

ON THE METHOD OF STUDY

*De ratione studii
ac legendi interpretandique auctores*

translated and annotated by
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Praecipitat omnia 'He writes everything in a hurry': the celebrated self-critique, in the *Ciceronianus*,¹ of his literary style should not delude us into supposing that the thoughts which flowed with such apparent ease from the pen of Erasmus were the facile effusions of a shallow mind. The germination of the educational programme which finds its mature expression in *De ratione studii* can be traced back to Erasmus' letters of the years 1496–8, which he spent in Paris, where he was obliged to earn his living by giving lessons to Christian and Heinrich Northoff, the sons of a merchant from Lübeck, and to two Englishmen, Thomas Grey and Robert Fisher.² Several of the precepts and writers recommended to the attention of teacher and pupil in *De ratione studii* make their first appearance in these letters – and often in the order and language of the later work. We may assume, therefore, that Erasmus readily accepted the opportunity afforded by his correspondence in 1511 with John Colet, dean of St Paul's and founder of St Paul's School, of setting down in fuller detail, both for pattern and incitement, his views on the method of study which the student of the classics should follow.

De ratione studii ac legendi interpretandique auctores liber, to give the work its full title, was first printed in an abridged form by G. Biermans at Paris for Jean Granjon, and published there in October 1511 in a volume which also included a collection of letters by the Italian humanist Agostino Dati. This version of the text omits passages quoted in the correspondence with Colet of September 1511. As these passages were to appear in the 1512 and subsequent authorized editions, it is almost certain that Granjon's edition was brought out without Erasmus' consent. The edition of 1512, incorporating the material from the Colet correspondence, was published by Josse Bade in Paris (July), then by Thierry Martens in Louvain (September). It is upon these and subsequent editions authorized by Erasmus, in particular the revised August 1514 edition of Matthias Schürer published in Strasbourg, that the attempt to reconstruct the author's autograph is based.³

The style of *De ratione studii*, like that of Erasmus' other educational treatises, is characteristically *tumultuarius* 'breathless,' yet lucid and straightforward in its syntax. Among typical features of his Latinity we may

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¹ LBI 1013E

² See Epp 54, 56, 58, 61, 62, 63, 64, 66 and their introductions. For Ep 66, which served as a preface to *De ratione studii*, see below 665.

³ On the history of the text see J.-C. Margolin's introduction to his critical edition, ASD I-2 83–109. The abridged version (1511) is printed in ASD I-2 147–51. The present translation is based on the ASD text, which is that of the August 1514 (Strasbourg: Schürer) edition.

note the following examples: a penchant for the use of diminutives, for example, *chartula*, *pauculi*, *flosculi*, *narratiuncula*, *notula*; a preference for the Silver Latin *ceu* 'as' or 'like'; the use of *modo ut* for *dummodo*, *simul et* for *simul ac*; frequent use of *siquidem* for 'since'; *sed* as a variant of *et*, in the style of Sallust; a readiness to employ the rare word drawn from his wide knowledge of the full range of Latin literature, for example, *balbuties*, *caecutire*, and his use of the Roman legal term *postliminio*; the use of the impersonal third person singular of the passive, for example, *si id hominis ingenio negatum est*; the occasional pun implicit in the word *infans* – both 'inarticulate baby' and 'incompetent orator.' Erasmus' attitude towards the language is summarized in his advice to the young to take Terence as a standard because he is 'closest to everyday speech.'⁴ He is concerned above all with preserving the vitality of Latin as a living language. Like Lorenzo Valla, he is prepared to exploit the full range of the language to achieve this end.

The content as well as the style of *De ratione studii* is heavily indebted to the *Institutio oratoria* of Quintilian, but Erasmus, unlike Quintilian, is confronted by a crucial issue: the relation of Christian to classical culture.⁵ Erasmus shares the humanist objective of re-creating the past in its totality, or as far as the ravages of time permit. To see the past as it really was, to absorb its categories of thought, to appreciate its artistic canons, requires the closest critical attention to its literary and material remains. We may refine our pleasure in reading the various authors of antiquity by applying the techniques of analysis and comparison as laid down by Quintilian and endorsed by Erasmus, yet there remain for the Christian reader grave moral dangers in the subject-matter of much of pagan literature. We may note Erasmus' passing remark on the need to censor certain passages in Plautus if he is to be used by the young. The exegesis⁶ of the second *Eclogue* of Virgil with its reliance on extensive allegorical interpretation is an explicit example of the same concern: the moral dangers inherent in classical literature when imbibed without the prophylactic of Christian theology. Similar sentiments are to be found in St Basil, writing on the value of Greek literature in the fourth century AD. In the twentieth century we find the problem formulated in the following remarks by one whose concern for the classical tradition and whose commitment to Christianity were as profound as Erasmus': 'In ages like our own ... it is the

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4 See below 669:10n.

5 On this issue see *Antibarbari* in CWE 23 passim.

6 Below 683:25ff

more necessary for Christian readers to scrutinise their reading, especially of works of imagination, with explicit ethical and theological standards. The "greatness" of literature cannot be determined solely by literary standards; though we must remember that whether it is literature or not can be determined only by literary standards.⁷ The reader's response to such a proposition will, in part, determine his evaluation of *De ratione studii*.

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⁷ T.S. Eliot 'Religion and Literature' in *Selected Essays* 3rd ed (London 1951) 388

ERASMUS OF ROTTERDAM TO HIS FRIEND [WILLIAM THALE]

My sweetest [Thale] you have indeed foreseen with skill, and now state with truth and dignity, that it matters enormously what plan and order one applies to each action; and that the importance of this consideration, great as it is in all activities, is particularly so in literary studies. Do we not observe that skill makes easily possible the lifting of huge weights, which otherwise no degree of force could move? Similarly, in warfare it does not matter so much how large your forces are, or how massive your attack, as how good your dispositions are and what order you maintain in the battle. And those who are familiar with short cuts reach their destination much sooner than those who take the river-bank or the shoreline as their guide, as Plautus remarks. You ask me accordingly to lay down for you an ordered course of study so that, following it like Theseus' thread, you may be able to find your way in the labyrinths of letters. I shall certainly be happy to obey, as far as in me lies, the wish of a friend so dear to me that I could not possibly deny him any request, much less one so useful and honourable as this.

... This, my dear Leucophaeus, is what I had to write to you for the moment on the method of study. Use it, if you like it; but if you do not, at least take my diligent efforts in good part. Only go on as you have begun, and confer lustre on your distinguished birth by equal prowess in letters. Farewell.

[London, 15 March]

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1 Erasmus ... to his friend] Ep 66 (Paris? 1497?). First printed as the preface to *De ratione studii*, which was originally composed for Thomas Grey, as is indicated by the name Leucophaeus (line 17), a Greek translation of 'grey' (cf Ep 221:39). It was apparently among the papers entrusted to William Thale in Ferrara in 1509 (cf Ep 30:17n). Thale, on returning to Paris, had it printed, substituting his own name for Grey's in the preface. He did not, however, have sufficient knowledge of Greek to detect the significance of Leucophaeus and so left it unchanged. When Erasmus published *De ratione studii* in an authorized edition, together with the *De copia* (Paris: J. Bade, 15 July 1512), he replaced Thale's name with that of Pierre Vitre and changed Leucophaeus to 'mi Petre.' Pierre Vitre (Latin, Viterius) was a close friend of Grey and may have succeeded Erasmus as his tutor (cf Ep 58:204n).

11 Plautus] Cf *Poenulus* 627–8; *Adagia* II vii 81.

14 labyrinths] Cf *Adagia* II x 51.

ON THE METHOD OF STUDY

In principle, knowledge as a whole seems to be of two kinds, of things and of words. Knowledge of words comes earlier, but that of things is the more important. But some, the 'uninitiated' as the saying goes, while they hurry on to learn about things, neglect a concern for language and, striving after a false economy, incur a very heavy loss. For since things are learnt only by the sounds we attach to them, a person who is not skilled in the force of language is, of necessity, short-sighted, deluded, and unbalanced in his judgment of things as well. Finally you may observe that none are more given to constant quibbling over the minutiae of language than those who boast that they pass over mere words and concentrate on the matter itself. Accordingly the best in each category must be learnt at once and, moreover, learnt from the best teachers. For what could be more foolish than to learn at great effort something that you are subsequently compelled to 'unlearn' at even greater? Nothing to be sure is acquired more easily than what is right and true. But once bad habits get a grip on a character, it is remarkable how they cannot be eradicated.

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- 4 of things and of words] To sophisticated readers this phrase would have recalled a more complex subject than pedagogy or curricula. 'Things and words' suggests or describes a topic that had been debated by philosophers for centuries: the question of universals, the reality of genera and species. The question descended from Plato (*Cratylus* and *Republic*) and Aristotle (his writings on logic and the *Metaphysics*) through Porphyry (*Isagoge*), Augustine (cf *De doctrina christiana* 1.2, 2.1–3) and Boethius (on Porphyry's *Isagoge*) to Abelard and his successors.

In *De duplici copia verborum ac rerum*, where Erasmus is concerned not with metaphysics or formal logic but with effectiveness and variety in communication, with rhetoric, he discusses both abundance of expression (book I) and abundance of subject-matter (book II). The opening sentence of *De ratione studii* reminds us that things and words, objects (of thought or experience) and language, comprise the whole of knowledge. Hence it is not surprising that *De ratione studii* contains echoes of *De copia* and allusions to it.

References to *De copia* in the notes are to the translation in this volume.

- 6 'uninitiated'] Literally 'with unwashed feet' (Erasmus quotes the Greek in the text), a proverbial expression used to characterize precipitate or immature action; *Adagia* I ix 54. Erasmus traces the derivation of the expression from the religious practice of washing and purifying things to be used in sacred ceremonies. The religious tone of the metaphor with its implicit stress on piety as a prerequisite for the Christian pupil's approach to learning is characteristic of the author's philosophy of education and helps set the tenor of the programme he now proceeds to outline.
- 14 learnt at once] Quintilian 2.3.2

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Grammar, therefore, claims primacy of place and at the outset boys must be instructed in two – Greek, of course, and Latin. This is not only because almost everything worth learning is set forth in these two languages, but in addition because each is so cognate to the other that both can be more quickly assimilated when they are taken in conjunction than one without the other, or at least Latin without Greek. Quintilian prefers us to begin with Greek, with the proviso that, once it has been acquired, Latin is to follow after a short time. To be sure he cautions that equal care must be devoted to each. ‘And in this way,’ he says, ‘neither should hinder the other.’ Accordingly the rudiments of both languages must be assimilated, and without delay, and from a really good teacher. If the teacher is not available, then (as the next best thing) the best authors must certainly be used. Personally, I should like them to be very limited in number but carefully chosen. Among the Greek grammarians everyone assigns first place to Theodorus Gaza; Constantine Lascaris, in my opinion, rightly lays claim to second place. Among the ancient Latinists there is Diomedes; among the more recent I see little to choose, save that Niccolò Perotti appears the most painstaking, but this side of pedantry. But just as I admit that examples of the above sort are necessary, so I should like them to be very few, provided that they are of the best. Nor have I ever agreed with the common run of teachers who, in inculcating these authors, hold boys back for several years.

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- 6 Quintilian] 1.1.12. In *The Governour* (1531) Sir Thomas Elyot advised that Greek and Latin be taken up at the same time, but the ordinary practice in Renaissance schools was to begin with Latin.
- 15 Theodorus Gaza] A Greek scholar (c 1400–78) who taught for many years in Italy. His Greek grammar was published at Venice in 1495. Erasmus translated two books of this (Louvain 1516, 1518; text in LB I 117–64; and see Ep 428 and Allen Ep 771).
- 15 Lascaris] 1434–1501. One of the Greek exiles who came to Italy after the fall of Constantinople in 1453, he taught Greek at Milan and Naples. His Greek grammar appeared in 1476; it was the first book printed in Greek type. On the role of Theodorus, Lascaris, and other Greeks in early Italian humanism see *New Cambridge Modern History* I (1957) 95–126; L.D. Reynolds and N.G. Wilson *Scribes and Scholars* (Oxford 1968).
- 16 Diomedes] Grammarian of the fourth century AD
- 17 Niccolò Perotti] 1430–80. Famous philologist and secretary to Cardinal Bessarion, and thus a member of the literary circle which included Theodorus Gaza and Lascaris. He was the author of the *Rudimenta grammatices* (Rome 1473), the first modern Latin grammar. On the significance of the Greek exiles in Italy in the early Renaissance and of Bessarion’s circle in particular see D.J. Geanakoplos *Greek Scholars in Venice* (Cambridge, Mass 1962).

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Characters in Terence's *Eunuchus*

From *Terentius, cum directorio vocabulorum, sententiarum, artis comice, glosa ... comentariis ...* (Strasbourg: Grüniger 1499), fol xxviii^v

In 1532 Erasmus wrote, in the preface to an edition, that of all authors Terence is the best, as well as the most enjoyable, for learning clear and correct Latin style (Allen Ep 2584:70–2).

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For a true ability to speak correctly is best fostered both by conversing and consorting with those who speak correctly and by the habitual reading of the best stylists. Among the latter the first to be imbibed should be those whose diction, apart from its refinement, will also entice learners by a certain charm of subject-matter. In this category I would assign first place to Lucian, second to Demosthenes, and third to Herodotus; again, among the poets, first place to Aristophanes, second to Homer, third to Euripides. For Menander, to whom I would have given even the first place, is not extant. Again, among Latin writers who is more valuable as a standard of language than Terence? He is pure, concise, and closest to everyday speech and then, by the very nature of his subject-matter, is also congenial to the young. Should someone think that a few, selected comedies of Plautus, free from impropriety, should be added to the above, I would personally not demur. Second place will go to Virgil, third to Horace, fourth to Cicero, and fifth to Caesar. If someone thinks that Sallust should be included, I would not offer much objection. These, then, I believe to be sufficient for a knowledge of each language. For I have no time for those who, in thumbing through any author you can think of with this end in view, waste an entire lifetime, considering in effect a person a mere beginner who has missed any work – however minor.

Having, therefore, developed a pure, if not ornate, skill in language, we must next direct the mind towards an understanding of things. Of course some considerable knowledge of things as well as of words is acquired in passing, from these writers whom we read in order to refine our language, but traditionally almost all knowledge of things is to be sought in the Greek authors. For in short, whence can one draw a draught so pure, so easy, and so delightful as from the very fountain-head? But perhaps it would be more appropriate for me to indicate elsewhere the order in which the branches of knowledge should be learnt and from which masters in particular. Let us meanwhile return to the studies of early youth.

In order, then, that you may acquire an earlier and fuller enrichment

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6 Lucian] On Erasmus' interest in Lucian see *De copia* 603:17n. His translations of Lucian and Euripides are reprinted in ASD I.

8 Menander] Most of his work has perished, but Erasmus would have been aware of his high reputation through his reading of ancient authors and critics, by whom some of the poet's lines were preserved.

10 Terence] Always a favourite with Erasmus who, according to Beatus Rhenanus, knew him by heart (Allen 1 55:84, 70:540–1). He produced an edition in 1532; in the prefatory letter to this he praises Terence very warmly as a standard of diction and an author for boys (Allen Ep 2584:70ff).

31 enrichment] *copia*

from the writers from whom, I have said, a treasury of language is to be sought, I believe that you should diligently study Lorenzo Valla, the extremely elegant arbiter of elegant Latin. Aided by his precepts you will notice much for yourself; for I would not like you to follow Valla's precepts slavishly in everything. It will be an additional aid if you learn off the grammatical figures set out by Donatus and Diomedes; memorize the rules of poetry and all its patterns; have at your fingertips the chief points of rhetoric, namely propositions, the grounds of proof, figures of speech, amplifications, and the rules governing transitions. For these are conducive not only to criticism but also to imitation.

Informed then by all this you will carefully observe when reading writers whether any striking word occurs, if diction is archaic or novel, if some argument shows brilliant invention or has been skilfully adapted from elsewhere, if there is any brilliance in the style, if there is any adage, historical parallel, or maxim worth committing to memory. Such a passage should be indicated by some appropriate mark. For not only must a variety of marks be employed but appropriate ones at that, so that they will immediately indicate their purpose. If someone should decide that dialectic be added to the above I shall not gainsay him much, provided that he learn his dialectic from Aristotle and not from that prolix breed, the sophists.

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- 2 Lorenzo Valla] 1407–57. Italian humanist whose *Elegantiae linguae latinae* sought to restore contemporary Latin to the purity of classical usage. First published in 1471, it had already run to over sixty editions before 1550. See F. Buisson *Répertoire des ouvrages pédagogiques du XVI^e siècle* (Paris 1886). For Valla himself see G. Mancini *Vita di Lorenzo Valla* (Florence 1891). On Erasmus' epitome of Valla's *Elegantiae* see Ep 23:108n. A critical edition of this *Epitome* is included in ASD I-4 191–351.
- 6 Donatus] Notably in his *Commentarius in Terentium*. Aelius Donatus was a Latin grammarian of the fourth century AD and author of an *Ars grammatica*. His literary survival was to a large extent the result of his being incorporated into the medieval scheme of personification of the Seven Liberal Arts as the exemplar of Grammar (for which he vies with Priscian).
- 6 Diomedes] Above 667:16n
- 7 chief points of rhetoric] On these terms see *De copia* above: propositions 595–605, 650–3; grounds of proof (commonplaces) 605ff, 637ff; figures 333–42; amplifications 437, 507; transitions 410, 648ff.
- 14 adage ... parallel] Erasmus collected these in his *Adagia* and *Parabola*.
- 15 maxim] *De copia* 627:11 ff, 630:7ff.
- 20 the sophists] The sophists emerge in Greece during the fifth century BC to meet the needs of the politically ambitious in the nascent democracies where vote-winning through persuasive oratory was essential to gaining political power. It was the sophists' claim to be able to teach men the art of expressing their ideas in the most plausible manner, without entering into any ethical

Nor, again, should he rest at that point and (to quote Gellius) pass into old age by the rocks of the Sirens.

But meanwhile, bear in mind that the best master of style is the pen and you must therefore give it plenty of practice in poetry, prose, and every sort of literary material. We must not neglect memory, the storehouse of our reading. Although I do not deny that memory is aided by 'places' and 'images,' nevertheless the best memory is based on three things above all: understanding, system, and care. For memory largely consists in having thoroughly understood something. Then system sees to it that we can recall by an act of recovery even what we have once forgotten. Furthermore, care is of the highest importance, not only here but in all things. That being so you must repeatedly re-read very carefully what you want to remember. Next, we must regularly tax ourselves with its recall so that if something happens to elude us it can be reinstated. The following is a small point but one well worth making. It will be of considerable help if you take things which it is necessary but rather difficult to remember – place-names in geography for instance, metrical feet, grammatical figures, genealogies, and so forth – and have them written as briefly and attractively as possible on charts and hung up on the walls of a room where they are generally conspicuous even to those engaged on something else. In the same way you will write some brief but pithy sayings such as aphorisms, proverbs, and maxims at the beginning and at the end of your books; others you will inscribe on rings or drinking cups; others you will paint on doors and walls or even in the glass of a window so that what may aid learning is constantly before the eye. For, although these measures seem trivial in themselves when taken singly, yet taken together they make a profitable addition to the

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discussion of the nature of the ideas, which accounted for their notoriety (see the *Clouds* of Aristophanes) and also for their initial success. Later sophists often became absorbed in pointless debates on matters of style. Hence Erasmus' gibe about their prolixity.

¹ Gellius] 16.8.17

³ best master of style] Quintilian 10.3.1, from Cicero *De oratore* 1.150 and 257

⁶ 'places' and 'images'] The places and images impressed on the memory as an aid to instant recall were the key to the ancient art of 'artificial memory.' See H. Caplan's edition (Loeb Classical Library) of *Ad Herennium* 3.16.28–40. For a detailed account of artificial memory and Renaissance attitudes towards it see Frances A. Yates *The Art of Memory* (London 1966). As his remarks in *De ratione studii* show, Erasmus was sceptical about its claims. See also his *Ars notoria* (Thompson *Colloquies* 458–61).

²³ paint on doors and walls] As is done in the house of Eusebius in *Convivium religiosum* (Thompson *Colloquies* 46–78).

treasury of knowledge – a factor not to be passed over by someone striving to be enriched by these resources. Finally, if you should often be teaching others also, then that will lead not only to one of our objectives, but to all of them at once. For there is no better means of grasping what you understand and what you do not. Sometimes new ideas occur to one in preparing a lesson, and everything is more firmly fixed in the mind when teaching. 5

On the method of teaching pupils

But I see that you want me to make some observations on the method of teaching as well. Very well, let Vitre's wish be granted, although I see that Quintilian has left a very thorough treatment of these matters, so that it would seem the height of impertinence to write about a subject he has already dealt with. Well then: he who wishes to instruct someone will be careful from the beginning to teach only the best, but he who is to teach what is best most correctly must, it follows, be omniscient; or, since this is denied to human understanding, he should at least know the fundamentals of each discipline. In this I shall not be content with the usual ten or twelve authors but will demand the proverbial 'encyclopaedia' so that even someone who is preparing to teach a very little is very widely read. He must, therefore, range through the entire spectrum of writers so that he reads, in particular, all the best, but does not fail to sample any author, no matter how pedestrian. And in order to enhance the value of that exercise, he should have at the ready some commonplace book of systems and topics, so that wherever something noteworthy occurs he may write it down in the appropriate column. I have indicated how this ought to be done in the 10 15 20 25

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- 1 striving to be enriched] Cf Hesiod *Works and Days* 24. Erasmus quotes the Greek.
- 12 Vitre's] For the little that is known of Pierre Vitre (Viterius), to whom *De ratione studii* is dedicated, see Ep 66 introduction.
- 13 Quintilian] Bks 1 and 2
- 20 proverbial 'encyclopaedia'] As the immediately prior remarks indicate, Erasmus is thinking not of encyclopaedic knowledge in a modern sense but rather of the *ἐγκύκλιος παιδεία* or traditional range of subjects which constituted a general education for the ancients. In the Middle Ages this scheme became standardized in the Seven Liberal Arts, comprising the trivium (grammar, rhetoric, dialectic) and the quadrivium (geometry, arithmetic, astronomy, and music).
- 26 in the appropriate column] Erasmus is here advocating the use of the 'commonplace book,' in which Courage, Danger, Economy, and so forth were each

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second part of my *De copia*. But if someone suffers from a lack of time or books, Pliny alone will furnish an immense amount of information, Macrobius and Athanaeus much, and Gellius a variety of things. First and foremost, however, recourse must be had to the sources themselves, that is, to the Greeks and the ancients. Plato, Aristotle, and his pupil Theophrastus will serve as the best teachers of philosophy, and then there is Plotinus who combines both these schools. Among theological writers, after the Scriptures, no one writes better than Origen, no one more subtly or attractively than Chrysostom, no one more devoutly than Basil. Among the Latin Fathers, two at least are outstanding in this field: Ambrose who is wonderfully rich in metaphors, and Jerome who is immensely learned in the sacred Scriptures. If you lack the time to dwell on them individually, I nonetheless recommend that they should all be savoured. But for the present it is not my intention to compile a comprehensive list. Certainly in an exposition of the poets, who are accustomed to flavour their compositions with knowledge drawn from every quarter, you must command a good supply of mythology, and from whom is it better to seek this than Homer, the father of all myth? But the *Metamorphoses* and *Fasti* of Ovid, although written in Latin, are of no small importance. Geography too, which is useful in history, not to mention poetry, must also be mastered. This is dealt with most succinctly by Pomponius Mela, most eruditely by Ptolemy, and most comprehensively by Pliny. For Strabo does not write on this exclusively. Here the main object is to have observed which of the vernacular words for mountains, rivers, regions, and cities correspond to the ancient. A similar care must be

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allocated a page to which were added apposite texts gleaned from one's reading.

1 second part of my *De copia*] See 635–48.

2 Pliny] the Elder Pliny, author of the *Naturalis historia*

8 Origen ... Chrysostom] See Allen Epp 1844; 1558:171ff; 1800:81ff.

9 Basil] St Basil (c 330–79 AD) had also written on Greek literature for the young, and this work provides some interesting insights into Erasmus' concerns in *De ratione studii*. See N.G. Wilson ed *St Basil on the Value of Greek Literature* (London 1975).

10 Ambrose] Allen Ep 1855

11 sacred Scriptures] Erasmus may intend here the apocryphal as well as canonical scriptures. Jerome gave attention to both; he introduced the term 'Apocrypha.'

21 Pomponius Mela] He wrote, in Latin, a geographical survey of the world (first century AD).

22 Strabo] A Greek scholar (c 64 BC–21 AD) who wrote on both history and geography, but his *Geography* alone has survived.

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shown for the names of trees, plants, animals, tools, clothes, and precious stones, of which, incredible as it sounds, the common run of teachers knows absolutely nothing. A list of these objects can be collected from the different authors who have written on agriculture, military science, architecture, cooking, minerals, plants, and the nature of animals. Although Julius Pollux has professedly written on things and their names, I only wish the distinctions he draws had matched in accuracy the richness of his material. It can also be drawn, in part, from etymologies and partly from these languages which preserve to this very day the clear traces of the ancient, pure language. I have in mind the Greek of Constantinople, and also Italian and Spanish, for French has degenerated further than the rest. We must hold fast to the knowledge of antiquity which is culled not only from ancient authors but also from old coins, inscriptions, and stones. The genealogy of the gods must also be learnt, since stories from every source are full of them. After Hesiod, Boccaccio dealt with the genealogy, with more elegance than one would expect from the age in which he lived. Astronomy must not be passed over, especially that of Hyginus, since the poets liberally sprinkle their creations with it. The nature and essence

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- 6 Julius Pollux] He compiled (second century AD) an *Onomasticon* or thesaurus in Greek but included also quotations covering a wide range of topics, as Erasmus mentions. See Ep 260:52–6.
- 13 coins, inscriptions] For the study of coins and inscriptions during the Renaissance see R. Weiss *The Renaissance Discovery of Classical Antiquity* (Oxford 1969) chaps 11, 12, and the corresponding bibliographies. A celebrated example of the use of coins as historical evidence, and one which Erasmus would certainly have in mind, is to be found in Lorenzo Valla's *De falso credita et ementita Constantini donatione declamatio* (1440), where it was argued that the absence of any reference to the Donation of Constantine on papal coins or medals was a forceful *argumentum ex silentio* that no such gift took place. See the Teubner text of the *Donatio* ed W. Schwahn (Leipzig 1928) 9.32. For the relationship between the revival of classical literature and the revival of the visual arts in general as seen by the humanists themselves see the preface to the *Elegantiae* of Lorenzo Valla mentioned above.
- 15 Boccaccio] In his *De genealogia deorum gentilium* (c 1472), an encyclopaedic work which sought to bring together the diffuse but interlocking relationships of the deities and heroes of classical antiquity, and as such became a bridge between the mythology of the Middle Ages and that of the Renaissance. See J. Seznec *The Survival of the Pagan Gods* trans Barbara F. Sessions (New York 1953) passim.
- 17 Hyginus] The reference is to the *Poeticon astronomicon libri IV* (editio princeps Ferrara 1475) attributed to one Hyginus, to whose name editors, apparently without any manuscript authority, prefixed the additional designation C. Julius (the celebrated freedman of Augustus who had become head of the

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of everything must be grasped, especially since it is from this source that they are accustomed to draw their similes, epithets, comparisons, images, metaphors, and other rhetorical devices of that kind. Above all, however, history must be grasped. Its application is very widespread and not confined to the poets. Or again, if a man wishes to expound Prudentius, the one really stylish poet among Christian authors, he must also be skilled in the secrets of Scripture. In short, there is no branch of knowledge, whether military, agricultural, musical, or architectural, which is not useful for those who have undertaken an exposition of the ancient poets or orators. But I see that you have been frowning for some time. Truly, you say, you place an immense burden on a mere elementary teacher. Agreed, but I place it on one person so as to remove it from as many as possible. I would have one man read it all, rather than have everyone read everything.

Now Quintilian has dealt thoroughly with the correct formation of boys' spoken language and with the method akin to play or sport by which the shape of the letters should be imparted. After the first elements have been imparted I should personally prefer a boy to be encouraged to practise speaking right from the start. For since young children can pronounce any language, however barbarous, within months, is there any reason why the same thing should not occur in Greek or Latin? But there is no scope for this in a large crowd of boys and it requires the private company of a teacher. Still, even in a school the teacher will be careful to speak as correctly as possible, whether conversing with several boys or with one alone. He should explain things in passing and encourage them to imitate him. He should, on occasion, compliment them when they express themselves particularly well or correct them when they go wrong. Such a practice will produce in them also the habit of speaking with greater care and precision and a more attentive regard for the teacher when he is speaking. It will be an additional aid if, as an incentive, a quasi-legal code of rewards and punishments be devised so that the boys themselves correct one another. Furthermore the teacher should choose some of the more advanced pupils to sum up an argument. It will be time well spent to lay down some

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Palatine library). The crudities and barbarisms of the work are such that no scholar now believes that in its present shape it could be attributed to a man renowned for his erudition.

2 similes ... metaphors] On similes see *De copia* 337:8ff, 587:10, 616:9–10, 635:21ff, 641:5ff; on epithets 579:15ff, 590:23ff; on comparisons 579:12–14, 593:6ff, 616:6ff, 624:22ff, 630:6ff, 635:19ff; on parallels 621:1; on images 623:18ff, 642:22ff; on metaphors 333:1ff, 335:1ff. See also General Index.

5 Prudentius] Erasmus wrote commentaries on two of his poems (LB v 1338–58).

14 Quintilian] 1.1.11, 24–6

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guidelines for boys as to the sort of speech they should employ at play, in company, and at meal times. These ought to be well informed, yet easy and agreeable. In addition my industrious, learned, and acute teacher will not shun collecting all the precepts of the grammarians, selecting the simplest and briefest as far as this is possible and arranging them in the most 5
suitable order.

After those have been imparted the boys should, without delay, be directed to the study of an author who is most suitable for the purpose, and to the habit of speaking and writing. At this stage the teacher will carefully drive home the points previously made, together with their examples, to 10
which he will add some of his own, preparing even now as it were for more advanced studies. From this point they should be trained in topics. In these one should avoid above all the common mistake of having topics vacuous in content or dull in form; they should have a certain point or charm which is not too remote from youthful capabilities, so that while they are concentrat- 15
ing on something else, they will learn material relevant to higher studies. He should, therefore, have a theme or memorable historical episode to set before the boys. For instance: the rash self-confidence of Marcellus undermined the Roman state; the prudent delaying tactics of Fabius restored it. Although here there is also an underlying general principle that over-hasty 20
schemes seldom turn out well. Likewise: it would be difficult to decide who was the sillier, Crates who threw his gold into the sea, or Midas who held it to be the supreme good. In similar vein: the unrestrained eloquence of Demosthenes and Cicero was their undoing. Again: no praise can match the merits of King Codrus, who considered that the citizens' safety should 25
be redeemed at the cost of his own life. But it would be no great trouble to collect a number of examples of this type from the historians, in particular Valerius Maximus. Or he should employ mythology, for example: Hercules won immortality for himself by vanquishing monsters; or the Muses take special delight in springs and groves and shun the smoky cities. Or he 30

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- 1 guidelines] As is done in the earliest *formulae* in the *Colloquies* (555ff), and cf *De civilitate* 1530 (LB I 1033–44).
- 10 examples] See *De copia* 606:26ff.
- 14 a certain point or charm] See *De copia* 627:11ff on *sententiae* or maxims.
- 18 Marcellus] Marcus Claudius Marcellus (third century BC), a famous Roman general who fought against the Gauls and later in the First Punic War
- 19 delaying tactics of Fabius] Quintus Fabius Maximus, who earned his title of 'cunctator' (the delayer) by his policy, when dictator of Rome, of constantly harassing Hannibal without engaging him in a set battle. He forms one of the subjects of Plutarch's *Lives*.
- 25 Codrus] Last of the legendary kings of Athens, who is said to have sacrificed himself for his country when invasion threatened it from the Peloponnesians

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should make use of a fable; for example: the lark was correct to teach that one should not entrust to a friend business which one can finish by oneself. Likewise: everyone sees the wallet which hangs in front of him, while nobody sees the one he carries behind him. So too: the fox showed cunning in preferring to retain the flies which were by this time almost sated, rather than to shake them off and allow on him those which were ravenous and thirsty to suck what remained of his blood. Or he should employ the apophthegm; for example: that he who preferred a man for himself rather than for his money was far out of step with the common values of our age. Or again: Socrates rightly condemned those who do not eat to live but live to eat; Cato was quite right in disapproving of those whose palate is more refined than their intellect. Or the proverb, such as: let the cobbler stick to his last; and it is not for everyone to sail to Corinth. Since I have published so many adages it should not be difficult to come by examples. Or he should employ the aphorism: for instance, nothing costs more than what is got by begging; and flattery begets friendship, truth hatred; and distant friends are no friends. Other themes may be suggested by the special properties of something, such as: the magnet draws iron to itself, naphtha fire. Likewise: such is the nature of the palm tree that, when weighted down, far from sinking to the ground, it strives upwards and raises itself up higher. So too the astonishing ability of the cuttle-fish which changes its colour to merge with the sea-bed in order to evade the fisherman's net. Or consider that striking figure of speech, climax: riches beget luxury, luxury excess, excess cruelty, cruelty widespread hatred, hatred destruction. Or the simile: just as iron is worn away by use, yet if not used it is eaten away by rust, so ability is consumed by over-working, yet if not exercised it is further atrophied by disuse and neglect. Or the metaphor, for example: fire should not be fought with fire, nor oil poured on troubled waters. Or chiasmus,

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- 1 the lark] Aulus Gellius 2.29
- 3 wallet] Cf Catullus 22.21 and Phaedrus 4.10.1.
- 8 apophthegm] Erasmus published a collection of apophthegms, in eight books, in 1531 (LB IV 93–380).
- 10 Socrates] Cf *Apophthegmata* (LB IV 160c).
- 11 Cato] *Apophthegmata* (LB IV 260–2 passim)
- 12 cobbler] *Adagia* I vi 16
- 13 sail to Corinth] *Adagia* I iv 1; see *De copia* 295:10n. This and the adage in the preceding line were favourites of Erasmus.
- 15 got by begging] See *De copia* 444:4n.
- 16 flattery begets friendship] Cf Terence *Andria* 68.
- 16 truth hatred] *Adagia* II ix 53
- 16 distant friends are no friends] *Adagia* II iii 86
- 18 magnet ... palm ... cuttle-fish] *Adagia* I vii 56, I iii 4, II iii 91

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such as: it is not because I am exceptionally fond of you that I consider you to be such a person, but because I consider you to be such a person that I am exceptionally fond of you. Or rhetorical division, for example: he is too stupid to be capable of silence, too childish to be capable of speech. He is too ingenuous to be capable of lying, too dignified to wish to lie. But it is sufficient on my part merely to have pointed the way. Or he should use some choice turn of phrase, of which no example is necessary. There is nothing to prevent several apt literary devices such as the aphorism, the historical example, the proverb, and figurative language from occurring in the same speech. Accordingly, the teacher, who should be well versed in the best authorities, will compile a small widely chosen anthology of this sort and will present such selections, or will even adapt them to a form suitable to boys' abilities.

After the boy has acquired some degree of skill in speaking by these methods, he should then, if it seems opportune, be referred to the more advanced stages of grammar, which should be imparted by some scheme of arrangement and systematization, in such a way that in the first place the simplest are set out, and briefly at that. Then, as the learners' talents mature, so will it be necessary to introduce all the more advanced rules in order. The model for such a system may be taken from the Grammar of Theodorus Gaza. I should not, however, like them to be detained overlong on this but to be referred, next, to weightier authorities, especially if they have already grasped that outline of rhetoric of which I have spoken, together with figures of speech and the forms of poetry. Meanwhile they should be trained in more difficult exercises also, in the selection and teaching of which they will require a diligent and well-informed teacher. If he should be of moderate ability but also modest, he will not object to seeking these exercises from someone more learned. The form of the exercises can generally be as follows. At one time he should set out the subject-matter of a short but expressive letter in the vernacular which has to be construed in Latin or Greek or both. On another occasion he should set a fable, on another a short but meaningful narrative, on another an aphorism composed of four parts, with a comparison between each of the two parts or with an accompanying reason attached to each. At one time the adducing of proofs should be dealt with in its five parts, at another the dilemma in two,

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21 Theodorus] See above 667:15n.

30 letter] On letter-writing see Erasmus' *De conscribendis epistolis* 1521, 1522 (LB I 345–484; ASD I-2 157–579).

32 aphorism ... of four parts] *De copia* 628:1–7

35 five parts] *Ad Herennium* 2.18.28

at another what is called *expolitio* or refinement should be developed in its seven parts. Sometimes, as a prelude to rhetoric, the pupils should deal with one of the parts separately. Aphthonius has written rhetorical exercises of this sort. Sometimes they ought to deal with praise, censure, mythology, simile, comparison; sometimes with a figure of speech, or description, division, impersonation, rhetorical question and answer, signification. They should be regularly instructed to turn verse into prose and at different times to put prose into verse. From time to time they should imitate in vocabulary and style a letter of Pliny or Cicero. Sometimes they should express, again and again, the same proposition in different words and style. Sometimes they should vary the expression of the same proposition in Greek and Latin, in verse and prose. Sometimes they should express the same proposition in five or six kinds of metre which the teacher has prescribed. Sometimes they should recast the same proposition in as many forms and figures as possible. And it is a highly beneficial exercise to translate from the Greek. Accordingly it is desirable for the pupils to receive the most frequent and careful training in this exercise. For as soon as the mind is trained to grasp meanings, then the vigour and peculiarity of each language is thoroughly appreciated and points of similarity and variance between ourselves and the Greeks are grasped. Finally, to capture the peculiar tone of the Greek one must deploy all the resources of the Latin language. If this seems difficult for boys to begin with, it will become easier through practice, and the wit and application of the teacher will remove a good part of the burden from the boys by supplying what he considers to be beyond their capacity.

Meanwhile the reading of good authors should be constantly interspersed with those exercises so that the pupils always have material for imitation. Nevertheless the teacher, after setting an exercise, ought to provide as well a good supply of vocabulary and figures of speech. Under

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1 *expolitio*] *De copia* 630:7ff; and see *Ad Herennium* 4.42.54.

3 Aphthonius] Rhetorician (fourth century AD) whose progymnasmata or exercises were used as a school text in the sixteenth century

5 simile, comparison] See 675:2n.

6 division] Distribution: *Ad Herennium* 4.35.47; cf 4.40.52; *De copia* 427:17ff.

6 impersonation] *Sermocinatio* (dialogue) in *Ad Herennium* 4.52.65 but combined by Quintilian 9.2.29–32 with *prosopopoeia* (impersonation)

6 question and answer] *De copia* 347:30ff, but see also ASD I-2 131:5n.

6 signification] 'Description of something by indicating the signs that accompany it' (*De copia* 332:18)

7 turn verse into prose] See *De copia* 303:21–4.

26 reading] Quintilian 1.8.1–12; 2.5.1–17

this heading they should also be encouraged to strive to discover those for themselves, so that once the bare bones of an argument have been set out, each may discover by his own efforts what will be appropriate to the treatment, adornment, and enrichment of the theme. And in this I shall require diligent attention to selection and variety on the part of the learned teacher; meanwhile I shall give a sample of what I mean. He will regularly set out the argument of the persuasive, dissuasive, exhortatory, dehortatory, narrative, congratulatory, expostulatory, commendatory, and consolatory letter. He will point out the nature of each type, some features and set-phrases they have in common, and, once the argument has been set out, their peculiarities as well. The same method will apply to an exercise in the different kinds of formal oratory, for instance, if he should order them to revile Julius Caesar or to praise Socrates in the demonstrative genre. Likewise, in the persuasory genre: that the best should be learnt at once; that happiness does not consist in riches; that a mother should nourish her offspring with her own milk; that one should or should not attend to Greek letters; that a man should or should not marry; or that one should or should not travel abroad. So too, in the judicial genre, that Marcus Horatius did not deserve punishment. But of course a man who has assumed the role of a teacher will not disdain to indicate to those entering the arena for the first time, first, in how many propositions that argument can be treated. Furthermore he will show the order of the propositions and how one follows from another. Next, the number of reasons by which each proposition should be supported, and the number of proofs of each reason. Then he will indicate sources for the circumstances and grounds of proof. Then, with what sort of similes, contrasts, examples, analogies, aphorisms, proverbs, myths, and fables each part may be enhanced. He should also point out the use of rhetorical figures and where striking examples may be employed which may render the speech more pointed or more rotund, of greater

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- 2 once ... the theme] A succinct statement of the purposes of *De copia*
- 3 by his own efforts] *Adagia* I vi 19
- 7 argument] *De conscribendis epistolis* provides analysis and examples of these types of letters.
- 14 the best should be learnt at once] So Ep 56:32
- 16 her own milk] A theme to which Erasmus returned more than once; for example in *Puerpera* (Thompson *Colloquies* 272–85)
- 17 marry] See *De copia* 598:9n.
- 18 travel abroad] Or 'go on pilgrimage'
- 18 Marcus Horatius] Livy 1.26. The example of Horatius, tried and acquitted for the killing of his unpatriotic sister, is a favourite with Quintilian: 3.6.76, 4.2.7, 7.4.8.

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clarity or appeal. Should amplification be called for somewhere, he should explain the method underlying it, whether by means of commonplaces or by those methods which Quintilian has divided into four types. Should any appeals to emotion be called for he will advise how these too are to be expressed. He should of course set out the principles governing connection and what form the best transition would take: from the opening section to the main outline, from the main outline to the division, from the division to the proofs, from proposition to proposition, from reason to reason, from the proofs to the epilogue or peroration. He should also point out some formulae by which they may be able to launch smoothly into the exordium or even the peroration. Finally he should, if it is possible, point out some passages in authors where they may be able to take something for imitation because of its relevance to the task in hand. When all that has been performed seven or eight times, then they will begin 'to swim without cork,' to quote Horace, and it will be sufficient to supply the bare subject of the exercise, and no longer necessary, as with infants, to be constantly putting predigested food into their mouths.

Nor am I averse to that type of exercise which I see was employed by the ancients: I refer to the selection of themes from Homer, Sophocles, Euripides, Virgil, or even the ancient historians on occasion. For instance: Menelaus should reclaim Helen before the Trojan assembly: or Phoenix should persuade Achilles to return to the battle: or Ulysses should urge the Trojans to give back Helen rather than endure the war. Several rhetorical exercises of Libanius and Aristides exist along these lines. Again: that a

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1 amplification] *De copia* 437:7–11, 507:9–15, 592 ff. Cf Quintilian 8.4.1 ff.

3 four types] See Quintilian 3.6.80 ff; 8.4.3.

6 transition] *De copia* chap 53 (above 410)

14 'to swim without cork'] That is, need no further assistance. Horace *Satires* 1.4.120; *Adagia* I viii 42

16 infants] An Erasmian pun. *Infans* is taken in its literal sense of 'inarticulate child' and in this context 'incompetent orator.' Cf Cicero *De oratore* 2.162. The analogy between teacher and midwife goes back to Socrates.

24 Libanius] Greek rhetorician (fourth century AD) from Antioch whose school at Constantinople was patronized by the emperor Julian. Erasmus translated three declamations by Libanius in 1503; they were published at Louvain in 1519 (text in ASD I-1 175–92). He dedicated them to Nicolas Ruistre, bishop of Arras and chancellor of the University of Louvain. The presentation copy of these translations, in Erasmus' hand, is in the library of Trinity College, Cambridge. See Ep 177.

24 Aristides] Aelius Aristides, a second-century Greek rhetorician who wrote letters and speeches in imitation of the best Attic style. The *editio princeps* of Aristides was published in 1517 by Giunta at Florence, but Erasmus had been

friend should urge Cicero not to accept the terms offered by Antony, an argument which is found in Seneca; or that Phalaris should persuade the priests of Delphi to consecrate the bronze bull to their god. The letters which circulate under the name of Phalaris and Brutus are relevant here. In correcting, the teacher will praise any felicity of invention, treatment, or imitation, and will censure any omission, misplacement, excess or slackness, obscurity, or even an infelicity of expression. He will show how it can be corrected and will insist that his pupils acquire the habit of correcting. He will, in particular, stimulate the pupils' spirits by starting with comparison among them, thereby arousing a state of mutual rivalry.

Now in reading authors I should not like you to follow the practice of today's common run of teachers who, through some perverse ambition, attempt to treat every passage as a text for exhaustive disquisition, but would like you to confine yourself to those points alone which are relevant to the interpretation of the passage under consideration – unless the occasional digression seems appropriate to enhance their enjoyment. If you ask me about the method of this also, then the following seems to me to be the best approach. In the first place the teacher should give a brief appreciation of the writer on whom he proposes to lecture, in order to win over his audience. Then he should point out the pleasure and benefit to be derived from his argument. Next, if (as is frequently the case) the tenor of the argument should offer a variety of applications, he should explain these and distinguish between them. For example, take a comedy of Terence. Before

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given access to a manuscript in preparing his *Adagia*: 'Many learned men of their own accord offered me authors not yet published.' (See *Adagia* LB II 405C–D.)

- 2 Seneca] The Elder Seneca. Cf Suasoria 6, which gives the various arguments for and against. For this suasory or deliberative type of speech in which the theme is set and then the arguments for and against are put forward, see Quintilian 2.4.24. A famous Elizabethan example is Hamlet's 'To be or not to be' soliloquy.

De copia 597:26ff contains suggestions for a suasoria on Antony's offer to Cicero.

- 2 Phalaris] Tyrant of Acragas in Sicily during the sixth century BC who was said to have roasted his victims in a bronze bull; *Adagia* I x 86
- 3 letters ... Brutus] Letters thought to have been written by Phalaris were shown by Richard Bentley (1697) to be forgeries. Authenticity of two of the letters by Marcus Junius Brutus in his correspondence with Cicero has been questioned (cf Loeb Classical Library edition of *Ad familiares* 3.616–19).

11 reading] See above 679:26ff.

16 digression] *De copia* 589:7ff.

23 Terence] See above 669:10n.

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translating this he should first of all discuss briefly the author's circumstances, his talent, the elegance of his language. Then he should mention how much enjoyment and instruction may be had from reading comedy; next the significance of that form of literature, its origins, the number of types of comedy and its laws. Next he should explain as clearly and concisely as possible the gist of the plot. He should be careful to point out the type of metre. Then he should make a simple arrangement of these points and then explain each one in greater detail. In this respect he should carefully draw their attention to any purple passage, archaism, neologism, Graecism, any obscure or verbose expression, any abrupt or confused order, any etymology, derivation, or composition worth knowing, any point of orthography, figure of speech, or rhetorical passages, or embellishment or corruption. Next he should compare parallel passages in authors, bringing out differences and similarities – what has been imitated, what merely echoed, where the source is different, where common, inasmuch as the majority of Latin works have their origin in Greek. Finally he should turn to philosophy and skilfully bring out the moral implication of the poets' stories, or employ them as patterns, for example, the story of Pylades and Orestes to show the excellence of friendship; that of Tantalus the curse of avarice. Here Eustathius, the commentator on Homer, will be a substantial aid to the teacher. And so it will come about (assuming mental agility on the teacher's part) that if some passage is encountered which may corrupt the young, far from its harming their morals it may in fact confer some benefit, namely by concentrating their attention, partly on annotation of the passage, partly on loftier thoughts. If, for instance, someone were going to read Virgil's second *Eclogue*, he should prepare or rather protect the minds of his audience with a suitable preface along the following lines: friendship can exist only among similar people, for similarity promotes

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4 significance of that form] See *De copia* 591:9n.

11 composition] Ways of linking phrases; *De copia* chap 30 (345:1 ff)

17 moral implication of ... stories] A topic that offered endless opportunities to Renaissance authors. See *De copia* 610:16ff.

19 Tantalus] *Adagia* I vi 22 and II vi 14

20 Eustathius] A twelfth-century archbishop of Thessalonica who wrote very full commentaries on the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* (*editio princeps* Rome 1542–50) which were important for preserving the scholia and commentaries of earlier scholars.

26 Virgil's second *Eclogue*] On the moral interpretation of pagan literature for a Christian audience and brief discussion of Erasmus' attitude towards it see Bolgar, esp 337–40; CWE 23 xxix–xxxii; and above 663–4.

28 friendship] *Adagia* I i 2

A ORAT ABDUCERE. Orat ut abducatur, figuratū est: ut donat habere, id est donat ut habeat. **ET FACIET.** Noli dicere, & faciam: ne quē amabat offenderet, si se velle aliter dare munus diceret quod ei parauerat.

Huc ades o formose puer: tibi lilia plenis
Ecce ferunt nymphae calathis: tibi candida Nais
Pallentes violas, & summa papauera carpens,
Narcissum, & florem iungit bene olentis anethi.
Tum casia, atque aliis intexens suauibus herbis,
Mollia luteola pingit vacinia caltha.
Ipse ego cana legam tenera lanugine mala,
Castaneasque nuceas, mea quas Amaryllis amabat.
Addam cerea pruna, & honos erit huic quoque pomo.
Et vos o lauri carpam, & te proxima myrte:
Sic posita quoniam suauis miscetis odores.

D HUC ADES O FORMOSE PVER, tibi lilia plenis Ecce ferunt nymphae calathis. Tantum honoris habet puero: ut ei dicat etiam numina obsecutura. Sane calathus, gracū est: nam latine quasillum dicitur. Cicero in philippicis, An non inter quasilla pendet aurum? **CANDIDA NAIS,** Vel pulchra, vel dea. Nam dii umbris contrarii sunt, quas nigras esse constat. hinc est, Candidus insuetum miratur limen olympi. **PALLENES VIOLAS.** Amantium tinctas colore. Horatius, Et tinctus viola pallor amantium. Vnde non praeter affectionem amantis, eos flores nymphae dicit offerre, qui sunt amantibus similes. **PAPAVERA CARPENS, NARCISSVM ET FLOREM BENE OLENTIS ANETHI.** Sane Papauer, Narcissus, Anethus, pulcherrimi pueri fuerunt: qui in flores suorum nominum versi sunt: quos ei offerendo, quasi admonet nequid etiam tale aliquid vnquam ex amore patiat. **TVM CASIA.** Herba suauissimi odoris: ut sequentia indicant: quā Graeci casiam dicunt. Et sic dictum est Tum casia, atque aliis intexens suauibus herbis: ut in Sallustio, Leonem, atque alias feras. **MOLLIA LUTEOLA PINGIT VACINIA CALTHA.** Mollia vacinia pingit, id est composit de caltha luteola. Nam nisi **LUTEOLA,** septimus sit casus, non stat verius. Mollia autem, tactus plumei felicitet. Hoc dicens, ex colorum diuersitate quaerit ornatum. **CANA LEGAM TENERA LANUGINE MALA.** Mala dicit cydonea: quae lanuginis plena sunt: sed non praeter obliquitatem. Nam in Aeneide diximus, apud Creteneses, infamia genus iuuenibus fuerat, non amatos fuisse. Et verecunde rem inhonestam supprimit: quam Thocritus aperte commemorat. **CASTANEASQUE NUCEAS.** Bene speciem addidit: dicens castaneas. Nam NUCEAS, generatim dicuntur omnia testa cotio duriora: ut auellanae, amygdala, iuglandes, castaneae. sicut contra dicuntur poma, omnia molliora. **MEA QVAS AMARYLLIS AMABAT.** Ne casus vires exstimes, quas Amaryllis est amare dignata, nam apud illam in ingenti fuerunt honore.

G CEREAE PRUNA. Aut cerei coloris: aut mollia. Horatius, Cereae Telephi laudat brachia. **HONOS ERIT HVIC QVQVE POMO.** Si à te dilectum fuerit: sicut castaneae in honore fuerunt amatae Amaryllidi. **O LAURI.** Licet Horatius dixerit, Depone sub lauro mea: meus tamen est iuxta secundam formā inflectere: nam melius sonat. **PROXIMA MYRTE.** Vel vicina lauro: vel ad odorem proxima. potest enim vtrunque intelligi. **SIC POSITAE QVONIAM SVAVES MISCETIS ODORES.** Quoniam permissione vestra suauis odor creatus Rusticus es Corydon, nec munera curat Alexis:
Nec si muneribus certes, concedat Iolas.
Eheu quid volui misero mihi? floribus austrum
Perditus, & liquidis immisi fontibus apros.
Quem fugis ah demens: habitauerunt diu quoque sylvas,
Dardaniusque Paris. Pallas quas condidit arces,

Virgil's second Eclogue, lines 45–55,

followed by the relevant passages from the greatest of ancient commentaries
on Virgil, that of Servius, in a handsome folio edition

Paris: R. Stephanus 1532

In *De ratione studii* Erasmus suggests how the master should prepare his pupils for
reading the second Eclogue. See pages 683–7.

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mutual good will, while dissimilarity on the other hand is the parent of hatred and distrust; moreover, the greater, the truer, the more deeply rooted the similarity, the firmer and closer will be the friendship. That of course is the essence of so many proverbs in literature. For example: the good attend the banquets of the good without having to be invited; again, like takes pleasure in like; equal delights equal; look for a wife who is your equal; God always brings like to like; jackdaw always associates with jackdaw; like lips, like lettuce; equals congregate most easily with equals; an elderly man marries an elderly woman; one stammerer best understands another; the cricket is dear to the cricket, the ant to the ant, the Cretan to the Aeginetan. Conversely, the many proverbs on dissimilarity amount to nothing else than that, among people of different station, way of life, or interests, either friendship is totally absent, or, if present, does not become firmly established and is quickly broken. And for that reason the ignoramus detests the scholar, the layman the priest, the rustic the courtier, the young man the old. In the same category comes the hatred of the Epicurean for the Stoic, the philosopher for the lawyer, the poet for the theologian, the stammerer for the eloquent. For this reason the friendship of the twin brothers Amphion and Zethus almost dissolved, because the one was devoted to the lyre, the other enjoyed tilling the fields; and it would in fact have dissolved had not Amphion thrown away his lyre and given in to his brother's interest. For the same reason the friendship of Castor and Pollux was fragile, even going so far as attempted parricide, although each had been born from the same egg – in this sense they could not have been truer twins – all because the one was a boxer, the other devoted to horses. Hence, too, the incompatibility of Remus and Romulus, because the one was sombre and austere in character, the other more easy-going; and for this reason his name was changed from Romus to Romulus. Because they were

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- 1 dissimilarity] See *Amicitia* (Thompson *Colloquies* 516–27), which deals with antipathies as well as sympathies in nature.
- 4 For example ... Aeginetan] For these examples, in the order in which they are quoted in the text, see *Adagia* I x 35; I ii 21; I ii 20; I viii 1; I ii 22; I ii 23; I x 71; I ii 20; I ii 62; I ix 77; I ii 24; I ii 27.
- 21 Amphion] The twin brother of Zethus and son of Zeus and Antiope who, as joint ruler with his brother, built the walls of Thebes. Like Orpheus, his skill on the lyre was legendary and he is said to have drawn the stones for his walls into place by the power of his music.
- 22 Castor and Pollux] Also termed Dioscuri; they were the twin sons of Zeus by Leda; famous for their bravery and fighting prowess. In later legend they were associated with the constellation Gemini.
- 28 name was changed] Servius on *Aeneid* 1.273 records that the name of Romus was changed to Romulus (a diminutive form).

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drawn to different types of life, Cain and Abel were anathema to one another. The deepest form of love coincides with the deepest resemblance, and so it has been portrayed by the poets. For instance, as soon as Narcissus, who had previously shunned every form of friendship, had caught sight of his own reflection on the glassy surface of a pool, he immediately began to burn with an all-consuming passion. For what is more like ourselves than our own reflection? Thus when the learned is drawn to the learned, the sober to the sober, the modest to the modest, the honest to the honest, each is drawn to nothing other than his own character as reflected in another person, that is, to himself in another form. But if such a likeness is rooted in the goods of the soul – the only true goods – that is, piety, justice, and temperance, then the resulting friendship is based on those qualities by which it was promoted, that is, it is honest, true, sincere, firm, and eternal. On the other hand, he will point out that if it is based on the transience of earthly things or even on baseness, then no true, pleasant, or lasting friendship is possible. Accordingly he should show how Plato conceived of two types of Venus, the one celestial, the other terrestrial; similarly of two types of Cupid, corresponding to their respective mothers. The celestial Venus brings true forms to birth and her son implants true and honourable affections. Among the good, love is always mutual, while among the low it is common for one to love, the other to hate, one to pursue, the other to flee. That occurs generally because of a dissimilarity in temperament and outlook. The Cupid of the poets is the cultured expression of this: sometimes piercing one person with a golden dart, another with a leaden one, thus making the former love, the latter recoil from it, and nothing can be more wretched than this form of ‘friendship.’ It is, then, a symbolic picture of such an ill-formed friendship which Virgil is presenting in this Eclogue. Corydon is from the countryside, Alexis from the city. Corydon is a shepherd, Alexis a courtier. Corydon is unsophisticated (for Virgil calls his songs artless), while Alexis is widely read. Corydon is advanced in years, Alexis in his early manhood. Corydon is ugly, Alexis handsome. In short, they differ in every respect. The prudent man should therefore choose a friend in tune with his own character, if he wants the affection to be mutual. If, then, he prefaces his remarks in this way, and

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3 Narcissus] Ovid *Metamorphoses* 3.407ff

17 two types of Venus] Cf Plato *Symposium* 180D–E. For a discussion of the ‘twin Venuses’ and their importance in Renaissance Neoplatonism see Erwin Panofsky ‘The Neoplatonic Movement in Florence and North Italy’ in his *Studies in Iconology* (New York 1939). They are the subject of Titian’s famous painting ‘Sacred and Profane Love.’

34 he] The teacher

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thereupon shows the passages which indicate the mistaken and boorish affections of Corydon, I believe the minds of his audience will suffer no ill effects, unless someone comes to the work who has already been corrupted. For such a person will have brought his infection with him and will not have acquired it from this activity. I have dealt with this particular example at some length so that each person may more easily come by similar means of exposition for himself in other cases. 5

Now in approaching each work the teacher should indicate the nature of the argument in the particular genre, and what should be most closely observed in it. For instance, the essence of the epigram lies in its pointed brevity. Then he will deal with the theory of wit which Quintilian and Cicero present, pointing out that this literary form takes particular delight in rhetorical exclamations, cleverly thrown in at the end, and thereby startling the reader into remembering their point. In tragedy, he will point out that particular attention should be paid to the emotions aroused, and especially, indeed, to the more profound. He will show briefly how these effects are achieved. Then he will deal with the arguments of the speakers as if they were set pieces of rhetoric. Finally, he should deal with the representation of place, time, and sometimes action, and the occurrence of heated exchanges, which may be worked out in couplets, single lines, or half-lines. In comedy, he should show in particular that decorum and the portrayal of our common life must be observed, and that the emotions are more subdued: that is, engaging, rather than passionate. He should show that decorum especially is studied, not only in its universal aspect, I mean that youths should fall in love, that pimps should perjure themselves, that the prostitute should allure, the old man scold, the slave deceive, the soldier boast, and so on, but also in the particular delineation of different characters as developed by the poet. For example, in the *Andria* Terence introduces two old men of widely different temperament. Simo is forthright, rather irritable, yet not stupid or dishonest. On the other hand, Chremes is polite and always calm, self-controlled on every occasion, resolving all 10 15 20 25 30

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11 theory of wit] Quintilian 6.3.1ff; Cicero *De oratore* 2.217ff; *De officiis* 1.103-4. Cf *De copia* 654:16ff.

13 rhetorical exclamations] Quintilian's 'acclamation' (8.5.11); *De copia* 629:6ff

18 representation of place, time] *De copia* 587:13-589:4

21 decorum] Erasmus is sensitive to decorum in dress and speech (*De civilitate* passim; Thompson *Colloquies* 210-16, 445-6; *Ecclesiastes* LB V 966f-7A) but does not treat at length the nature of artistic decorum. The fundamental exposition of decorum is Cicero *De officiis* 1.93-101, where 'propriety,' 'appropriateness' (the definition of decorum) is said to be identical with what is morally right: 'quod decet, honestum est; et quod honestum est, decet' (1.94).



Master and pupils

When praising Colet in his dedicatory letter to *De copia* (Ep 260) Erasmus expresses the common sixteenth-century conviction about the importance of having youth 'absorb Christian principles together with an excellent literary education from their earliest years.' Tudor schoolmasters were regularly required to teach the catechism. This illustration from a 1593 edition of Alexander Nowell's *Catechism or Institution of Christian Religion* (London: Windet) shows the master rewarding a proficient pupil.

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differences as far as he can, gentle but hardly simple-minded. Likewise he introduces two young men of divergent natures: Pamphilus, wise for his years, and very resourceful, but rather blunt, so that you recognize him as a true son of his father, Simo. Set against him is Charinus who is childish, inept, and resourceless. Again, two slaves of different character: Davus, crafty, packed with guile, unshakably optimistic; Byrria is the exact opposite, totally lacking in initiative, a constant source of despair to his master. Likewise in the *Adelphi*: Micio is gentle and gay even when scolding, while even the sweetness of Demea has a touch of bitterness to it. Again, take Aeschinus who, because he is city-bred and has the trust of Micio, will attempt anything, but you still appreciate the basic decency of the man who is dutiful towards his brother, faithful to his sweetheart. On the other hand, Ctesipho is rather boorish and timid because of his inexperience in those things. Syrus is wily and daring, constantly confounding truth and falsehood, so that in drunkenness alone is his deceit revealed; while Dromo is dull and obtuse. But it is not my purpose here to develop these points; it is sufficient for the present to have pointed the way. In the *Eclogues* the teacher should remind them that the setting is the Golden Age with its portrayal of the fabulous antique way of life. Consequently, he should point out that in such a context all the aphorisms, similes and comparisons are drawn from pastoral life; that the characters' emotions are simple and they delight in songs, aphorisms, and proverbs, and are susceptible to signs and portents. In the same way he will be careful to remind pupils of the essential nature of epic poetry, history, the dialogue, the fable, satire, the ode, and the other literary genres. Then he will not shirk from pointing out the merits or even the faults of particular authors in particular passages, in order that the young may become accustomed, even at so early an age, to employing what is, in everything, of paramount importance – judgment. In this matter, apart from his own expertise and native wit, the teacher will

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- 15 Dromo] Erasmus' memory of *Adelphi* seems to be at fault here. Dromo is referred to by Syrus at line 376 but does not appear in the play. The character sketch in lines 14–16 above does not fit the only other slave (Syrus) with a role in the play.
- 17 *Eclogues*] On Theocritean and Virgilian pastoral, its influence on Renaissance pastoral poetry, and Renaissance conceptions of pastoral see E.R. Curtius *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* trans Willard R. Trask (New York 1953) chap 10 183–202; W. Leonard Grant *Neo-Latin Literature and the Pastoral* (Chapel Hill 1965); T.G. Rosenmeyer *The Green Cabinet: Theocritus and the European Pastoral Lyric* (Berkeley 1969); Fred J. Nichols 'The Development of Neo-Latin Theory of the Pastoral in the Sixteenth Century' *Humanistica Lovaniensia* 18 (1969) 95–114.

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obtain additional help in Cicero's short treatise *De claris oratoribus* and in the literary criticism of Quintilian, Seneca, and Antonio Campano, not forgetting the ancient interpreters; Donatus in particular was concerned with this.

Relevant to this is the theory underlying the literary form: why, for example, did Cicero feign fear in his defence of Milo; and what lies behind Virgil's eulogistic portrayal of Turnus, the enemy of Aeneas; and why, in Lucian, does the disowned doctor, far from striking his stepmother, actually praise her and is more hostile towards the father than the stepmother? But here again the scope is vast. Yet someone will criticize all this as involving too much hard work. For my part, I want a learned teacher, one trained by long experience. Given such a person, the boys will acquire such knowledge, even easily. But if such a programme proves rather arduous to begin with, progress and practice will make it easier. Unless I am mistaken, it is the best one; and it is fitting to accustom them to the best from the start, although these points are not to be inculcated in their entirety on every occasion – otherwise boredom is likely to overwhelm the pupils – but rather the more important should be inculcated as they occur. Nor, of course, should the teacher take less care in testing what he has imparted than in putting it across. This is far and away the heaviest burden on the teacher, but is most useful to his pupils. It is not merely the bare outlines of the lesson which he should test but the substance of the points which must be

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- 1 *De claris oratoribus*] The *Brutus*, a treatise by Cicero on famous orators. On Roman rhetorical history and Cicero's attitude towards it see the edition of *Brutus* by A.E. Douglas (Oxford 1966) introduction.
- 2 Seneca] The Elder Seneca, compiler of the *Controversiae* and *Suasoriae*
- 2 Antonio Campano] 1429–77. Friend of Pius II, who made him bishop of Cotrone (Crotone) and later of Teramo. He translated Plutarch and Aesop and wrote amorous poetry. Erasmus calls him 'a man born for jesting and wit' (Ep 61:153–4). See *Io Antonii Campani epistolae et poemata* ed J.B. Mencken (Leipzig 1707); Flavio Di Bernardo *Gianantonio Campano* (Rome 1975).
- 3 Donatus] Above 670:6n
- 6 Cicero] *Pro Milone* 1.1
- 7 Virgil's] *Aeneid* 7–12
- 8 Lucian] In his *Abdicatus*, which Erasmus had translated in 1506 (ASD I-1 398–409), a son who had been disowned and studied medicine cures his father of insanity; then he is taken back into the family. Later, when his stepmother becomes insane, he refuses to cure her and is consequently disowned again. (Erasmus does not deal with the question of whether the son's references to his stepmother are ironical.)
- 20 the teacher] On the importance of having teachers who are both learned and humane see Ep 56. For glimpses of schoolmasters who perhaps fell short of this ideal see Thompson *Colloquies* 22–4, 44–5.

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known – that is what they should be used to reproducing faithfully. The difficulty should not deter them from this, as it is surmounted even in the space of a month. I have never approved of youths writing down every word they hear, for this practice leads them to neglect the cultivation of the memory, allowing for the fact that some may want to make a few brief notes 5 of certain things, but that only until such time as the memory has been strengthened and they no longer desire the prop of the written word.

Finally, such weight do I attach to the correct method of teaching, provided that the teacher is conscientious and learned, that I would not hesitate to hazard this promise: given youths who are not totally incompetent intellectually, I would with less trouble, and within fewer years, bring 10 them to a creditable degree of eloquence in each language than those notorious instructors who force their charges into their own stammering form, or rather lack, of expression. Having, therefore, received a thorough grounding in primary school, a boy may then with confidence turn his 15 attention to higher studies; and whatever direction this takes, he will readily demonstrate how important it was that he received his first instruction from the best teachers. I am setting these precepts down for you for the present, my dearest Pierre, as my views on the method of studying. Do make use of them, if you think fit; if not, at least take the pains I have 20 bestowed on it in good part, since you are so true to me. Only forge ahead as you have begun: apply yourself zealously to the cause of learning, and adorn your native France, so illustrious in other spheres, with ennobling studies as well. Farewell.

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10 this promise] See Colet's comment on this passage in Ep 230:10–16.

15 with confidence] Literally 'with good birds,' that is, favourable auspices;
Adagia 1 i 75