

‘Non per instituir altri’?

Attitudes to rule-following in sixteenth-century poetics

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Conventional narratives of western European literary history tend to associate a poetics of rule-following with seventeenth-century neoclassicism, in France in particular, and with the sixteenth-century Italian commentators and theorists on whom the neoclassical critics drew.¹ Even in their apparent heyday, however, rules were slippery things; just knowing what they were, beyond the broadest stipulations about genre, unity, verisimilitude, and decorum, was a considerable challenge, if a stimulating one. Pierre Corneille was sure of the rules’ existence and importance, and of their classical pedigree, but complained that ‘Aristotle, and Horace after him, have written so obscurely about them as to require interpreters’, and had thus tended to provoke rather than resolve confusion.² English critics of various kinds and opinions, including John Dennis and John Dryden, tempered their warm enthusiasm for rule and principle with an equal measure of ambivalent scepticism.³ As Michael Werth Gelber nicely explains, Dryden ‘carefully distinguishes between the existence of rules, which he believes is demonstrable, and the content of specific rules, which can be inferred but never proved’ (Gelber 1999: 84–85).

The neoclassical assumption that the rules exist is not straightforwardly a matter of mimetic obedience to classical authority: while Aristotle’s *Poetics* was held up as the single greatest source of inherited critical legislation, and certainly laid down reasoned norms for

¹ For general accounts of ‘the rules’ of neoclassicism, see: for Italy, Hathaway (1962: esp. 437–59); for France, Bray (1931); for England, Gallaway (1940: esp. 185–209) and Marks (1968: esp. 38–47); for Germany, Gillet (1916) and Drux (1976). As this venerable list of studies suggests, monographic treatments of the subject are rare and out of fashion. Of wider relevance are Gelley (1995), Lamb (2014), and Manley (1980), all of which shed light on areas contiguous with the concerns of this article. Most stimulating to my own thinking has been Dolven (2007), which contains several excellent insights into sixteenth-century thinking on rules in the course of a broader study of the relationship between pedagogy and romance.

² Corneille (1963: 822): ‘Aristote et Horace après lui en ont écrit assez obscurément pour avoir besoin d’interprètes’.

³ On Dennis’s attitude to rules, see Paul (1911: 146–52); on Dryden, see Sherwood (1950), Sherwood (1953), Sherwood (1969), and Trowbridge (1946).

dramatic composition, Aristotle does not himself adopt an explicit lexis of rule-following, except in writing of properties that should be ‘aimed at’ (‘δεῖ στοχάζεσθαι’) in the construction of plots or the creation of dramatic character (Aristotle 1965: 1452b28, 1454a16). Both Dionysius of Halicarnassus and the author known as Longinus go further in speaking explicitly of ‘τεχνικὰ παραγγέλματα’ (Russell 1964: 2.1.15) or ‘τὰ παραγγέλματα τῶν τεχνῶν’ (Dionysius 1899–1929: vol. 2, 25.135.19; cf. 26.143.1). Such locutions allude to what C. O. Brink and Michael Heath have termed a ‘technographic’ tradition, modelled on rhetorical handbooks, which Heath would tend to distinguish from something called ‘philosophical poetics’ (Brink 1963–1982: vol. 2, 77; Heath 2013: 171–74); the distinction is as useful as it is inadequate, not least because many of the doctrines proposed by the latter became the rules and precepts of the former.⁴ In the ensuing centuries it was frequently treated as axiomatic that the component materials of any art were rules: Isidore of Seville, for instance, writes that an *ars* is so called because it consists of strict (‘artus’) rules and precepts (Isidore 1911: 1.1.2).

While it is commonly assumed, then, that ‘the rules’ are the intellectual property of neoclassicism, of which they are both aesthetically and ideologically constitutive, the history of the relationship between rules and poetics unfolds over a much longer duration. This complex story is partly one of classical reception, but a reception that has as much to do with forms of thought as with theoretical content. Sixteenth-century theorists of poetry tended to assume that the discipline they were trying to set out was indeed comprised of rules: George Puttenham, for instance, is entirely conventional in equating the existence of a poetic *ars* with that of ‘a certain order of rules’ about poetry (Puttenham 2007: 95).⁵ Benedetto Varchi made the slightly different point that poetry is not an art but a faculty; if it has been called an art this

⁴ For an excellent wider overview of the assumptions and methods of ancient rhetorical technography, see Heath (2004).

⁵ As I have noted elsewhere, Puttenham’s formula is a vulgarization of a concept frequently found in contemporary manuals of logic, notably that of Philip Melanchthon, with its deeper roots in Stoicism; see Hetherington (2016b: 59–60).

is only because it has been reduced to rules and precepts.⁶ The terminology is omnipresent, varying only in its concentration. Scholarship on works of sixteenth-century poetics has generally focussed on their doctrines and debates, including questions over mimesis, verisimilitude, genre, delight, and the purpose of literature; conversely, little attention has been paid to their investment in the practice of rule-making and rule-following, which is, after all, one of their most distinctive features as descriptive and prescriptive accounts of human creativity. This article seeks simultaneously to draw attention to and to defamiliarize this practice, examining some of the different ways in which literary rules were thought about in the period in order to reflect on what they imply about the process of literary creation and about the technical and axiological realms within which poets practised their art.

I. Definitions and divisions

At the beginning of Giordano Bruno's *De gli eroici furori*, a complex hybrid of sonnet sequence, commentary, and philosophical dialogue published in London in 1585 and dedicated to Philip Sidney, Tansillo insists that there are many different kinds of poet because there are many different kinds of talent or cast of mind ('ingegni'), and that the conventional genres do little justice to this human variety. Cicada observes that there are certain rule-makers or 'regolisti' who would like to judge every poet by Aristotle's rules—beastly people, Tansillo thinks, who are deeply misguided in their belief that rules might ever teach someone how to be a second Homer. Instead, he suggests, rules are principally useful as descriptive tools of literary knowledge, ways of painting a detailed picture ('pittura') of a particular poet's work (Bruno 2013: 40–45). Those who think that the rules and norms of poetics are practically useful are, for Bruno, making a category mistake, wrong-headedly pursuing a prescriptive model of

⁶ Varchi (1590: 571): 'si chiama arte, si chiama non perchè sia veramente arte, ma per lo essere ella stata sotto precetti ridotta, e sotto regole.' I am grateful to Micha Lazarus for this reference.

classical reception at the expense of a less instrumental and more critically exact descriptive one. Bruno's critique demonstrates, furthermore, the existence of a dispute not just about what 'the rules' of poetry might be, but about what rules themselves might be—not just about their content, that is, but about their very form or nature.

There might be as many types of poetological rule as of rules in general—including conventions, positive laws, purposive intentions, technical instructions, and rules of thumb—which both require and resist precise differentiation. It is, indeed, highly likely that apparent differences among early modern theorists on specific points of literary doctrine sometimes spring from divergent underlying conceptions of the nature and purpose of theoretical rule-making. Discursive or philosophical statements about literature made by one theorist might easily be re-read, or misread, as directive rules by another: thus Gabriel Harvey, in a marginal annotation to his copy of George Gascoigne's *Posies*, writes of 'A pithie rule in Sir Philips Apologie for Poetrie. The Inuention must guide & rule the Elocution: non contrà'—a doctrine that Sidney declines to express in such baldly prescriptive terms (Harvey 1913: 169). Likewise, to borrow a Kantian distinction that later became important to twentieth-century philosophical enquiry into rules and language, disagreements about specific *regulative rules* may be a function of disagreements about the *constitutive rules* of literature itself, including general principles about its instrumental value, arguments about which are conducted by proxy at the level of particulars.⁷ Jeff Dolven is right to point out 'how underdeveloped most humanist reflection on rule-following tends to be' (2007: 36); clear and explicit thinking about these issues was correspondingly rare.

The metaphorically rich but conceptually treacherous terminology of rule-following itself contributes to such confusions. The word 'rule' was used, in early modern English, to translate from Latin both *regula* and *ratio*, terms which could themselves converge in near

⁷ For the distinction between regulative and constitutive rules, see Searle (1969: 33–42).

synonymity or diverge quite widely.⁸ The semantic range of *ratio* is notoriously broad, but could at one extreme include ‘reason’ in its more abstract and disembodied sense; *regula*, on the other hand, originally meant a straight stick, a literal and material ruler, which sets it in relation to terms like *norma* (a carpenter’s or mason’s square) and *libella* (a plumb-line or level), and to the Greek *κανών* (a straight rod or bar), all of which could, in turn, denote rules either physical or abstract. Other relevant but less obviously metaphorical terms include the more generic *praeceptum* and the more explicitly juridical *lex*. Attempts to fix the value of these terms failed to resolve their overlapping ambiguities. The *Lexicon Philosophicum* published by the German scholar Rudolph Goclenius suggests that *regula* properly denotes a brief *praeceptio* or *praeceptum* that does allow exceptions; less properly, he thinks, it may denote an infallible canon or measure (Goclenius 1613: 974–75). For another early seventeenth century philosopher, Johann Heinrich Alsted, the arts and sciences are made up of both *praecepta*, which are their basic definitions and divisions, and *regulae*, which are known as theorems in the sciences and canons in the arts, canons being rules that guide practice (Alsted 1630: vol. 1, 75). Most instances of such terminology, in Latin or in vernacular languages, are unlikely to be the product of studied or nuanced selection among the various possibilities. Some writers, occasionally, are likely to have been alive to the metaphorical roots of these terms, and even to the possibility of inter-lingual play—but not all, and not always.

The interchangeability of these terms is visible, for example, in Nicholas Udall’s English translation of Erasmus’s *Apophthegmata*, which renders the ‘certas rationes’ needed by men of affairs as ‘suer rewles’ (Erasmus 1542: *6r).⁹ Erasmus’s analogy for such *rationes*

⁸ In some accounts, *regulae* have a special role in communicating *rationes*. The legal writer William Fulbeck, for example, argues that in teaching any subject we must show not just ‘that others did thus’ but ‘why they did so’; rules are those bearers of causal explanation ‘in which the reason and knowledge of doing thinges aright is conteyned. A man cannot make a shooe by a number of lastes, but hee must haue instruction of one that is skillfull in the trade’ (Fulbeck 1600: M2v). Fulbeck silently borrows this last image from the closing passage of Aristotle’s *Sophistical Refutations* (see Aristotle 1958: 184a2–8). See also Wilson (1553: y1r): ‘Rules wer therefore geuen [...] that those whiche could not see Arte hid in another mannes doynes, should yet se the rules open, all in an order set together’.

⁹ I owe this particular reference to Dolven (2007: 111). For the Latin original see Erasmus (2010: 38).

here is with the ‘suer poinctes’ or ‘certos [...] modos ad manum’ relied upon by wrestlers—the movements and bodily configurations, inculcated by training, to which one can resort in pugilistic necessity. Erasmus had employed the same image in another work, the *Enchiridion militis christiani*, where the wrestling holds stand in comparison not to *rationes* but to the book’s twenty-two *regulae* or *canones* of Christian life. Erasmus, who had begun the work in a more abstract, less pragmatic vein, introduces these rules by expressing concern lest his short handbook turn into an ‘ingens volumen’. The value of the rules lies, he suggests, in being conveyed ‘breviter’; but brevity, it turns out, is a strangely elusive thing. First, Erasmus mixes his similes, so that what are at one moment wrestling holds (‘nexus quosdam palaestricos’) are, in the very next, threads leading one out of the labyrinth of worldly error (Erasmus 2016: 158). Second, Erasmus’s rules are not in fact very brief; or, if they are, they are buried in the longer, essay-like chapters of the book, as if insufficient to stand alone. It is perhaps in this immediate retreat from brevity, however, that the subtlety and justness of Erasmus’s analogy between rule and wrestling hold become most evident: both are forms of action which can be learned in advance, but in the knowledge that the configurations of mind or body they enable one to attempt in the midst of practical action will always deviate from the norm to which they aspire. They are, moreover, at once instruments of technical mastery and marks of a kind of helplessness.

One contention of this article is that such subtle thinking about rules and rule-following could take place even in the absence of a well-developed conceptual framework or consistent vocabulary, and did in fact do so in the domain of poetics, a pursuit which is partly constituted by the very attempt, however provisional, to legislate for, or regulate, acts of poetic making and their subsequent interpretation. The time is ripe to reassess the role of rules in poetics, and to focus on their form rather than their content, thanks in part to the development of a large and sophisticated body of thought about rule-following in a range of disciplines since the mid-

twentieth century. Philosophers, legal theorists, sociologists, and others have exposed the logic of rule-following as stranger than we thought we knew; their insights can sharpen our sense of what was at stake when an early modern theorist posited a rule. Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* (especially §§185–242) have engendered a substantial philosophical sub-field about the very possibility of rule-following, asking (among other questions) what actually happens when we think we are following a rule, or whether a rule can ever in fact justify or determine a particular course of action (Wittgenstein 2009: 80–95). Wittgenstein's responses to such questions are not answers but therapeutic excogitations, irreducible to philosophical dogma, and thus hugely stimulating of commentary and debate. While it would be crass to extract particular points as if they were settled propositions, aspects of Wittgenstein's thinking will be useful to the analyses of poetological rules attempted below.

The influence of this thinking has not been limited to analytic philosophy. Pierre Bourdieu, who was avowedly influenced by Wittgenstein's investigations of rule-following, grounded his critique of the structuralist method in anthropology in its presumptuous claim to be able to map systems of practice objectively, from a privileged position outside those systems, which necessarily fails to do justice to the lived experience, 'lifeworld', or 'habitus' within which such practices are enacted (Bourdieu 1977). Bourdieu contends that a habitus can be 'objectively "regulated" and "regular" without being in any way the product of obedience to rules' (Bourdieu 1990: 53); he is correspondingly keen to move away from 'the theory of action as execution' that the concept of rule-following seems to imply (Bourdieu 2000: 63). The topic has also been a major interest of legal theorists: most influentially, H. L. A. Hart rejected the idea that law consists in coercive orders emanating from a sovereign and enforced by threat of punishment in favour of a model of law as a system of rules. Hart argued, furthermore, that such a system must be composed both of the primary rules that determine behaviour under the system and secondary rules that regulate the primary ones; most important

among the secondary rules is a ‘rule of recognition’ that identifies what counts as binding law within a particular system (Hart 2012: esp. 94–110).¹⁰ This raises a wider set of philosophical questions about (for example) how we know when a particular rule applies, how we know how to apply it, how much interpretation a rule requires, whether there are rules to interpret rules, and, if so, how many. Talk of rules threatens an infinite explanatory regress.

II. Grammar and temporality

While plenty of early modern poetic rule-making proceeded in happy ignorance of these subtle and vexing considerations, almost any such process committed theorists to a host of assumptions and begged questions which, when analysed, tell us a lot about the practice of literary theory in the period. William Webbe’s 1586 *Discourse of English Poetry* is a largely sub-philosophical and historical survey of its subject, offering a number of particular suggestions for the improvement of English letters. Webbe comes closest to writing a technographic poetics, first, in his perceptive remarks on English versification, and then in presenting fifty-four ‘canons or general cautions of poetry, prescribed by Horace, first gathered by Georgius Fabricius Chemnensis, which [he] thought good to annex to this treatise as very necessary observations to be marked of all poets’ (Webbe 2016: 132).¹¹ These canons are clearly intended as prescriptive guidelines or norms, either to be considered before, or to be referred to during, the process of composition. Webbe’s presentation of Fabricius’s distillation of Horace’s *Ars poetica* immediately raises questions about what kind of ‘canon’ or rule we are dealing with.¹² In what way is a ‘canon’ like a ‘caution’, and in what way like an

¹⁰ For a provocative critique of Hart’s theory from the perspective of legal history, see Ibbetson (2004).

¹¹ Fabricius’s *De re poetica* had originally been published in a four-book version at Leipzig in 1556; by 1566 there were seven books, although the shorter version continued to be printed in Germany, France, and the Netherlands. The Horatian precepts apparently first appeared in the Paris edition of 1584, thirteen years after Fabricius’s death.

¹² In Fabricius’s book these distilled Horatian precepts are presented not as *canones* but as ‘catholica’—as ‘universals’ or ‘general properties’ (Fabricius 1584: 300r).

‘observation’? What is implied or entailed by a poet’s ‘mark[ing]’ of a rule? Is the rule marked or observed in advance of or during the process of composition; is it a training aid that can be happily discarded once the requisite level of poetic skill has been acquired, or a tool as necessary as a chisel to a sculptor or, for that matter, a *κανών* or *norma* to a mason or carpenter?

These canons are part of a longer-standing tradition that was, in the sixteenth century, more closely rooted in the reception of Horace than in that of Aristotle. An early, highly significant, and oft-reprinted contribution to the sixteenth-century discourse of poetic rule-making was the commentary on Horace’s *Ars poetica* published by Jodocus Badius Ascensius in 1500, and then in an expanded edition in 1503. Badius divides Horace’s 476-line poem into twenty-seven sections of between two and thirty-seven lines, offering detailed commentary and extracting from each section a summative *regula*.¹³ Some of these *regulae* are essentially paraphrases, some direct commands, some descriptions of the kind of creative activity or behaviour the text envisages. While some are long and unwieldy, others are succinct—especially the twentieth *regula*, which summarizes lines 275–94: ‘Castigandum est priusque emittatur opus’ (Horace 1503: XVIIIr).¹⁴ The rule-making function of this gerundive is obvious, obliging the poet to behave in a certain way, although it is silent on how one might actually go about emending one’s work; we might well ask, in the spirit of Borges or Carroll, how many further and more particular rules would be needed to specify such corrective action, short of mapping out the corrected poem in all its detail. Delicacies of grammatical construction are central to the ways in which Badius’ rules envisage the deontic constraints they impose on any reader who might take seriously their implicit claim to function as guides to literary composition. The first rule, drawn from lines 1–13 of the *Ars poetica*, is as follows:

¹³ White (2013: 211–16) places these Horatian *regulae* in the context of Badius’ other commentaries. See also Moss (1999: 67–69) and Weinberg (1961: 81–85). On the inconsistency of the rules stipulated in Badius’ commentary, see Moss (2003: 203–204).

¹⁴ All references to Horace (1503) are to the folio sequence in Badius’s edition of *De arte poetica libellus*, which is the second, separately foliated item in the volume.

Compositurus seu conscripturus quodlibet opus sic rem omnem excogitabit: excogitatam disponet: dispositam ornabit: vt nihil monstri simile aut repugnans in eo sit: sed omnia sui similia: atque inter se quadrantia (Horace 1503: IIv).

(He who is to compose or write any work will devise everything, arrange what has been devised, and embellish what has been arranged, in such a way that there may be nothing monstrous or incongruous in it, but that everything may be self-consistent and properly joined together.)

The third rule, drawn from lines 24–37, is:

Transitionem in aliam materiam ita faciemus vt compositio non sit monstri ac prodigii similis. Præterea non sic vnum vitabimus peccatum vt in aliud incidamus: sed rem viribus nostris æquam aggressi sic pertractabimus vt finis principio ac medio respondeat. Qui tamen penitus diuersa docent satis fecerint si corpus sit vnum licet membra diuersa dummodo non repugnantia (Horace 1503: IIIIv).

(We will make a transition to a different subject in such a way that the composition does not resemble a monster or prodigy. We will not, furthermore, avoid one fault in such a way that we fall into another. Instead, having undertaken a subject equal to our powers, we will handle everything so that the end coheres with the beginning and the middle. Those who present things utterly diverse will have done enough if the body of the text is united, even if there are diverse members, provided that they are not incompatible.)

Each of these rules specifies future behaviour in a particular situation. In the first rule, the participles ‘compositurus’ and ‘conscripturus’ imagine someone poised to begin writing, whereupon the indicative ‘excogitabit’ casts him into an as-yet imagined future. The third rule similarly relies on the future tense, while acknowledging that the condition for the rule’s fulfilment lies in a decision we must already have taken before we start writing (to adopt a subject suited to our talent). Neither rule provides detailed instructions for the substance of the behaviour it stipulates: the words *ita*, *sic*, and *ut* obscure the nitty-gritty of practical poetics, in lieu of which they merely offer a model of the structure of the relationship between intention and result. Moreover, despite looking like prescriptions for future action, they seem to admit that the proof of the pudding will be in the eating, the proof of the rule in its exceptions: these are rules in the future perfect (‘satis fecerint si’), holding the poet to a standard that the rule itself cannot stipulate.

The final section of the *Ars poetica* (lines 452–76) offers an extraordinary description of the mad, unsocialized, ursine poet who must be avoided by the sane lest he kill them with his verses. Badius sanitizes this quite considerably to form the final *regula*:

Summopere cauendum est ne in opinione nostra persistentes incorrigibiles simus:
& dum gloriam captamus omnibus ridiculi simus: quod vitium pulchre vitauerimus
si sapientum iudicio auscultauerimus (Horace 1503: XXIIIr).

(We need most especially to be on our guard lest, persisting in our own opinion,
we be incorrigible, and lest, in hunting for glory, we be totally laughable. We will
avoid this fault beautifully if we obey the judgement of the wise.)

Like the first and third *regulae*, this relies on the future tense and a final clause (introduced by ‘ne’) to communicate its regulative force. Noteworthy in the final colon is a

term whose centrality to the *regula* is moot: ‘pulchre’. Does the rule entertain the possibility of a merely adequate performance that might avoid the fault of ridiculous incorrigibility without doing so ‘beautifully’; or is the adverbial supplement in fact constitutive of the rule as a whole? Furthermore, the injunction to heed the judgement (singular) of the wise (plural)—where the grammatical number strongly suggests a general faculty rather than a series of discrete judgements—implies at least some pre-existing ability to recognize that judgement, which may mean that we must possess at least some judgement ourselves. If not, how could we be expected to implement the rule; but if so, why do we need the rule? And what, in this scenario, would be the difference between knowing and obeying? A similar question is raised by George Puttenham in *The Art of English Poesy*, when he stipulates that rhyme words should not have identical vowel and consonant combinations, but comments that this ‘rule nevertheless is not well observed by many makers for lack of good judgment and a delicate ear’ (Puttenham 2007: 170): knowing, and even observing, the rule is useless unless one has an ability to apply it. Again, an adverb (‘well’) highlights a wrinkle in the rule, gesturing beyond what can be prescribed to the modalities of lived experience.

Badius’s *regulae*, then, might be subjected to all kinds of criticism: as both summary and supplement they add little to, and subtract much from, the richness of Horace’s text and from Badius’ own commentary, exhibiting all the fullness and all the emptiness of something that has been distilled or reduced. They are unlikely to have much power, in and of themselves, to turn someone into a good poet. It is, of course, probable that they do not bear this much scrutiny, nor were meant to bear; were attendant rules, ones that would do to make a textbook, swell a commentary or two.¹⁵ Nevertheless, they highlight conceptual difficulties that attend

¹⁵ Some modern philosophers distinguish a rule from its various possible formulations, and might therefore see these grammatical intricacies as irrelevant: see Schauer (1991: 62–64), which references earlier discussions. The intriguing idea that Badius’s rules might ultimately exist before or beyond the specifics of their expression does not, of course, dispel the strangeness of those specifics or the interest of the way they model the normative structure of the rules.

any attempt to specify creative acts in abstractly normative terms. Some poetic theorists of the period seem to have known that the exercise was doomed if taken too seriously. George Gascoigne's *Certain Notes of Instruction Concerning the Making of Verse or Ryme in English* (1575)—which are as much *commentarii quidam* as *notitiae certae*—trip balletically over their own feet when they venture to posit rules: poems must, we are told, be grounded ‘upon some fine invention’, which must in turn have in it ‘*aliquid salis*’, by which, Gascoigne says, ‘I meane some good and fine devise, shewing the quicke capacitie of a writer: and where I say *some good and fine invention* I meane that I would have it both fine and good’. Aware that this is unsatisfactory, and chary of giving ‘generall examples’, Gascoigne resorts to a few specific exemplary scenarios, after which he writes: ‘Thus much I adventure to deliver unto you (my freend) upon the rule of Invention, which of all other rules is most to be marked, and hardest to be prescribed in certayne and infallible rules’ (Gascoigne 2000: 454–55).¹⁶ Gascoigne looks as if he doesn’t know what he’s doing: in fact, he does; but he is playing a wrier theoretical game at certainty’s expense than these clumsy remarks explicitly suggest.

To have noticed, as Gascoigne seems to have done, that rules are more complex things than their confident commands allow was to anticipate some of the concerns of the modern thinking about rules that I described earlier. This is not to say that species of scepticism about rules were unknown before modernity: one need think only, for example, of Aristotle’s recognition that one cannot set down universal principles which will be correct in all particular cases, and thence of the need for judicial *ἐπιείκεια*—a recognition that inspired the long jurisprudential tradition of thinking about equity.¹⁷ Another kind of scepticism about rule-following is exemplified in certain seventeenth-century critiques of the topical invention beloved of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century rhetoricians and dialecticians. The Port-Royal

¹⁶ For stimulating essays that shed oblique light on Gascoigne’s apparently paradoxical concept of ‘generall examples’—which might as well be rules—see Gelley (1995).

¹⁷ Aristotle (1894: 1137b11–14). Compare Aristotle’s statement in his *Rhetoric* that no *τέχνη* deals with particulars (Aristotle 1959: 1356b30).

logicians Antoine Arnauld and Pierre Nicole denied that the topical *sedes argumentorum* were ever really used to invent arguments, and in so doing they understood the topics as *règles*. They cite a passage of the *Aeneid* which had once been used, by Petrus Ramus, to illustrate the topic of efficient cause; but Arnauld and Nicole argue that Virgil could only have written these lines had he first forgotten the rules, if indeed he had known them, and then forgotten himself in order to transform himself into the passion he portrayed (Arnauld and Nicole 1662: 297). Rule-following, if understood as a conscious experience, is simply too clunky and too slow a process to represent the mental acts performed by Virgil in the exigent moment of composition. Rules may, perhaps, explain cognitive processes that take place in advance of the act of writing, and may later be invoked to measure or judge the product of that process, but they cannot take us into the experiential dynamics of the act itself.

Whether or not we agree with Arnauld's and Nicole's understanding of the topics as *règles*, their critique touches on a worry often voiced in sixteenth-century discussions of poetic rules: namely, that rule-following slows down thought in a way that seems almost physically cumbersome. In one of the more ostensibly serious and level-headed sections of *The Defence of Poesy*, Philip Sidney argues that 'the highest-flying wit [must] have a Daedalus to guide him', but says of English poets that 'neither artificial rules nor imitative patterns, we much cumber ourselves withal' (Sidney 1973: 111–12). This is couched as a criticism of poets who have not been willing to work at their craft; but the word 'cumber' tacitly acknowledges the costliness of the very rule-following Sidney purports, evasively, to advocate. Puttenham was also wary of how 'cumbersome' laboured art might be to courtly minds (Puttenham 2007: 243); and King James, laying down his own 'Reulis and Cautels to be obseruit and eschewit in Scottis Poesie', recommended to his reader that before he 'cummer' himself with reading these rules, he must, by nature, have some poetic inclination or talent, 'for gif Nature be nocht the cheif worker in this airt, Reulis wilbe bot a band to Nature, and will mak zow within short space

weary of the haill airt' (James VI of Scotland 1584: K2v-3r).¹⁸ Sidney's and James's comments on the encumbrance threatened by rules are in one sense, of course, merely reiterations of the need for the synthesis of nature, art, and exercise identified by Roman rhetoricians and their early modern followers: plodding doctrine shouldn't get in the way of the poet who has become habituated to his skill. Nevertheless, any account that treats poesy as a *τέχνη* governed by rules and norms must at some point consider the process of their implementation, and with it the idea that *praxis* or *poiesis* are not forms of precipitate action engaged upon with utter spontaneity, but experiences that unfold diachronically as the poet's conscious mind actively regulates his conceptual and linguistic creativity. Speaking of rules, however slight our philosophical rationale for so doing, commits us to assumptions about the nature and temporality of the creative act.

III. Abstraction and spatiality

Besides the explicit formulation of *regulae* exemplified by Badius and found, to varying degrees, in most works of early modern poetics, we also find a less explicit but no less intricate exploration of rule-following in works that sit less comfortably in a technographic tradition. Julius Caesar Scaliger's *Poetices libri septem* (1561), with its extravagant display of critical learning, is notorious for its investment in the idea of deliberately exercised art; but, as we shall see, it scopes out the realm of rules and norms in a way that far exceeds mechanical prescription. Quite early in this massive text Scaliger makes plain his interest in the question of literary norms, during his discussion of the Homeric roots of the dramatic genres.¹⁹ He reports the common opinions both that the composition of the *Iliad* preceded that of the *Odyssey*, and that the former was the 'modulus' for tragedy and the latter for comedy. Despite

¹⁸ On James's attitude to poetic rules, their political implications, and their subsequent reception in the hands of Gabriel Harvey, see Richards (2008).

¹⁹ On this subject, see Lecointe (2012).

Homer's temporal priority and reported influence on the formation of the dramatic genres, however, Scaliger is highly sceptical of his normative force, arguing that rather than treat Homer *as* a norm, we should judge him *by* a norm: 'non omnia ad Homerum referenda, tamquam ad normam, censeo: sed & ipsum ad normam' (Scaliger 1561: 10).²⁰ However, the norm that Homer fails to provide is out there somewhere: in literature, as in all things, there is a single correct original ('unum quippiam [...] rectum et primum') which is the 'norma' to which all the others can be referred. In the field of literary production this norm is provided by epic, from whose 'ratio' all the other parts of poetry take their direction, acting as the source of those 'communes leges' that underpin the more specific precepts about other genres (Scaliger 1561: 144). Within the epic genre, in turn, it is Virgil who reigns supreme. Scaliger compares Virgil's normative achievement to the ideal beauty visible in the work of the best painters and sculptors, abstracted and compounded from the many excellent but less-than-ideal things in nature. Mere human embodiment diminishes the beauty even of those who are perfect in their proportions ('in ipsis normis atque dimensionibus'); only art—the very best art—can make these norms fully available to us. It would be impossible to draw from nature itself the kinds of examples with which Scaliger is provided by what he calls the 'Virgiliana idea' (Scaliger 1561: 113).

Later, in the fifth book of his poetics, Scaliger amasses parallel passages from Virgil and Homer for comparative criticism. He could provide even more such passages, he writes, but these will suffice for the use of the imitator, whose example, rule, principle, and goal ('exemplum, regula, principium, finis') must be Virgil (Scaliger 1561: 245). This is one of the relatively rare occasions on which Scaliger uses the term *regula*. He knows, of course, that the word is metaphorical, and says as much in his discussion of metre and rhythm: *metron* is a

²⁰ William Scott was happy to render Scaliger's 'norma' as 'rule' when he approvingly borrowed and translated this passage in 1599: see Scott (2013: 33).

‘regula’ that orders the basic phonetic matter of language, and *rhythmos* is a ‘modus regulæ’. We borrow the term ‘regula’ from geometry, where it denotes a straight line; the relationship between the ‘regula’ of *metron* and the ‘modus regulæ’ of *rhythmos* is analogous to that between the abstract straight line of geometry and the applied straight line (and its exciting derivative: curved lines) in architecture (Scaliger 1561: 56).²¹ Here Scaliger’s etymologically affined terms *norma* and *regula* meet: the first, as we have seen, denotes a carpenters’ or masons’ square, the second a straight rod. These are not dead metaphors. There is good reason to think that Scaliger was alive to the practical architectural origins of these terms since he draws on a rich stream of Vitruvian vocabulary, including not only the ‘modulus’ we have already encountered but terms like ‘responsus’ and ‘commensus’, used in Scaliger’s prefatory letter to his son Sylvius, which are either unique to Vitruvius in classical Latin or used in uniquely Vitruvian senses (Scaliger 1561: a4r).

One cannot, of course, use Virgil’s poems like a set-square to check the rectitude of one’s own writing at every turn, however useful it might be to think of those poems as *normae*. The *Aeneid* is not a tool or instrument outside the poetic self to be picked up and put down as required—it is too unwieldy for that, unless one has somehow internalized its particular details and the general qualities to which they attest. This is why, having dealt exhaustively with literary history, genre, versification, content and style, Scaliger insists at the beginning of Book Five on the importance of imitation and judgement in forming the poet (Scaliger 1561: 214). Scaliger’s stress on critically aware immersion in literary history as the most important precondition for good writing is the escape valve in what could otherwise have been a normative poetics of excessive rigidity and numbing detail. Normativity, as experienced by the poet, must be a living principle, not a straightjacket of rules. Scaliger does give plenty of instructions, does use the idiom of ‘lex’ and ‘praecepta’, and has as fine a line in slightly vague

²¹ See further Laurens (1986).

final clauses as *Badius*; the epic poem must, for instance, be divided into books according to subject-matter so that those books seem to determine their own bounds ('vt libri ipsi illos sibi terminos quæsisse videantur'), a feat which only Virgil has ever managed (Scaliger 1561: 144). More importantly, however, Scaliger opens up for our consideration a wider notion of normativity, appealing to the craft-based language of *norma* and *regula* to come to terms with the nature of literary production—with the relationship (to coin a phrase) between tradition and the individual talent. Beyond mere technical rules, the Scaligerian poet operates in a regulated realm of obligations and norms; the appointed task of the *Poetices libri septem* is to explore the scope of this realm.

Central to the conceptual architecture of Scaliger's work (which is admittedly not nearly as theoretically coherent as its reputation suggests) is its stress on teleology. If, for Scaliger, Virgil is simultaneously the 'exemplum, regula, principium', and 'finis' of the imitating poet, the equation of rules and final causes is something shared by other early modern theorists. Indeed, the concept of an art of poetry structured by its final cause makes the final cause itself into a kind of rule, in relation to which all other rules, from general precepts to particular points of technique, are logically and hierarchically subordinate. As I have showed at some length elsewhere (Hetherington 2016a), William Scott provides just such a model of poetics, and one which is highly self-conscious in its enactment of this methodological premise. An art is 'a frame and body of rules compacted and digested by reason out of observation and experience, behoveful to some particular good end in our civil life' (Scott 2013: 7). Accordingly, Scott unambiguously defines the task of any technographic work as 'prescribing certain sufficient rules how to work to some good end', and his own role as modeller of poesy as 'laying down the rules and way how in style to feign or represent things' (Scott 2013: 6). He speaks without reservation of 'the rules and laws the poet must observe in his imitation', while acknowledging that 'it is neither possible nor needful to set down so absolute a frame of rules

in the institution of our poet as shall be able to direct him to every particular circumstance required and belonging to the setting forth and dressing of every poem' (Scott 2013: 29). More important, in fact, than any specific rule laid down by Scott is the principle that 'every work is directed and *overruled* by the end' (my emphasis): the final cause both of each specific poem and of poetry in general is itself a kind of rule, since 'by knowing and observing the end we gather what are the most convenient means to produce it' (Scott 2013: 30). The quasi-spatial 'observation' of an as-yet distant end or goal generates, by a complex dialectical process that simultaneously works towards that end and reasons backwards from it, a method for its achievement. As in Scaliger's case, though in a very different way, what could have been a rather mechanistic technography flickers into something more dynamic, as Scott takes us inside the process of composition by suggesting how the poet might negotiate with a set of rules, guided by, but also actively construing, their normative force.

IV. Personality and life

A rule-based poetics of the kind offered by Scott, which carefully legislates for genre, subject matter, plot, lexis, style, and so on, is necessarily somewhat impersonal, prioritizing artistic rationality over expressive idiosyncrasy. His brief allusion to 'the differences of poets' is immediately suppressed by the corrective 'or rather poems'; those latter differences, seemingly more objective and susceptible to logical analysis, 'will best be showed by the manner of handling and the particular end, evermore alterable according to the subject or argument' (Scott 2013: 18). Style is one area where personality is a legitimate theoretical concern: Scott agrees with Cicero when he 'discerns as many differences in style as there are persons that write, because everyone hath some peculiarity of nature and some difference of apprehension out of which he inditeth' (Scott 2013: 51). Note that even here, however, the concept of individuality is dressed in the always incipiently logical language of differentiation. However much Scott

avoids dull prescriptivism by showing us how his rules function as part of a dynamic process, his poetics sees the rules it lays down as principles arrived at by an impersonal rationality. Erring on the side of generality, Scott acknowledges, but cannot fully embrace, the limitations that human difference imposes on theory.

This is very different, of course, from the utterly personal sense of the nature of rules we earlier encountered in Giordano Bruno. It is Bruno's contention that since rules are merely descriptive of the practices of individual poets, they are emphatically not didactically effective—'non per instituir altri' (Bruno 2013: 42). Indeed, some early modern invocations of the concept of rules plainly understand them not as dictates of an impersonal rationality but as principles of individuation, rooted in the lived idiosyncrasies of particular minds: thus Sidney's revised *Arcadia* describes Plexirtus as 'he, who by the rules of his own mind could construe no other end of men's doings but self-seeking' (Sidney 1987: 263). I want, in the final pages of this article, to think about the broader possibilities raised by Bruno's bold claim by examining the late-sixteenth-century English writer who, I suggest, thinks most richly about the normative environment in which poetic writing takes place, both out in society and within the rule-less regularity of his own mind: Samuel Daniel.²²

Daniel largely eschews the technical language of rule-following, about which he is sceptical, in favour of a wider exploration of the poet's responsibilities and duties towards his society and, more importantly, himself.²³ His poem *Musophilus* is simultaneously an essay, dialogue, defence of poetry, and defence of learning. Its prefatory sonnet, addressed to Fulke

²² Though it is inessential to my argument, we might also entertain, without being able to prove, the possibility that Daniel's own thinking about the norms of poetics owes something to Bruno's. Daniel's first publication is prefaced by a letter from 'N. W.' that strongly suggests that they had both heard Bruno speak in Oxford in the mid-1580s (Daniel 1585: *4r). Daniel and Bruno later shared mutual acquaintances in both Fulke Greville and John Florio. Hilary Gatti is confident of their intellectual affinities: she finds *Musophilus* 'is full of echoes of Bruno's works', largely on the grounds of Daniel's praise for open-minded scientific inquiry (Gatti 1995: 817).

²³ Beyond the works discussed below, Daniel's rule-scepticism is especially visible in his verse epistle to Lord Egerton, which argues that 'euen Iniustice may be regulare; / And no proportion can there be betwixt / Our actions which in endlesse motion are / And th'Ordinances which are alwayes fixt.' Daniel therefore praises equity as 'the soule of Law', which 'Dwell's not in written Lines' but 'is that Lesbian square, that building fit, / Plies to the work, not forc't the worke to it' (Daniel 1930: 104–105).

Greville on the occasion of its first publication in 1599, promises us a model of ‘the forme of mine owne heart’, and a personal justification of the particular ‘course’ undertaken by Daniel’s Muse (Daniel 1930: 67).²⁴ The same terminology introduces Daniel’s 1603 *Defence of Ryme*, written in opposition to the classicizing quantitative metrics espoused by Thomas Campion: the work was, Daniel says, initially drafted ‘to confirm my selfe in mine owne courses’ (Daniel 1930: 127). Daniel returns repeatedly to the term ‘course’ in these works and in his verse epistles. In *Musophilus* it is used to take us deep inside Daniel’s experience of poetic making, as he sets the poet’s own private procedures (what he does *as a matter of course*, or *as a rule*, we might say) against the normative environment in which he operates.

Philocosmos opens the dialogue by accusing the poet Musophilus of pursuing an ‘ungainfull art’ and ‘toiling to no end’ (ll. 7–8), that is, of engaging in a paradoxical activity – writing poetry – that negates the teleological principle understood by almost all theorists of the period as fundamental to artistic endeavour. The absence of teleology, of course, might very well be the necessary condition for the absence of rules, for reasons established earlier in relation to Scaliger and Scott. It remains to be seen, at this early point in the dialogue, whether this is the result of a genuine indifference to teleology on Musophilus’s part or of some kind of incompetence. Philocosmos makes the perfectly unexceptionable argument that ‘not discreetly to compose our parts / Unto the frame of men (which we must be) / Is to put off our selves, and make our arts / Rebels to Nature and society’ (ll. 80–83). We might hear in this an echo of several Horatian dicta, all of which stress the primacy of social relation and human communication to the poetic vocation: the *Ars poetica*’s opening injunctions about the composition of parts into literary unity; its stress on linguistic ‘usus’ as the ‘norma loquendi’; its demands that poets remember their audiences and behave sanely. Musophilus answers the

²⁴ Greville’s own works are replete with a rule-scepticism akin to Daniel’s. See, for example, his *Treatie of Humane Learning* (34.1–3): ‘What thing a *right line* is, the learned know; / But how auailles that him, who in the right / Of life, and manners doth desire to grow?’ (Greville 1939: vol. 1, 162).

challenge to provide an alternative account, a different *measure*, of his normality by commanding us not to

meate out truth and right-deseruing prayse,
By that wrong measure of confusion
The vulgar foote: that neuer takes his wayes
By reason, but by imitation;
Rowling on with the rest, and neuer way's [i.e. 'weighs']
The course which he should go, but what is gone.
Well were it with mankind, if what the most
Did like were best, but ignorance will liue
By others square, as by example lost;
And man to man must th'hand of errour giue
That none can fall alone at their owne cost,
And all because men iudge not, but beleue.
For what poore bounds haue they whom but th'earth bounds,
What is their end whereto their care attaines,
When the thing got relieues not, but *confounds*,
Hauing but trauaile to succeed their paines? (ll. 93–108)²⁵

Here Musophilus inveighs against dull servility to received opinion and precedent, in literature but also, implicitly, in other spheres of human action, and speaks elusively of the limitations of pragmatic instrumentality. In so doing, he claims for himself a rationality that displaces the 'square' of common opinion—another glance, perhaps, at the socially determined

²⁵ In this quotation I have expanded orthographic contractions preserved by Sprague's edition.

Horatian ‘norma loquendi’—in favour of a rarer knowledge rooted both inside the self and beyond it, in expansive speculation.²⁶ Musophilus’s rationality, we might start to think, is a private one and hence no rationality at all, its rectitude unverifiable because unshared.²⁷ Moreover, Musophilus argues, those who seek to criticize his poetry lack the proper criteria to which they lay claim, since there is no right standard of poetic judgement that exists outside the experience of the practising poet. He writes of

Prodigious wits that study to confound
The life of wit, to seem to know aright,
As if themselves had fortunately found
Some stand from off the earth beyond our sight

and he asks ‘Who hath admitted them only to be / Free denizens of skill, to judge the best?’ (ll. 209–12, 217–18). Musophilus is attacking the pretensions of those who claim access to what the philosopher Thomas Nagel would later call ‘the view from nowhere’ (Nagel 1986): we are none of us ‘free denizens of skill’, because, he implies, we are bounded creatures—‘freely ranging’, perhaps, but ‘only’ (to borrow Sidney’s words) ‘within the zodiac of [our] own wit’ (Sidney 1973: 78).²⁸

²⁶ Compare the proem to Book V of Edmund Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene* (5.pr.1–3), which complains that ‘the world is runne quite out of square’, and begs pardon ‘if in discipline / Of vertue and of ciuill vses lore, / I doe not forme them to the common line / Of present dayes, which are corrupted sore’ (Spenser 2007: 508). See also John Rainolds’ complaint, in lectures on Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* delivered in Oxford in the 1570s, about those who ‘measure the precepts of disciplines in terms of the Lesbian rule of authority [*auctoritatis Lesbia regula*] rather than the golden mean of reason [*rationis aurea norma*]’ (Rainolds 1986: 286–87).

²⁷ As Wittgenstein would observe in *Philosophical Investigations*, § 202, ‘it’s not possible to follow a rule “privately”; otherwise, thinking one was following a rule would be the same thing as following it’ (Wittgenstein 2009: 87–88).

²⁸ Sidney’s ‘only’ (which appears in both early manuscripts but only one of the two printed editions of the *Defence*) is beautifully delicate. While its primary force lies in strengthening the assertion of the poet’s freedom by denying other implicit limitations, it simultaneously imposes a limit of its own.

Whatever the attractions of Musophilus's argument, he seems to be on the point of revealing that following one's own rules and refusing to recognize common norms might lead to an ethically barren poetics of self-consistent inwardness. Philocosmos, rightly picking up on inconsistencies in Musophilus's arguments, is able to turn them back on him (ll. 405–9):

Beholde how euery man drawne with delight
Of what he doth, flatters him in his way;
Striuing to make his course seeme onely right
Doth his owne rest, and his owne thoughts betray.

Philocosmos charges Musophilus with relying on 'flattering glasses that must shew him faire / And others foule; his skill and his wit best' (ll. 412–13), subtly ventriloquizing Sidney's argument in the *Defence of Poesy* that would-be poets should 'look themselves in an unflattering glass of reason, if they be inclinable unto it' (Sidney 1973: 111). Philocosmos is equally Sidneian in his stress on the primary importance of worldly action and the barrenness of a poetry that is merely autotelic, and in presenting his own version of Sidney's Cyropaedian poetics of vivid ethical exemplarity (ll. 514–21). Acknowledging the force of these arguments, Musophilus concedes, of mankind in general, that 'that course likes them best which they are on', but immediately asserts, 'Yet truth hath certaine bounds, but falsehood none' (ll. 529–30). Musophilus cleaves to his own 'course' much as a craftsman would to his *regula*, bound by its normative power not least because he values boundedness itself. These images of bounded linearity recur yet again as the poem's scope expands beyond its initial meditation on the poet's vocation to consider learning in general, in the context of historical change. Daniel is highly wary of the deleterious effects of religious reformation, which 'ouerthrew that holy reuerent bound / That parted learning and the laiety' (ll. 691–92), and argues for a judicious retracing

of our historical steps, since ‘to go forward backwards, right, men brings, / T’obserue the line from whence they tooke their waies’ (ll. 717–18).²⁹ Faced with a threatening loss of social, religious, and cultural order, it is ‘Eloquence’ that promises to ‘manage, guide, and master th’eminence / Of mens affections’ (ll. 939, 941–42), and

Poesie (mother of this force)

That breeds, brings forth, and nourishes this might

Teaching it in a loose, yet measured course,

With comely motions how to go vpright (ll. 969–72)

We now confront the very mirror image of Musophilus’s original argument: starting from a position of poetic autonomy, self-regulating and self-consistent but indifferent to the outside world, Musophilus’s own ‘loose, yet measured course’ has taught him the force of his own eloquence, and essayed a way in which the poet’s integrity might function as a corrective norm for a world that craves its rule.

Daniel’s ‘loose, yet measured course’ is evidently, in part, a description of the kind of measure provided by verse form, and is, indeed, a good characterization of the balance of freedom and constraint he achieves in *Musophilus*’s own rhymes and rhythms. Daniel would, four years later, confidently assert the cognitive and creative value of such formal ‘measure’—a word rich in both geometrical and musicological associations—in his *Defence of Ryme* (1930: esp. 137–38).³⁰ But Daniel’s ‘course’ is clearly more than this, too. It is the imagined line that

²⁹ These lines warrant comparison with the well-known injunctions of Donne’s third *Satyre* (ll. 77–82): ‘doubt wisely; in strange way / To stand inquiring right, is not to stray; / To sleepe, or runne wrong, is. On a huge hill, / Cragged and steep, Truth stands, and hee that will / Reach her, about must, and about must goe; / And what th’ hills suddennes resists, winne so’ (Donne 1967: 13). See also Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria*, 2.17.29: ‘qui recta via depulsus est reduci ad eam nisi alio flexu potest’ (Quintilian 2001: 1:390).

³⁰ The kinds of rules possible in the field of versification were, in many works of poetics from the period, a model for rules of a less obviously or purely technical kind; indeed, they came closest to fulfilling the widely held but never quite fulfilled desire to produce a wholly artificial poetics, untroubled by the problems (to a theorist) of *ingenium* or inspiration.

bounds and defines his poetic practice, regulating what he does and writes without reference to those arbitrarily imposed external rules he would go on to deplore in the *Defence* as ‘tyrannicall’, or as ‘vnlawfull lawes’ (135, 149). Daniel thus explores the possibility of a rule-less poetic integrity, something deeply inward to the poet but nevertheless an objective fact of his lived experience, capable, up to a point, of scrutiny. To borrow the terminology invoked by Wittgenstein when describing the ultimate failure of rules’ explanatory power, what Daniel is describing is a ‘practice’, ‘simply what I do’, and, like any language game, something that resides in a ‘form of life’ (Wittgenstein 2009: 87, 91, 94).³¹

V. Analogy and understanding

In one sense, this takes us a long way indeed from the apparent commands or prescriptions of a theorist like Badius. In another, however, it confirms what was ultimately found to be true of his Horatian *regulae*: that rather than actually specifying what the poet should do, they describe forms and modes of action that pre-exist their reification in regulative terms. If rules, in this account, explain nothing, determine nothing, change nothing, we must, of course, ask what purpose they served. Part of the answer may lie in the craft origins of terms like *regula*, *norma*, and *κανών*, and the analogical thinking they sustain. However divergent their conception of poetic rules, all the texts discussed in this essay have been invested in such analogies and metaphors: Erasmus’s wrestling holds; Scaliger’s quasi-architectural ‘norma’; Daniel’s ‘square’, ‘course’, and almost musicological ‘measure’; Scott’s visual language of ‘observation’ and creative process it implies. When the mid-Tudor humanist Thomas Wilson describes the rules of logic as ‘touche stones to trye vntruthes’ (Wilson 1551: V1v), what is

³¹ There is, indeed, good reason for linking rules and ‘form of life’ in ways that both chime with and go beyond Wittgenstein’s sense of that phrase. Erasmus, whose rules for Christian life in the *Enchiridion* we have already encountered, wrote in a letter to Martin Dorp that in them he had provided ‘simpliciter Christianae vitae formam’ (Erasmus 1906–1958: vol. 2, 93). For a stimulating study of the concept ‘form of life’ as it developed in relation to monastic rules in late antique and medieval Christianity, see Agamben (2013).

perhaps most notable about his choice of phrase is not the positive force that it seems to attribute to those rules but the analogy he uses—a metaphor overlaid upon the concept of rules, which is itself already metaphorical. The resort to analogy simultaneously asserts and mystifies the rules’ power as tools of human use. Another logician, Ralph Lever, says that ‘Ther are rules in euery arte, which authors vse as groundes and sure principles, not to be denyed or doubted of’ (Lever 1573: A3r). Such principles, the most profound of which are simply the God-given gifts that make human reason possible, are ‘stayes to mans wit’—ways of arresting, controlling, or directing a thought-process that might otherwise be infinite or inconclusive. While Lever is confident that such rules are grounded in reality, these locutions also acknowledge their origins in a pragmatism necessitated by human weakness. The ‘touchstone’ or the ‘stay’, like the *regula*, *norma*, or *κανών*, is useful because it materially embodies a principle of rectitude which might not otherwise be accessible to human wit. Both individual rules of poetry and the very concept of rule-following may fall down when subjected to analytic scrutiny, but may nevertheless have value as provisional or heuristic ways of describing or managing processes of composition and judgement whose complexity exceeds them.

Among the complexities which the analogical discourse of rule-following addresses is the problem of the subjectivity of literary judgement, whether exercised in the context of reading or of composition. Even Bruno’s insistence that the rules are principles of individuality does not preclude their value as tools, however crude, of intersubjective understanding; and even the intimate self-scrutiny essayed by Daniel in Musophilus’s sketch-map of his idiosyncratic ‘course’, which threatens to dissolve rule-following in the solvent of solipsism, takes place in the context of dialogue, however one-sided. Daniel’s scepticism about supra-personal rationality does not deafen him to the claims of community: while his *Defence of Ryme* denies that his ‘course’ is the result of his having been ‘drawne with the current of custome, and an vnexamined example’, he positively acknowledges that he was ‘first

incourag'd or fram'd thereunto' by Mary, Countess of Pembroke, 'receiuing the first notion for the formall ordering of those compositions at *Wilton*' (Daniel 1930: 129). Daniel's target, in both the *Defence* and *Musophilus*, is the stupidity of lazy inheritance and abstract rationality alike—tradition and reason being the two grounds on which positive arguments for literary rules are normally made. In place of these, he imagines literary training, writing, and reading as products of humane encounter; to borrow the terminology of ancient grammarians like Varro and Quintilian, Daniel's impatience with *auctoritas* and *ratio* entails a countervailing stress on *consuetudo* or *usus*. To attempt to articulate the rules and norms of the habitus of writing, which *Musophilus* depicts as a profoundly challenging and perhaps even scarcely possible task, is necessarily to confront not only what is knowable and what is unknowable about literature, but also what can and cannot be spoken of, taught, and shared.

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