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HANDBOOK OF POETICS

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WAIN & COMPANY

Macaulay's "Milton" - poetry - illusion or
imagination. Unsoundness of mind.
Great poet must be little child. Best po-
etry in primitive times.
Milton metaphysically inaccurate. impossi-
ble for him to adopt altogether the material or the
immaterial system. Milton's friends
not metaphysical abstractions, not wicked
men, not ugly heretics.

A

HANDBOOK OF POETICS

FOR

Students of English Verse.

BY

FRANCIS B. GUMMERE, PH.D.,

PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH IN HAVERFORD COLLEGE.

UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

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PREFACE.

THIS book is published in the belief that many teachers have felt the lack of a concise and systematic statement of the principles of poetry. Such text-books are taught with good result in German schools, and are intended to simplify, not to complicate, the study of literature. The greater part of the literature taught in our schools and colleges is in verse; but, in too many cases, the scholar studies poems without having acquired any definite and compact knowledge of the science of poetry. This "Handbook of Poetics" is meant to aid the teacher in laying so necessary a foundation.

The author has tried to take a judicious position between exploded systems on one hand, and, on the other, those promising but not yet established theories of the latest writers on Poetics—especially in the matter of Versification—which, brilliant and often enticing, have nevertheless failed so far to win general assent. Effort has been made to be accurate without being pedantic, and to avoid the bareness of the primer as well as the too abundant detail of the treatise.

Whether this effort has been successful or not, must be tried by a practical test, — by the judgment, not — as King James puts it — of “ignorants obdurde,” nor of “curious folks,” nor even of “learned men, quha thinks thame onelie wyis,” but rather of “the docile bairns of knowledge.”

The *examples* are by no means intended to be exhaustive. Many obvious ones, as the Olney Hymns or the Dunciad or the Epitaph on the Countess of Pembroke, are omitted for the same reason which Cato gave for the absence of his statue from the forum. The pupil should collect his own examples as far as he can; and every scrap of verse which he reads should be subjected to a close analysis as regards its meaning, its style, its rhythm. This study of the science of poetry is altogether distinct from the art of rhetoric: the two should be carefully held apart.

Of the many books consulted, Wackernagel's Lectures on *Poetik*, and the works on Metre by Child, Schipper, Ellis, and Ten Brink, may be named as especially helpful. The article on “Poetry” in the last volume of the *Encyclopædia Britannica* did not come to hand in time to be of use even in the revision of the proof-sheets.

F. B. G.

NEW BEDFORD, 7 September, 1885.

PREFACE TO SECOND EDITION.



THE belief that this little manual would be of use in the study of English poetry has been strengthened by the welcome it has received from many of our best scholars. In this second edition only such corrections are made in the text as seem needed for the clear statement of facts. Attention must here be called, however, to a slight inaccuracy in the first paragraph on p. 11: the myths about Beowulf arose, it is true, before the fifth century; but the legendary and historical basis of the epic of *Beowulf* belongs to the end of the sixth century (*cf.* Wülker, *Grundriss zur Gesch. der Ags. Litt.* p. 306). As the paragraph is worded it does not seem to agree with what is said on p. 13. — Again, in speaking of *The Owl and the Nightingale* (p. 32), I have unaccountably forgotten to mention that sort of poem known as *Flyting*, of which the piece in question is the first specimen found in English verse, though it is not strictly identical with later *Flytings*, — such as that between Dunbar and Kennedy. Both forms, however, are undoubtedly borrowed from the old French

jeu-parti (cf. Bartsch, *Chrestom.* 343 f.) in which two poets take opposite sides of a question; and which, in its turn, Wackernagel refers to the influence of the Vergilian eclogue. This pastoral flavor, however, hardly justifies Mr. Stopford Brooke in calling the delightful but noisy dialogue an Idyll.

In Paul and Braune's *Beiträge*, Vol. IX, Professor Kluge has recently treated the history of rime in Germanic verse, and has sought to establish certain rules and tests important for the study of Anglo-Saxon metres. His general results still further strengthen the assertion, made on p. 145 of this book, that rime is a natural product of the accentual system; that beginning-rime is for a while sole factor in binding together the halves of a verse; but that end-rime is necessarily developed from the same impulse, increasing with the distance from such early works as *Beowulf*. Kluge thus adds end-rime to the tests of later composition. In regard to beginning-rime itself (151 ff.), it is perhaps well to add a caution about its use in modern verse. Beginning-rime, or alliteration, is detected by the ear, not by the eye (cf. *Eng. Stud.* VIII, 390), as is evident if we compare 'king: knave' with 'right: wrong'; and further, it counts chiefly in accented syllables, though (cf. p. 153) there is a sort of subordinate alliteration. In Swinburne's lines —

A delight that rebels, a desire that reposes:
I shall hate sweet music my whole life long,

we see the force of the second rule. No real beginning-rime exists in the first verse; it does in the second (*hate: whole*). Of course, the first has subordinate beginning-rimes as well as assonance; but the fact that it contains no real alliteration needs to be insisted on, were it only to counteract the influence of such thoughtless assertions as are found in some of our standard histories of English Literature, — e.g. that alliteration consists in "words beginning with the same letter." — The controversy in regard to Middle-English word-accent is still very active, but the whole subject is here practically untouched, as it seemed out of place in a book of this kind. The description of the *King Horn* metre is, therefore, meant merely as the most general information possible, and will not bear a critical analysis. Meanwhile, Schipper's recent remarks in the current volume of *Englische Studien*, 184 ff., seem very sensible. His views were set forth in his *Englische Metrik*: an attack upon them by Wissmann will be found in the *Anglia*, V, 466 ff.; and there are many other voices which have been raised in this dispute. A brief statement of the question will be found in *The Nation*, 1882, Oct. 12th. But these special matters of

controversy belong outside the proper limits of a text-book.

Lastly, teachers will permit the suggestion that where a class has some knowledge of French, it would be profitable to bring out the excellence of our own rhythm by comparing it with the metres of French verse. Rules and examples helpful for this exercise will be found in T. de Banville's *Petit Traité de Poésie Française*, Paris, 1881.

F. B. G.

NEW BEDFORD, 21 January, 1886.

PREFACE TO THIRD EDITION.



SINCE the second edition of this book was printed, there have appeared several works of considerable interest for the subject. Very recently, Professor F. N. Scott, of the University of Michigan, has published a pamphlet on "The Principles of Style"; and a few months earlier, he and Professor Gayley, of the University of California, put forth "A Guide to the Literature of Æsthetics." In both of these pamphlets will be found valuable hints for those who wish to carry their study of poetry into special fields.

These are mainly guides to what has been done. Of original work, the first place belongs to the *Poetik* of Wilhelm Scherer, a posthumous work edited by his colleague, Dr. Meyer (1888). It is fragmentary, but even in its many faults it always contrives to be stimulating and aggressive; and it differs from the annual crop of such works in that its author takes new ground, and quite breaks away from the traditions and prejudices of his own school. As the present "Handbook" is meagre and cautious to a fault in its treatment of the

origin and nature of poetry, this opportunity is taken to present the views of Scherer on these two points.

I. THE NATURE OF POETRY.—Scherer calls poetry “the artistic application, or use (*Anwendung*), of language,” with the limitations that not all poetry is artistic application of language (*e.g.*, Ballet, or Pantomime, both wordless, may yet be poetry); and that not all artistic application of language (*e.g.*, a sermon, or other persuasive rhetoric) is poetry. Yet Scherer concedes that whatever is rhythmic must be assumed to be poetry, though poetry is not necessarily rhythmic. Such unrhythmic forms as must be counted under the head of poetry are in their general character always closely allied to the rhythmic forms (p. 32). Among the oldest phases of poetry are Chorus, Proverb, Tale (*Märchen*), Charm, and Riddle. The first, the choral song of the multitude at feast or sacrifice, contains all rhythmic germs of later poetry; chorus and dance combined are the origin of rhythm. [See pp. 9, 135, of this Handbook.] Yet the primitive tale was unrhythmic; in Scherer’s system the tale, like modern romances (*e.g.*, Scott’s), counts as poetry, and so we have a door opened to what Mr. Saintsbury calls “the pestilent heresy of prose-poetry.” Choral Song and Tale are among the very earliest forms of poetry. Here, then, is new doctrine: “Oldest form of epic poetry is without doubt the [unrhythmic] short tale.” Some indi-

vidual told such a story to the crowd, while the crowd was itself actively poetic in the chorus. The two forms approached each other and formed the epic; so that the oldest phase of epic poetry must have been a mixture of rhythmic and unrhythmic material, song and tale combined, like a Scandinavian Saga. Gradually the rhythm spread from the chorus and the song over the whole poem, took the form of a chant or recitation, and so produced the epic as we know it. Scherer assumes a poet or maker from the start, and thus throws over the pet theory of Jacob Grimm, and of the whole Romantic School, that oldest poetry, real folk-poetry, always “writes itself.”

II. THE ORIGIN OF POETRY.—Here Scherer frankly puts on the badge of Darwinism. To be sure, Schiller furnishes him the word *Spieltrieb*; or, to speak with Scherer, “entertainment,” as the source of poetry; but for the real origin of the thing, recourse is had to Darwin’s views on the expression of emotion in animals. Any exercise of one’s muscles may be undertaken in order to express or give pleasure; hence our laughing, our dancing, and our singing. Singing, like birds’ notes, may express pleasure and desire. The love-lyric may be led back directly to a song analogous to that of the male bird in mating-time. In short, (*a*) poetry arises from the expression of pleasure through leaping, rejoicing, laughing, singing; and (*b*) the original subject of poetry was probably erotic.

It seems to the present writer that this theory not only eliminates from poetry the noblest factor of all, human sympathy on high planes for human joy and sorrow, but hands over poetry itself to the dissecting-table of the biologist. Nevertheless, as a curb upon the silliness which most people think necessary to any talk about poetry, Scherer's book will have a salutary effect.

In the "Modern Language Notes" for December, 1890, Professor Scott corrects the mistake into which so many have fallen in quoting at second-hand Milton's comparison of poetry and rhetoric. The proper words are these: "To which [*sc.* rhetoric] poetry would be made subsequent, or indeed rather precedent, as being less subtile and fine, but more simple, sensuous, and passionate." [See p. 4 of this "Handbook."]

On p. 8 it is stated that English "book" is derived from the word for "beech," which is Skeat's etymology as well as traditional explanation. Sievers, however,—a very potent authority,—now denies this in Paul's *Grundriss der germanischen Philologie*, I, p. 241; and supports his denial with good argument. "Book" meant originally "a writing-tablet." Moreover, since Runes, as Wimmer has proved, were not brought from Rome into Germany until about the end of the second century, the *notæ* mentioned by Tacitus can hardly have had anything to do with the runic alphabet.

It only remains to say that the detailed study of Anglo-Saxon metres is now everywhere based upon the masterly investigations of Sievers (Paul-Braune, *Beiträge*, X ff.), which have shown much more method and regularity in our old rhythm than had been attributed to it by earlier researches. Nevertheless, what is said in § 2, Chap. VII, of this book, though needing correction in detail, is fairly true to the spirit of Anglo-Saxon poetry.

F. B. G.

HAVERFORD COLLEGE, 23 December, 1890.

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INTRODUCTION.

POETRY belongs with music and dancing, and is opposed to the arts of painting, sculpture, and architecture. The latter class is concerned with relations of *space*; we see and touch and measure its products. But the former class has for main principle the idea of motion, of succession, and therefore deals with relations of *time*. In fact, the three arts—poetry, music, dancing—were once united as a single art. Little by little, their paths diverged; but for the oldest times they were inseparable. The principle governing this single early art was *harmony*. Harmony consists really in repetition, just as two or more parallel lines agree or harmonize because one repeats the conditions of the other. So in poetry, or music, or dancing, a certain succession of accents, or notes, or steps is repeated, thus establishing the relation of harmony. To be sure, this harmony of recurrence is found to some extent in all speech; in poetry, however, it is carried to a system, and under the name *rhythm* or *metre* is the distinguishing and necessary mark of poetry. Aristotle and his school maintained that “invention” was the soul of poetry. The substance, say they, is the main thing. But later criticism asserts that in poetry the form (*metre*) is the principal requisite. A late writer has declared that “*metre* is the first and only condition absolutely demanded by poetry.”