INTERLUDE II.

Bookseller. THE monsters of your Botanic Garden are as surprising as the bulls with brazen feet,[1] and the fire-breathing dragons, which guarded the Hesperian fruit;[2] yet are they not disgusting, nor mischievous: and in the manner you have chained them together in your exhibition, they succeed each other amusingly enough, like prints of the London Cries,[3] wrapped upon rollers, with a glass before them. In this at least they resemble the monsters in Ovid's Metamorphoses;[4] but your similies, I suppose, are Homeric?

Poet. The great Bard[5] well understood how to make use of this kind of ornament in Epic Poetry. He brings his valiant heroes into the field with much parade, and sets them a fighting with great fury; and then, after a few thrusts and parries, he introduces a long string of similies. During this the battle is supposed to continue; and thus the time necessary for the action is gained in our imagina-

tions; and a degree of probability produced, which contributes to the temporary deception or reverie of the reader.

But the similies of Homer have another agreeable characteristic; they do not quadrate,[6] or go upon all fours (as it is called), like the more formal similies of some modern writers; any one resembling feature seems to be with him a sufficient excuse for the introduction of this kind of digression; he then proceeds to deliver some agreeable poetry on this new subject, and thus converts every simile into a kind of short episode.

B. Then a simile should not very accurately resemble the subject?

P. No; it would then become a philosophical analogy, it would be ratiocination[7] instead of poetry: it need only so far resemble the subject, as poetry itself ought to resemble nature. It should have so much sublimity, beauty, or novelty, as to interest the reader; and should be expressed in picturesque language, so as to bring the scenery before his eye; and should lastly bear so much veri-similitude as not to awaken him by the violence of improbability or incongruity.

B. May not the reverie of the reader be dissipated or disturbed by disagreeable images being presented to his imagination, as well as by improbable or incongruous ones?

P. Certainly; he will endeavour to rouse himself from a disagreeable reverie, as from the night-mare. And from this may be discovered the line of boundary between the Tragic and the Horrid: which line, however, will veer a little this way or that, according to the prevailing manners of the age or country, and the peculiar associations of ideas, or idiosyncracy of mind, of individuals. For instance, if an artist should represent the death of an officer in battle, by shewing a little blood on the bosom of his shirt, as if a bullet had there penetrated, the dying figure would affect the beholder with pity; and if fortitude was at the same time expressed in his countenance, admiration would be added to our pity. On the contrary, if the artist should chuse to represent his thigh as shot away by a cannon ball, and should exhibit the bleeding flesh and shattered bone of the stump, the picture would introduce into our minds ideas from a butcher's shop, or a surgeon's operation-room, and we should turn from it with disgust. So if characters were brought upon the stage with their limbs disjointed by torturing instruments, and the floor covered with clotted blood and scattered brains, our theatric reverie would be destroyed by disgust, and we should leave the playhouse with detestation.

The Painters have been more guilty in this respect than the Poets; the cruelty of Apollo in flaying Marcias alive[8] is a favourite subject with the antient artists: and the tortures of expiring martyrs have disgraced the modern ones. It requires little genius to exhibit the muscles in convulsive action either by the pencil[9] or the chissel, because the interstices are deep, and the lines strongly defined: but those tender gradations of muscular action, which constitute the graceful attitudes of the body, are difficult to conceive or to execute, except by a master of nice discernment and cultivated taste.

B. By what definition would you distinguish the Horrid from the Tragic?

P. I suppose the latter consists of Distress attended with Pity, which is said to be allied to Love, the most agreeable of all our passions; and the former in Distress, accompanied with Disgust, which is allied to Hate, and is one of our most disagreeable sensations. Hence, when horrid scenes of cruelty are represented in pictures, we wish to disbelieve their existence, and voluntarily exert ourselves to escape from the deception: whereas the bitter cup of true Tragedy is mingled with some sweet consolatory drops, which endear our tears, and we continue to contemplate the interesting delusion with a delight which it is not easy to explain.

B. Has not this been explained by Lucretius,[10] where he describes a shipwreck; and says, the Spectators receive pleasure from feeling themselves safe on land? and by Akenside,[11] in his beautiful poem on the Pleasures of Imagination, who ascribes it to our finding objects for the due exertion of our passions?

P. We must not confound our sensations at the contemplation of real misery with those which we experience at the scenical representations of tragedy. The spectators of a shipwreck may be attracted by the dignity and novelty of the object; and from these may be said to receive pleasure; but not from the distress of the sufferers. An ingenious writer,[12] who has criticised this dialogue in the English Review for August, 1789,[13] adds, that one great source of our pleasure from scenical distress arises from our, at the same time, generally contemplating one of the noblest objects of nature, that

of Virtue triumphant over every[14] difficulty and oppression, or supporting its votary under every suffering: or, where this does not occur, that our minds are relieved by the justice of some signal punishment awaiting the delinquent. But, besides this, at the exhibition of a good tragedy, we are not only amused by the dignity, and novelty, and beauty, of the objects before us; but, if any distressful circumstances[15] occur too forcible[16] for our sensibility, we can voluntarily exert ourselves, and recollect, that the scenery is not real: and thus not only the pain, which we had received from the apparent distress, is lessened, but a new source of pleasure is opened to us, similar to that which we frequently have felt on awaking from a distressful dream; we are glad that it is not true. We are at the same time unwilling to relinquish the pleasure which we receive from the other interesting circumstances of the drama; and on that account quickly permit ourselves to relapse into the delusion; and thus alternately believe and disbelieve, almost every moment, the existence of the objects represented before us.

B. Have those two sovereigns of poetic land, HOMER and SHAKESPEAR, kept their works entirely free from the Horrid?—or even yourself in your third Canto?

P. The descriptions of the mangled carcasses of the companions of Ulysses, in the cave of Polypheme,[17] is in this respect certainly objectionable, as is well observed by Scaliger.[18] And in the play of Titus Andronicus,[19] if that was written by Shakespear (which from its internal evidence I think very improbable), there are many horrid and disgustful circumstances. The following Canto is submitted to the candour of the critical reader, to whose opinion I shall submit in silence.

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[1] In the *Argonautica* (3rd century BCE) by Apollonius Rhodius, Medea's father, the King of Colchis, tasks Jason with harnessing two fire-breathing, bronze-footed bulls to the plough, in order to earn the Golden Fleece.

[2] In Greco-Roman mythology, one of the labors of Heracles / Hercules is to fetch the golden apples cared for by the Hesperides who, according to Hesiod's *Theogony* (line 215), were daughters of Night (Nyx) and Darkness (Erebus). The apples were guarded by the dragon Ladon, slain by Heracles.

[3] Illustrations of London street hawkers, with the calls they used to sell their wares. Several artists created series of London Cries from the late seventeenth century, usually as broadsheets or bound collections. ED may be thinking of those produced by John Kirk and family, engravers and booksellers, which were advertised in 1754 as available on rollers for children: a strip of images was wound on rollers in a glass-faced box so that the viewer could scroll from one image to the next by turning the rollers. (See Sean Shesgreen and David Bywaters, "The First London Cries for Children,"

The Princeton University Library Chronicle 59.2 (1998): pp. 223–50.)

[4] Roman poet Ovid (43 BCE–17 CE) composed *Metamorphoses* c. 2–8 CE, a collection of myths with an emphasis on shape-changing.

[5] Homer.

[6] To conform, agree, or be applicable; to harmonize. The OED gives this passage as an example for this sense.

[7] Reasoning, especially deductively or using syllogisms.

[8] Marsyas was a satyr who played the *aulos* (a kind of pipe). He challenged Apollo (who played the *kithara* or lyre) to a music contest judged by the Muses. Marsyas lost and was hung from a tree and flayed alive by Apollo.

[9] A pencil or a fine tapered paintbrush.

[10] Titus Lucretius Carus (c. 95–55 or 51 BCE), Roman poet and philosopher. He wrote the six-book poem *De Rerum Natura* [On the Nature of Things] which expounds atomic theory, Epicurean philosophy, cosmology, and various natural phenomena. The famous passage ED refers to is found in lines 1–5 of Book 2: "Suave, mari magno turbantibus aequora ventis / e terra magnum alterius spectare laborem; / non quia vexari quemquamst iucunda voluptas, / sed quibus ipse malis careas quia cernere suave est"; "Pleasant it is, when over a great sea the winds trouble the waters, to gaze from shore upon another's great tribulation: not because any man's troubles are a delectable joy, but because to perceive what ills you are free from yourself is pleasant" (trans. W. H. D. Rouse, Loeb Classical Library).

[11] Mark Akenside (1721–1770), poet and physician. His best-known work, *The Pleasures of Imagination* (1744), is a three-book philosophical poem in blank verse with notes. According to "The Design," it aims to deduce the pleasures the imagination finds in nature and the arts from principles in the constitution of the human mind (p. 4). In Book 2, Akenside, like Lucretius, describes viewing a shipwreck from land; he then rhetorically asks whether in the "mutual terror and compassion's tears" of the observers there is "No sweetly-melting softness which attracts, / O'er all that edge of pain, the social pow'rs / To this their proper action and their end?" (2:693–711). Akenside also refers to the same passage in Lucretius in a note to 2:157 about taking pleasure in painful passions: while "*Lucretius* resolves it into self-love […] The ingenious and candid author of the *reflexions critique sur la poesie & sur la peinture* [1719, by Jean-Baptise Dubos (1670–1742)], accounts for it by the general delight which the mind takes in its own activity, and the abhorrence it feels of an indolent and unattentive state: And this, joined with the moral applause of its own temper, which attends these emotions when natural and just, is certainly the true foundation of the pleasure, which as it is the origin and basis of tragedy and epic, deserved a very particular consideration in this poem."

[12] This passage, from "An ingenious writer" to "besides this," does not appear in 1789.

[13] This anonymous review was printed in two parts, the first in the July issue of the *English Review* 14, 1789 (pp. 1–8), and the second in the August issue (pp. 128–32). The passage ED refers to is found at the beginning of the second part. See Appendix 5.3.

[14] 1791: "overy difficulty"; 1794, 1799: "over difficulty"

[15] 1799: "circumstance"

[16] 1789: "forceable"; 1791, 1794, 1799: "forcibly"

[17] Polyphemus, a cyclops. The episode ED refers to is in *The Odyssey* Book IX. Ulysses and some of his men enter Polyphemus's cave while he is out and eat some of his food. When he returns and they are discovered, Polyphemus eats several of them, after dashing out their brains and tearing off their limbs.

[18] Julius Caesar Scaliger (1484–1558) was a scholar, physician, and literary theorist. Among his works is *Poetices libri septem* [Poetics, in seven books] (1561), in which he influentially compares Homer and Virgil, to Homer's disadvantage. Alexander Pope (1688–1744), in his translation of Homer's *Odyssey* (1726), notes that "*Scaliger* injudiciously condemns this description; '*Homer*, says he, 'makes use of the most offensive and loathsome expressions, more fit for a butcher's shambles than the majesty of Heroic Poetry'" (9:344n., referencing Scaliger, *Poetices* Book 5, Chapter 3, p. 241).

[19] A tragedy known for its violence, *Titus Andronicus* was first published in 1594 and composed either around 1590–1591, or in 1593–4. The first critic to question Shakespeare's authorship was Edward Ravenscroft (c. 1640–1697), in the Address to his adaptation of the play, printed in 1687. There is a summary of and commentary on debate over the authorship of *Titus Andronicus* in *The Plays of William Shakespeare. In ten volumes. With the corrections and illustrations of various commentators; to which are added notes by Samuel Johnson and George Steevens* (2nd ed. revised, 1778, vol. 8, pp. 558–62), which judges that "There is every reason to believe, that Shakespeare was not the author of this play" (p. 560).