293. [↑](#footnote-ref-132)
133. Puttenham, ‘English Poetics,’ pg. 293. [↑](#footnote-ref-133)
134. See ‘singular, *adj*.’ in the *OED Online*. [↑](#footnote-ref-134)
135. Puttenham, ‘English Poetics,’ pg. 293. [↑](#footnote-ref-135)
136. Puttenham, ‘English Poetics,’ pg. 293. [↑](#footnote-ref-136)
137. Puttenham, ‘English Poetics,’ pp. 293-94. [↑](#footnote-ref-137)
138. Cf. Aristotle, *Physics*, Book II, Chap. 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-138)
139. Sidney, ‘Defence of Poetry,’ pg. 342. [↑](#footnote-ref-139)
140. ‘Nam si equus ad gestationem fuit a Natura comparatus, equum profecto trituratores imitantur, ubi phalangibus paleas gerunt ad foenilia. Quinetiam domus imago quaepiam videtur antri.’ Scaliger, *Poetices*, VII.2.346.B. [↑](#footnote-ref-140)
141. Puttenham, ‘English Poetics,’ pg. 295. [↑](#footnote-ref-141)
142. Puttenham, ‘English Poetics,’ pg. 295. [↑](#footnote-ref-142)
143. Puttenham, ‘English Poetics,’ pp. 295-96. [↑](#footnote-ref-143)
144. ‘Natura enim laxa nunc acciptur significatione etiam pro natura prima, id est deo. Idcirco et quae ille fecit effecitque, uti sint immutabilia, et quae ordine naturae fiunt, utraque pro factis accipienda sunt.’ Scaliger, *Poetices*, III.iv.85(2C). [↑](#footnote-ref-144)
145. Puttenham, ‘English Poetics,’ pg. 192. [↑](#footnote-ref-145)
146. Heninger, *Touches*, pg. 304. [↑](#footnote-ref-146)
147. ‘None deserve the name of creator but God and the Poet.’ P. B. Shelley, *A Defence of Poetry*, [City], 1821. [↑](#footnote-ref-147)
148. M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition*, Oxford, 1953, pg. 273. [↑](#footnote-ref-148)
149. I. Samuel, ‘Introduction,’ in T. Tasso, *Discourses on the Heroic Poem*, trans. M. Cavalchini and I. Samuel, Oxford, 1973, pg. xi. ‘andiamo formando l'idee delle cose artificiali ; nella quale operazione ci pare d' esser quasi divini, e d' imitare il primo artefice.’ T. Tasso, *Discorsi dell’arte poetica e del poema eroico*, Bari, 1964, pg. 117. [↑](#footnote-ref-149)
150. Tasso, *Discourses,* pg. 57. ‘se pur talvolta consideriamo le cose verisimili, non possiamo aver altra notizia di loro, se non quella che ci dà la cognizione del vero.’ Tasso, *Arte poetica*, pg. 117. [↑](#footnote-ref-150)
151. Tasso, *Discourses,* pg. 57. ‘Ma quanto sono più stabili, quanto più vere, quanto più certe le cose intellettuali, alle quali drizziamo l'intelletto?’ Tasso, *Arte poetica*, pg. 117. [↑](#footnote-ref-151)
152. ‘Et egreci dixono poeta da questo uerbo piin: elquale e in mezo tra creare che e proprio di dio quando diniente produce in essere alchuna chosa: Et fare che e de glhuomini in chiaschuna arte quando di materia et di forma compongono.’ Qtd in Tigerstedt, ‘The Poet as Creator,’ pg. 458 [↑](#footnote-ref-152)
153. Tasso, *Discourses,* pg. 78. ‘il quale non per altro è detto divino , se non perchè , al supremo artefice nelle sue operazioni assomigliandosi , della sua divinità viene a partecipare.’ Tasso, *Arte poetica*, pg. 140. [↑](#footnote-ref-153)
154. Tasso, *Discourses,* pg. 78. ‘quasi in un piccolo mondo’ ‘una la forma e l’anima sua, e ... tutte queste cose sieno di maniera composte che l’una l’altra riguardi, l’una all’altra corrisponda, l’una dall’altra o necessariamente o verisimilmente dependa, sì che una sola parte o tolta via o mutata di sito, il tutto si distrugga.’ Tasso, *Arte poetica*, pg. 140. [↑](#footnote-ref-154)
155. Tasso, *Discourses,* pg. 77. ‘questo mirabile magisterio di Dio, che mondo di chiama.’ Tasso, *Arte poetica*, pg. 139. [↑](#footnote-ref-155)
156. Sidney, ‘Defence of Poetry,’ pg. 342. [↑](#footnote-ref-156)
157. Tasso, *Discourses,* pg. 78. ‘l’arte del comprre il poema sarebbe simile alla ragion dell’universo, la qual è composta de’ contrarii, come la ragion musica.’ Tasso, *Arte poetica*, pg. 140 [↑](#footnote-ref-157)
158. Tasso, *Discourses,* pp. 77-78. ‘e ruscelli e fonti e laghi e prati e campgane e selve e monti’ ‘qui tempeste, qui incendii, qui prodigii, ... là discordie, là errori, là venture, là incanti’ Tasso, *Arte poetica*, pp. 139, 140. [↑](#footnote-ref-158)
159. Tasso, *Arte poetica*, pg. 140. [↑](#footnote-ref-159)
160. Tasso, *Discourses,* pg. 7. ‘essendo tutte l’azioni della natura amminsitrate con divina providenza, chi scrive l’azioni della natura par che sia poeta.’ Tasso, *Arte poetica*, p. 64. [↑](#footnote-ref-160)
161. Tasso, *Discourses,* pg. 10. ‘a me non pare che sia imitata alcuna azione divina in quanto divina, perché, in quanto tale, per aventura non si può imitare con alcuno di quelli instrumenti che sono proprii della poesia’ Tasso, *Arte poetica*, pg. 65. [↑](#footnote-ref-161)
162. Tasso, *Discourses,* pg. 10. ‘Laonde io direi piu tosto che la poesia altro non fosse che imitazione dell’azioni umane, le quali propriamente sono azioni imitabili, e l’altre non fossero imitate per se, ma per accidente, o non come parte principale, ma come acessoria ; e in questa guisa ancora si possono imitare non solo l’azione delle bestie, ... ma le naturali’ Tasso, *Arte poetica*, p. 66. [↑](#footnote-ref-162)
163. Tasso, *Discourses,* pg. 10. ‘le temporale maritime, le pestilenze, i diluvii, gli incendii e i terremoti e l’altre sì fatte.’ Tasso, *Arte poetica*, pg. 66. [↑](#footnote-ref-163)
164. Tasso, *Discourses,* pg. 109. ‘questa finzione peraventura sarebbe soggetta a maggiore opposizione s’ella fosse nella geografia’ Tasso, *Arte poetica*, pg. 170. [↑](#footnote-ref-164)
165. Tasso, *Discourses,* pg. 23. ‘all’oratore … la material è spesso offerta dal caso o dalla necessità, al poeta dall’elezione ; al quale è lecito ancora di fingerla, e la fizione è riputata invenzione’ Tasso, *Arte Poetica*, pg. 80. [↑](#footnote-ref-165)
166. Tasso, *Discourses,* pg. 25. ‘La materia … o si finge, e allora pare che il poeta abbia gran parte non solo nella scelta, ma nel ritrovamento, o si prende dall’istorie.’ Tasso, *Arte Poetica*, pg. 83. [↑](#footnote-ref-166)
167. Tasso, *Discourses,* pg. 25. ‘Molto meglio dunque e … che l’argomento sia prestato dall’istoria; che non sarebbe s’egli in tutto si fingesse’ Tasso, *Arte Poetica*, pg. 83. [↑](#footnote-ref-167)
168. Tasso, *Discourses,* pp. 25-26. ‘argomenti finti’ ‘falsi argomenti’ ‘il poeta vuol solo piacere a gli orecchi fa quasi professione di falsità e di bugia’ ‘la verità, la quale è mescolaa con alcune cose finte e composte dall'artificio del poeta, non sia nascosta sotto un manto quasi contrari di sozze invenzioni e di brutte parole, ma dentro un pio velame di cose oneste e di nomi splendidi e illustri.’ Tasso, *Arte poetica*, pp. 83-84. [↑](#footnote-ref-168)
169. Tasso, *Discourses,* pg. 26. ‘al poeta eroico si conviene fare il suo fondamento nel vero’ Tasso, *Arte poetica*, pg. 84. [↑](#footnote-ref-169)
170. Tasso, *Discourses,* pg. 26. ‘dovendo … cercare in molte parti il verisimile’ ‘ove non siano [i grandi e fortunosi avvenimenti] recati in scrittura, da questo solo argumentano gli uomni la loro falsità’ Tasso, *Arte poetica*, pg. 84. [↑](#footnote-ref-170)
171. Tasso, *Discourses,* pg. 27. ‘persuadere che le cose da lui trttate siano degne di fede e d’autorità’ Tasso, *Arte poetica*, pg. 85. [↑](#footnote-ref-171)
172. Tasso, *Discourses,* pg. 19. ‘l’imitazione non e congiunta con la verità per sua natura, ma con la verisimilitudine.’ Tasso, *Arte poetica*, pg. 76. [↑](#footnote-ref-172)
173. Tasso, *Discourses,* pg. 27. ‘quelli che scrivono cose in tutto false, se non sono imitatori, non sono poeti, e i suoi componimenti non sono poesie, ma finzioni più tosto ; laonde non meritano il nome di poeta, o non tanto.’ Tasso, *Arte poetica*, pg. 85. [↑](#footnote-ref-173)
174. Tasso, *Discourses,* pg. 28. ‘la novità del poema non cisista principalmente nella falsità del suggetto non udito, ma nel bel nodo e nello scioglimento della favola.’ Tasso, *Arte poetica*, pg. 86. [↑](#footnote-ref-174)
175. Tasso, *Discourses,* pg. 34. Emphasis mine. ‘[la poesia] fosse un’arte o ver facoltà di dire il vero e il falso, ma ’l vero principalmente.’ Tasso, *Arte poetica*, pg. 92. [↑](#footnote-ref-175)
176. Weinberg, *Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance*, Vol. II. pg. 687. [↑](#footnote-ref-176)
177. Tasso, *Discourses,* pg. 29. ‘a cui s’appertiene di considerare non il flaso, ma il probabile. Ma il probabile, in quanto egli [è] verisimile, appertiene al poeta’ Tasso, *Arte poetica*, pg. 87. [↑](#footnote-ref-177)
178. Tasso, *Discourses,* pg. 29. ‘non in quanto egli è falso, ma in quanto è probabile.’ Tasso, *Arte poetica*, pg. 87. [↑](#footnote-ref-178)
179. Tasso, *Discourses,* pg. 50. ‘fra’ popoli lontani e ne’ paesi incogniti’ ‘senza toglier autorità alla favola.’ Tasso, *Arte poetica*, pg. 109. [↑](#footnote-ref-179)
180. Tasso, *Discourses,* pg. 58. ‘considerare le cose non come sono state, ma in quella guise che dovrebbono essere state, avendo riguardo più tosto all’universale che alla verità de’ particolari’ ‘senza rispetto alcuno di vero o d’istoria a sua voglia muti e rimuti, ordini e riordini’ ‘mescolando il vero col finto, ma in guisa che ’l vero sia fondamento della favola’ Tasso, *Arte poetica*, pg. 117. [↑](#footnote-ref-180)
181. Tasso, *Discourses,* pg. 60. ‘non dee … la licenza de’ poeti stendersi tanto oltre ch’ardisca di mutar l’ultimo dine dell’imprese ch’egli prende a trattare, o pur narrare al contrario di quello che sono avenuti alcun degli avvenimenti principali e più noti, che già sono ricevuti per veri nella notizia del mondo.’ Tasso, *Arte poetica*, pg. 119. [↑](#footnote-ref-181)
182. Tasso, *Discourses,* pg. 60-61. ‘muti poi, se così gli pare, i mezzi e le circostanze, confonda i tempi e l’ordine dell’altre cose’ ‘si dimostri più tosto artificioso poeta che verace istorico’ Tasso, *Arte poetica*, pg. 120. [↑](#footnote-ref-182)
183. Tasso, *Arte poetica*, pg. 62. The story of Zeuxis is recounted in Cicero *De Inventione* 2. 1. 1-3. [↑](#footnote-ref-183)
184. Tasso, *Discourses,* pg. 6. ‘questa differenza e per Aventura fra l’idee delle cose naturali che sono nella mente divina, e quella dell’artificiali, delle quali si figura e quasi dipinge l’intelletto umano: che nell’una l’universale e innanzi le cose stesse, nell’altro dapoi le cosi naturali.’ Tasso, *Arte poetica*, p. 66. [↑](#footnote-ref-184)