

Poets without Book."¹³ This must have been one of the most valuable exercises for Shakspeare. Clarke keeps up his assaults upon poetry.

For when Boys are thought fit to be enter'd in the *Classicks*, they commonly begin with the *Poets*; some with *Ovid de Tristibus*, some with his *Metamorphoses*, and some with both; a very great Absurdity certainly: For none sure that knows what *Poetry* means, can make a Doubt of it, whether the *Style of Prose* be not ordinarily more easy than that of the *Poets*.¹⁴

Emphasizing the poets was the mode in Shakspeare's time, and the reader will find here the explanation of Shakspeare's particular knowledge of these works of Ovid, as demonstrated most concretely by Professor Root.

Clarke's remedy is to study the plain unfigurative style of the historians first.

By so doing, they will learn the genuine and proper Signification of Words, and use them accordingly: They will not be misled by the figurative Use of Words, Phraseology, and Forms of Construction proper only for *Poetry*; nor need they fear to imitate the Language of their Authors: Whereas, in the Reading of the *Poets*, the Case would be quite otherwise; there they could borrow nothing, without rendering their Style very bombastick and ridiculous.¹⁵

Of course, the old system had used Cicero for prose model, but to Clarke, Cicero would have been about as bad as poetry. Clarke is wholly out of sympathy with the Renaissance ideal of style, and so would completely reshape the curriculum to get more matter and less art. Shakspeare's grammar school had a great deal more art than critics trained under Clarke and his kind could realize. The fault of the old system was exactly its strongest point for the poet Shakspeare and for those who held his concept of style both in poetry and prose—that is, for the Renaissance. But for Clarke and the eighteenth century a different style was desired, and a different scale of values prevailed.

Clarke now makes his direct attack upon mincing poetry.

Another Oversight in the common Method of Teaching, is *Making Boys get their Lessons in the Poets without Book*. If this be proper, why is it not equally so, to take the same Method with them in Prose, and make them commit to Memory every Lesson they read there too?¹⁶

The answer is that in the sixteenth century the boys did in effect memorize the prose too, but times had changed. Even Brinsley was

¹³ Clarke, *Essay* (1720), p. 13.

¹⁴ Clarke, *Essay* (1720), pp. 44-45.

¹⁵ Clarke, *Essay* (1720), pp. 47-48.

¹⁶ Clarke, *Essay* (1720), p. 48.