**Gregory of Nazianzus, *An Apologetic for Poetry* (“On My Own Verses”)**

Beholding many in the modern age who write

Unmetrical words that gush forth without effort,

Yet who, time after time, are constantly worn down,

From which there is no gain except empty gossip;

Yes, they are writing on like a great despot 5

Things that happen to be stuffed with all kinds of nonsense,

Mostly sand of the seas or Egypt’s gnawing swarms—

Indeed, to you I offer this most pleasant proverb:

Hurl away every single word; deliver these up;

We should only hold to God’s inspirited ones, 10

As those who flee the swell seek out calm anchor.

For if the Scriptures grant such a wealth of firm places,

Spirit, this course is from you—the wisest poetic,

That which is a stimulating defense for all

Against empty words from evil intended deeds. 15

When you write, against your dark-nether perceptions,

Do you set out fully reasons beyond dispute?

Yet since this is by far easier said than done,

The world has shattered into scores of divorcing schools,

Each one with support for its own private escape; 20

In my writing I have led down this other path—

(Another which I’ve searched; I reckon, at any rate,

A good one, or at least for me, one beloved)

To offer up some part of my hardships in verse.

Not as many of the living might suppose suspecting 25

All too easily that I’m cultivating fame—

A void, as they suggest. No, it’s just the reverse;

I know only too well those who hunt down my words

For their own public approval, since most line out

By their own plumb-line and by those nearby at hand; 30

It’s not because I worship my works above God’s.

Could God’s word ever be less than any such prizing?

Perhaps I’ve yet to suit your curiosity:

First off, strongly I willed through other hard jobs

To keep control of my own ill-measured excess; 35

So that in writing, I might not write out too much,

Laboring with my measure. Second, for the young

(Above all to those who delight in well-planned words)

To provide a lovely remedy for the ear,

Persuasion leading them on to useful matters, 40

Skill sweetening the sharp-piercing injunctions.

Consider, the lyre-string enjoys being loosened some,

As you might wish to do, if for nothing more than

As an alternative to songs and lyre-strumming.

I serve this up for you to play, if you care to play 45

In a way that never stops your way to good-beauty.

Third, I own up—though this reason may seem rather

Shabby of me—to my motive that I cannot

Concede that those alien should best us in words;

I speak of these, their strained-showy-defiling words, 50

Since for us, the good is seen in contemplation.

So for you, wise ones, we have brought forth this pastime.

Admit to me the grace of the lion-hearted.

Fourth, I have found when burdened under sickness,

These to be a fit portent, as an ancient swan, 55

My vocalise for myself upon whispering wings,

Not in threnody, but as a hymn of departure.

Finally, you wise ones, you may now apprehend

What lies in myself. Yet if you yield bested, reason

Was your superlative need, for words are just playthings 60

For champions. Still, nothing here’s lengthy or too filling,

Nor unprofitable, as I myself am convinced.

The words can disciple if you cooperate.

Some of them are mine and some are others’;

Some commend nobility, others condemn faults; 65

Some dogma, some instruction, some sharpened speech;

They encourage memory by tightly bound word-choice.

If they seem ineffective, create something better.

You critique the meter? No wonder, unmetered man,

Iambic-hack writer, you abortive scribbler. 70

What blinded person can make out the one with sight?

What novice runner can pace with a thoroughbred?

Hold on. You can’t pocket what you pay to hush up,

And then critique, what you black-market by yourself—

Scribbled verse, and that wholly disjointed doggerel. 75

Whatever piece he disdains, trust demands an encore,

Yet we see, the prosaic sweetie has sunk our show.

You wise ones, go cunningly craft such stuff yourself;

Is it not clearly deception, a confidence trick?

He displays for us an ape; now, it’s a lion. 80

Thus, we are taken in and fall for desired fame.

Learn this above all, that Scripture has many poems,

which the wise sages of Hebrew descent do speak;

If the sounds from their strings don’t strike us as metered,

As the ancients’ tradition tuned concordant words, 85

Bringing forth, I hold, by a well-crafted support

The noble, and by melodic impress a right course,

Then Saul may persuade you, since from the spirit he

Was freed by the manner of the plectored kinnor.

Do you really think there is danger for the young 90

To be brought to fellowship with God by grand things?

Since they cannot bear up under demanding change,

For now, they’ll require a more high-class mixture.

It’s fitting that in time they have a hold on the good,

Then we’ll take down their vaulting supports so that like 95

An arch they may retain their sound construction.

What could produce a more serviceable result?

Do you not yourself put some sweet tastes in your food,

You solemn sourpuss with furrowed meeting eyebrows?

Why then critique my metrical ability, 100

Others’ meters measured out by your foundations?

*Far separate are the Mysian and Phrygian borders.*

*Far separate in height the nests of eagles and crows.*