

still planning to save the boys from memorizing at least the prose.¹⁷ By Clarke's day they had been saved. Clarke objects that all the boys get in memorizing poetry is the order of words, and that this order is a vicious order, not being that of prose, nor can it, therefore, help the boys to speak and write. He then quotes Locke at length. Now both Locke and Clarke are overlooking the very thing this exercise was calculated to attain, because neither was in sympathy with it. Sixteenth century school-masters had planned by this means to fix the rhythms of poetry in the heads of the boys so that they also might write poetry by those rhythms. But the eighteenth century had no rhythm, only metre; no ears, only fingers. For people like Clarke and Locke, who had no desire for poetry as conceived by the Renaissance in any form, the teaching of poetry by any method was a waste of time, and to memorize the poets in addition was therefore to add insult to injury. From their view of proper objectives, their criticism was wholly right, and it reflects the eighteenth century. But the sixteenth century had aimed to attain other objectives; it planned a Renaissance and attained it. The eighteenth century planned what it considered to be Classicism and attained it.

Clarke can see the point to some composition—shades of Erasmus, to whom composition was supreme!

I will grant, if you please, it may not be amiss to employ Boys now and then, in making little Discourses upon the Passions, Virtues, Vices or any Moral Subject, when their Minds are by the Reading of *Latin* and *Greek* Authors, and the Master's Discourses upon them, when any Points of Morality come in his Way, furnish'd with a pretty competent Knowledge of those Things, and they can express themselves pretty properly and handsomely in the *Latin* Tongue.¹⁸

But

Of what Use *Versifying* is, I must own, I do not understand: Nay, I cannot but look upon it as dangerous, to give so much Exercise to the Wit and Fancy of Boys, before they have been instructed in, and inured to a close and regular Way of Thinking. But supposing it had no ill Influence upon the Mind; the best you can make of it is but a Diversion, a Degree above Fiddling. For to what useful Purpose can *Verse* serve, where Prose will not do as well, or better? And if it will, Where is the Necessity that Boys should all be made *Poets*, suppose it could be effected? Which yet I doubt will prove an impossible Task: For after all, it is Nature must make them so; Use and Exercise will do but very little in the Case . . . If I might advise therefore,

¹⁷ Brinsley, *Ludus Literarius* (1627), p. 106.

¹⁸ Clarke, *Essay* (1720), pp. 63-64.