

Kanonentstehung als Evolutionsprozess

[1] Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* 10.1.19–20 (tr. D. A. Russell, 2001 [Loeb Class. Libr.])

Repetamus autem et tractemus et, ut cibos mansos ac prope liquefactos demittimus quo facilius digerantur, ita lectio non cruda sed multa iteratione mollita et velut confecta memoriae imitationique tradatur. Ac diu non nisi optimus quisque et qui credentem sibi minime fallat legendus est, sed diligenter ac paene ad scribendi sollicitudinem nec per partes modo scrutanda omnia, sed perlectus liber utique ex integro resumendus, praecipueque oratio, cuius virtutes frequenter ex industria quoque occultantur.

Let us go over the text again and work on it. We chew our food and almost liquefy it before we swallow, so as to digest it more easily; similarly, let our reading be made available for memory and imitation, not in an undigested form, but, as it were, softened and reduced to pap by frequent repetition. For a long time, the only authors to be read should be the best and least likely to betray our trust, and they should be read thoroughly, with almost as much care as we devote to writing. We must do more than examine everything bit by bit; once read, the book must invariably be taken up again from the beginning, especially if it is a speech, the virtues of which are often deliberately concealed.

[2] Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* 10.1.8–9

Nobis autem copia cum iudicio paranda est, vim orandi, non circulatoriam volubilitatem spectantibus. Id autem consequemur optima legendo atque audiendo: non enim solum nomina ipsa rerum cognoscemus hac cura, sed quod quoque loco sit aptissimum. Omnibus enim fere verbis, praeter pauca quae sunt parum verecunda, in oratione locus est. Nam scriptores quidem iamborum veterisque comoediae etiam in illis saepe laudantur; sed nobis nostrum opus intueri sat est. Omnia verba, exceptis de quibus dixi, sunt alicubi optima: nam et humilibus interim et vulgaribus est opus, et quae nitidiores in parte videntur sordida, ubi res poscit proprie dicuntur.

What we have to do is to acquire our stock with judgement, aiming at forceful oratory, not the patter of a street trader. And we shall achieve this by reading and hearing the best models. By taking this trouble, we shall learn not only the words for things but which words are best in each place. Practically all words have a place in oratory, except for the few which infringe the standards of decency. It is often true that writers of iambs and Old Comedy are often praised even for these; but it is sufficient for us to consider the need of our own work. Any word, then, with the exceptions I have mentioned, may be the best possible word somewhere or other; we shall need low and common words on occasion, and expressions which seem coarse in a more elegant context are absolutely right when the subject demands them.

[3] Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* 10.1.40

Paucos enim vel potius vix ullum ex iis qui vetustatem pertulerunt existimo posse reperiri quin iudicium adhibentibus allaturus sit utilitatis aliquid.

I believe that there will be found to be few, or rather hardly any, of those who have stood the test of time, who will not be of *some* use to anyone who uses his judgement.

[4] Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* 10.1.42

Sed non quidquid ad aliquam partem scientiae pertinet, protinus ad faciendam etiam phrasin, de qua loquimur, accommodatum.

However, not everything that bears on some department of knowledge is necessarily also relevant to the formation of style (*phrasis*), which is our present subject.

[5] Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* 10.1.45

Paucos enim, qui sunt eminentissimi, excerpere in animo est: facile est autem studiosis qui sint his simillimi iudicare, ne quisquam queratur omissos forte aliquos quos ipse valde probet; fateor enim pluris legendos esse quam qui nominabuntur.

My plan is to select a few authors, those who are the most eminent. It is easy for students to decide what authors most resemble these, and so no one will have cause to complain if I happen to pass over his favourites. I admit there are more who deserve to be read than will be mentioned here.

[6] Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* 10.2.18–19

Ergo primum est ut quod imitaturus est quisque intellegat, et quare bonum sit sciat. Tum in

So, the first step is for the student to understand what it is that he is going to imitate, and to know why it is good.

suscipiendo onere consulat suas vires. Nam quaedam sunt imitabilia quibus aut infirmitas naturae non sufficiat aut diversitas repugnet: ne cui tenue ingenium erit sola velit fortia et abrupta, cui forte quidem sed indomitum amore subtilitatis et vim suam perdat et elegantiam quam cupit non persequatur: nihil est enim tam indecens quam cum mollia dure fiunt.

[7] Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* 10.2.24

Itaque ne hoc quidem suaserim, uni se alicui proprie quem per omnia sequatur addicere. Longe perfectissimus Graecorum Demosthenes, aliquid tamen aliquo in loco melius alii, plurima ille. Sed non qui maxime imitandus, et solus imitandus est.

[8] Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* 10.2.26

Nam praeter id quod prudentis est quod in quoque optimum est, si possit, suum facere, tum in tanta rei difficultate unum intuentis vix aliqua pars sequitur; ideoque cum totum exprimere quem elegeris paene sit homini inconcessum, plurimum bona ponamus ante oculos, ut aliud ex alio haereat, et quo quidque loco conveniat aptemus.

[9] Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* 10.2.7–10

Turpe etiam illud est, contentum esse id consequi quod imiteris. Nam rursus quid erat futurum si nemo plus effecisset eo quem sequebatur? Nihil in poetis supra Livium Andronicum, nihil in historiis supra pontificum annales haberemus; ratibus adhuc navigaremus, non esset pictura nisi quae lineas modo extremas umbrae quam corpora in sole fecissent circumscriberet. Ac si omnia percenseas, nulla mansit ars qualis inventa est, nec intra initium stetit: nisi forte nostra potissimum tempora damnamus huius infelicitatis, ut nunc demum nihil crescat: nihil autem crescit sola imitatione. Quod si prioribus adicere fas non est, quo modo sperare possumus illum oratorem perfectum? cum in iis quos maximos adhuc novimus nemo sit inventus in quo nihil aut desideretur aut reprehendatur. Sed etiam qui summa non adpetent, contendere potius quam sequi debent. Nam qui hoc agit, ut prior sit, forsitan, etiam si non transierit, aequabit. Eum vero nemo potest aequare cuius vestigiis sibi utique insistendum putat: necesse est enim semper sit posterior qui sequitur. Adde quod plerumque facilius est plus facere quam idem: tantam enim difficultatem habet similitudo ut ne ipsa quidem natura in hoc ita evaluerit, ut non res quae

Next, in undertaking the burden, he must consider his own strength. There are some objects of imitation for which his natural capacity may be too weak, or with which his very different temperament may be at odds. A person whose talent is delicate should not aim solely at rugged boldness; the strong but undisciplined mind should not, out of love of fine craftsmanship, waste its vigour while failing to achieve the elegance it seeks: nothing is so unbecoming as a hamfisted attempt to be dainty!

I am therefore not disposed to advise anyone to swear allegiance to any one author and follow him in everything. Demosthenes is by far the most perfect of the Greeks, but, while of course he does most things best, there are some areas in which others have done better. The author who is most to be imitated is not also the only author to be imitated.

Apart from the fact that a wise man should always, if possible, appropriate what is best in any model, it is also true that the whole enterprise is so difficult that those who concentrate on one model will hardly find any part of it within their grasp. Consequently, since it is scarcely given to man to produce a complete reproduction of a chosen author, let us keep the excellences of a number of authors before our eyes, so that one thing stays in our minds from one of them, and another from another, and we can use each in the appropriate place.

It is a disgrace too to be content merely to attain the effect you are imitating. Once again, what would have happened if no one had achieved more than the man he was following? We should have nothing in poetry better than Livius Andronicus, nothing in history better than the Annals of the *pontifices*; we should still be going to sea on rafts, and the only painting would consist in drawing outlines round the shadows cast by objects in the sun. Take a comprehensive view: no art has remained as it was when it was discovered, or come to a stop in its early stages. Or are we to condemn our own age to the unique misery of being the first period in which nothing grows? And nothing grows by imitation alone. But if we are not allowed to add to previous achievements, how can we hope for our ideal orator? Of the greatest orators known up to the present, we can find none without some deficiency or fault. But even those who do not aim for the top have an obligation to compete and not lag behind. The man who tries to win a race may perhaps draw level, even if he does not get into the lead; but no one can draw level with a man in whose footsteps he feels bound to tread. The follower is inevitably always behind. Furthermore, it is generally easier to improve on something than simply to repeat it. Total similarity is so difficult to achieve that even Nature herself has failed to prevent things which seem to match and resemble each other most closely from being always distinguishable in *some* respect.

*simillimae quaeque pares maxime videantur utique
discrimine aliquo discernantur.*

[10] Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* 10.1.93–94

*Elegia quoque Graecos provocamus, cuius mihi
tersus atque elegans maxime videtur auctor
Tibullus. Sunt qui Propertium malint. Ovidius
utroque lascivior; sicut durior Gallus. Saturam
quidem tota nostra est, in qua primus insignem
laudem adeptus Lucilius quosdam ita deditos sibi
adhuc habet amatores ut eum non eiusdem modo
operis auctoribus sed omnibus poetis praeferre non
dubitent. Ego quantum ab illis, tantum ab Horatio
dissentio, qui Lucilium 'fluere lutulentum' et esse
aliquid quod tollere possis putat. Nam et eruditio in
eo mira et libertas atque inde acerbitas et abunde
salis. Multum est tersior ac purus magis Horatius
et, nisi labor eius amore, praecipuus. Multum et
verae gloriae quamvis uno libro Persius meruit.
Sunt clari hodieque et qui olim nominabuntur.*

In elegy, too, we challenge the Greeks. The most refined and elegant author seems to me to be Tibullus. Some prefer Propertius. Ovid is more self-indulgent than these two, Gallus stiffer.

Satire, for its part, is entirely ours. The first poet to achieve high renown in this genre, Lucilius, still has admirers so devoted to him that they unhesitatingly prefer him not only to other satirists but to all poets. I disagree, just as much as I disagree with Horace, who speaks of Lucilius' 'muddy stream' and says there is 'something you could take away.' In fact, Lucilius has both remarkable learning and remarkable freedom, and hence a sharp edge and an abundance of wit. Horace is much more refined and pure; unless my affection for him leads me astray, he is the best of them all. However, Persius, with his one book, has earned much fame, well justified. And there are distinguished satirists even today, men who will one day be famous.

[11] Plinius, *Epistulae* 6.15.1–2; 9.22.1–2 (tr. B. Radice, 1969 [Loeb Class. Libr.])

*Passennus Paulus, splendidus eques Romanus et in
primis eruditus, scribit elegos. Gentilicium hoc illi:
est enim municeps Properti atque etiam inter
maiores suos Propertium numerat. Is cum recitaret,
ita coepit dicere: 'Prisce, iubes ...' Ad hoc Iavolenus
Priscus (aderat enim ut Paulo amicissimus): 'Ego
vero non iubeo!' Cogita qui risus hominum, qui
ioci. [...]*

*Vir est optimus, honestissimus, nostri amatissimus;
praeterea in litteris veteres aemulatur exprimit
reddit, Propertium in primis, a quo genus ducit,
vera suboles eoque simillima illi in quo ille
praecipuus. Si elegos eius in manus sumpseris,
leges opus tersum molle iucundum et plane in
Properti domo scriptum. Nuper ad lyrica deflexit, in
quibus ita Horatium, ut in illis illum alterum
effingit: putes, si quid in studiis cognatio valet, et
huius propinquum. Magna varietas, magna
mobilitas: amat ut qui verissime, dolet ut qui
impatientissime, laudat ut qui benignissime, ludit ut
qui facetissime, omnia denique tamquam singula
absolvit.*

Passennus Paulus, a distinguished Roman knight and a scholar of repute, writes elegiac verse. This runs in his family, for he comes from the same town as Propertius and considers him one of his ancestors. Paulus was giving a public reading and began by saying "You bid me, Priscus—" at which Javolenus Priscus, who was present as a great friend of Paulus, exclaimed "Indeed I don't!" You can imagine the laughter and witticisms which greeted this remark [...]

He is the best of men, the soul of honesty, and my devoted friend. His literary work is modelled on that of the ancients whom he imitates and brings back to life, Propertius in particular, from whom he traces his descent; and he is indeed a true descendant, resembling the poet most in the qualities which were his greatest. Take up his elegiacs and you will find them exquisitely finished, full of sensuous charm, and truly in Propertius's style. He has lately turned to lyric poetry, and here he recalls Horace as successfully as he does Propertius elsewhere: if kinship has any influence on literature, you would think he was related to Horace too. He is highly versatile, with many changes of mood; he can love like a true lover and portray grief in all its passion; his tributes are generous and his wit is brilliant: in fact everything he does is perfected as a whole and in part.

[12] S. Blackmore, *The Meme Machine*, Oxford 1999, 10f. [ch. 2]

He [sc. Darwin] reasoned that if living creatures vary (as they certainly do) and if, due to their geometric increase in numbers, there is at certain times a struggle for life (which cannot be disputed), then it would be most extraordinary if there were not some variation that was useful to a creature's welfare. The individuals with these characteristics will then have the best chance of being 'preserved in the struggle for life' and will produce offspring with the same characteristics. This was the principle he called 'natural selection'.

Darwin's argument requires three main features: variation, selection and retention (or heredity). That is, first there must be variation so that not all creatures are identical. Second, there must be an environment in which not all creatures can survive and some varieties do better than others. Third, there must be some process by which offspring inherit

characteristics from their parents. If all these three are in place then any characteristics that are positively useful for survival in that environment must tend to increase. [...] This *inevitability* of evolution is part of what makes Darwin's insight so clever. All you need is the right starting conditions and evolution just has to happen.

[13] R. Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene* (1976, 21989), Oxford 42016, 249 [ch. 11]

I think that a new kind of replicator has recently emerged on this very planet. It is staring us in the face. It is still in its infancy, still drifting clumsily about in its primeval soup, but already it is achieving evolutionary change at a rate that leaves the old gene panting far behind.

The new soup is the soup of human culture. We need a name for the new replicator, a noun that conveys the idea of a unit of cultural transmission, or a unit of *imitation*. 'Mimeme' comes from a suitable Greek root, but I want a monosyllable that sounds a bit like 'gene'. I hope my classicist friends will forgive me if I abbreviate mimeme to *meme*. If it is any consolation, it could alternatively be thought of as being related to 'memory', or to the French word *même*. It should be pronounced to rhyme with 'cream'.

Examples of memes are tunes, ideas, catch-phrases, clothes fashions, ways of making pots or of building arches. Just as genes propagate themselves in the gene pool by leaping from body to body via sperms or eggs, so memes propagate themselves in the meme pool by leaping from brain to brain via a process which, in the broad sense, can be called imitation. If a scientist hears, or reads about, a good idea, he passes it on to his colleagues and students. He mentions it in his articles and his lectures. If the idea catches on, it can be said to propagate itself, spreading from brain to brain.

[14] R. Dawkins, *Selfish Gene* (1976), 42016, 246 [ch. 11]

On the island where he [*sc.* the biologist Peter F. Jenkins] worked there was a total repertoire of about nine distinct songs. Any given male sang only one or a few of these songs. The males could be classified into dialect groups. For example, one group of eight males with neighbouring territories sang a particular song called the CC song. Other dialect groups sang different songs. Sometimes members of a dialect group shared more than one distinct song. By comparing the songs of fathers and sons, Jenkins showed that song patterns were not inherited genetically. Each young male was likely to adopt songs from his territorial neighbours by imitation, in an analogous way to human language. During most of the time Jenkins was there, there was a fixed number of songs on the island, a kind of 'song pool' from which each young male drew his own small repertoire. But occasionally Jenkins was privileged to witness the 'invention' of a new song, which occurred by a mistake in the imitation of an old one. He writes: 'New song forms have been shown to arise variously by change of pitch of a note, repetition of a note, the elision of notes and the combination of parts of other existing songs ... The appearance of the new form was an abrupt event and the product was quite stable over a period of years. Further, in a number of cases the variant was transmitted accurately in its new form to younger recruits so that a recognizably coherent group of like singers developed.' Jenkins refers to the origins of new songs as 'cultural mutations'.

[15] Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* 10.2.28

*Nam erit haec quoque laus eorum, ut priores
superasse, posteros docuisse dicantur.*

These masters will acquire another glory too: that of being said to have surpassed their predecessors and taught their successors.

[16] S. Blackmore, *Meme Machine*, 1999, 18 [ch. 2]

My own view is that the idea of memes is an example of the best use of analogy in science. That is, a powerful mechanism in one domain is seen to operate in a slightly different way in an entirely new domain. What begins as an analogy ends up as a powerful new explanatory principle. In this case, the most powerful idea in all of science – the explanation of biological diversity by the simple process of natural selection – becomes the explanation of mental and cultural diversity by the simple process of memetic selection. The overarching theory of evolution provides a framework for both.

[17] A. Trembl, *Klassiker: 'Herstellung' oder 'Herausbildung'?*, in: R. Charlier/G. Lottes (eds.), *Kanonbildung. Protagonisten und Prozesse der Herstellung kultureller Identität*, Hannover 2009, 143–160, 157

Wer das Buch eines Autors liest, selektiert aus einer großen Anzahl anderer Bücher, die er in diesem Augenblick nicht liest. Je mehr Bücher es gibt, desto mehr Bücher kann ein Einzelner *nicht* lesen.

[18] A. Treml, *Klassiker: Die Evolution einflussreicher Semantik, Band I: Theorie, Sankt Augustin 1997, 87*

Wenn ein Autor Reputation besitzt, gar klassische Reputation, dann signalisiert dies, daß es sich lohnen kann, sich mit ihm zu beschäftigen. Brillante Texte sind folglich nicht Texte, die brillant sind, sondern Texte, die zu brillanten Einfällen führen. Die Reputation klassischer Texte dient als Orientierungshilfe bei der chronischen Überforderung, die uns angesichts der Möglichkeit praktisch unbegrenzter Lektüre überkommt

[19] A. Treml, *Klassiker: Die Evolution einflussreicher Semantik I, 1997, 147*

Noch zur Zeit von Aristoteles haben die Lehrer der Rhetorik und Poetik noch *alle* 'klassischen' Autoren behandelt. Aber schon zur Zeit der Ptolemäer, vor allem aber in der hellenistischen Zeit war die zu behandelnde Anzahl der einschlägigen Autoren zu umfangreich geworden, so daß eine *Auswahl* getroffen werden mußte. Das Ergebnis kennen wir als 'alexandrinischen Kanon'. Noch war der kulturelle Konsens über den Maßstab dieser Auswahl gegeben, so daß diese ihre eigene Legitimität gleich mitliefern konnte. Nur scheinbar wird hier evolutionäre Legitimität planmäßig bzw. absichtsvoll erzeugt, so daß man den Eindruck bekommen kann, die Klassiker würden durch einen bewußten Akt, ja durch einen pädagogischen Willen entstehen. In Wirklichkeit wird nur dasjenige herausdestilliert, was evolutionär zuvor schon bewährt war. Die alexandrinische Kanonisierung einzelner Klassiker stabilisierte sich deshalb, weil die ihr zugrundeliegenden Selektionskriterien selbst schon evolutionär stabilisiert waren. Die normative Auswahl als absichtliche Veranstaltung konnte nur deshalb so wirkungsvoll sein, weil sie solche Autoren und solche Texte adelte, die dem evolutionär schon bewährten Ideal der Vollendung am nächsten kamen.

[20] A. Treml, *Klassiker: Die Evolution einflussreicher Semantik I, 1997, 113*

Klassiker können Texte produzieren, die nachträglich als 'klassisch' bezeichnet werden, aber sie können sich nicht selbst als Klassiker produzieren. Klassiker sind deshalb nicht prognostizierbar, sie sind immer nur nachträglich Klassiker. Das hängt deutlich mit dem schon erwähnten Stabilisierungseffekt klassischer Semantik zusammen: Die evolutionären Übergänge von Variation zu Selektion und schließlich zu Stabilisierung brauchen *Zeit*. Deshalb sind Klassiker, wenn sie Klassiker werden, in der Regel tot.

[21] R. Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (2006), London 2007, 232

Different schools and genres of art can be analysed as alternative memeplexes, as artists copy ideas and motifs from earlier artists, and new motifs survive only if they mesh with others. Indeed, the whole academic discipline of History of Art, with its sophisticated tracing of iconographies and symbolisms, could be seen as an elaborate study in memeplexity. Details will have been favoured or disfavoured by the presence of existing members of the meme pool, and these will often include religious memes.

Further reading

- D. T. Campbell, Blind Variation and Selective Retention in Creative Thought as in Other Knowledge Processes, in: *Psychological Review* 67, 1960, 380–400.
- J. D. Delius, Zur Naturgeschichte der Kultur: Gene und Meme, in: *Zeitschrift für Semiotik* 12, 1990, 307–321.
- L. Gabora, The Origin and Evolution of Culture and Creativity, in: *Journal of Memetics* 1.1, 1997.
- F. Heylighen/K. Chielens, Evolution of Culture, Memetics, in: R. A. Meyers (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Complexity and Systems Sciences*, vol. 3: E, New York 2009, 3205–3220.
- G. F. Miller, Sexual Selection for Cultural Displays, in: R. Dunbar/C. Knight/C. Power (eds.), *The Evolution of Culture*, Edinburgh 1999, 71–91.
- F. Moretti, The Slaughterhouse of Literature, in: *Modern Language Quart.* 61, 2000, 207–227; repr. in: F. M., *Distant Reading*, London 2013, 63–89; dt. Übs. von C. Pries, *Die Schlachtbank der Literatur*, in: F. M., *Distant Reading*, Konstanz 2016, 63–86.
- H. Plotkin, Universal Darwinism, in: H. P., *Darwin Machines and the Nature of Knowledge*, London 1994, 59–101.
- D. Rancour-Laferrriere, Preliminary Remarks on Literary Memetics, in: K. Menges (ed.), *AXIA. Davis Symposium on Literary Evaluation*, Stuttgart 1981, 77–87; repr. in: B. Cooke/F. Turner (eds.), *Biopoetics. Evolutionary Explorations in the Arts*, Lexington 1999, 58–70.
- L. Salwiczek, Grundzüge der Memtheorie, in: W. Wickler/L. Salwiczek (eds.), *Wie wir die Welt erkennen. Erkenntnisweisen im interdisziplinären Diskurs*, Freiburg 2001, 119–201.
- M. Stachon, Evolutionary Thinking in Ancient Literary Theory: Quintilian's Canon and the Origin of Verse Forms, in: *Classical World* 110, 2017, 237–255.
- J. Tynjanov, O literaturnoj évoljucii [1927], in: J. T., *Archaisty i novatory*, Leningrad 1929, 30–47; dt. Übs. von A. Kaempfe, *Über literarische Evolution*, in: J. T., *Die literarischen Kunstmittel und die Evolution in der Literatur*, Frankfurt am Main 1967, 37–60 sowie von H. Imendörfer: *Über die literarische Evolution* [1969], in: J. Striedter (Hg.), *Russischer Formalismus. Texte zur allgemeinen Literaturtheorie und zur Theorie der Prosa*, München 1971, 432/3–460/1; Engl. tr. by C. A. Luplow, *On literary evolution*, in: L. Matejka/K. Pomorska (eds.), *Readings in Russian Poetics. Formalist and Structuralist Views*, Cambridge (Mass.) 1971, 66–78.
- S. Winko, Literatur-Kanon als *invisible hand*-Phänomen, in: H. L. Arnold (ed.), *Literarische Kanonbildung*, München 2002, 9–24.