

arts derives from their objects insofar as they are variously capable of being devised. Now the artifice of the work consists not only in representing the idea of the ruling art, [8] but also serves other ends. And so we can say that bridlemaking forms the bridle in accordance with the idea conceived by horsemanship, but yet this bridle is not made in order to represent the similitude of the idea, but rather so that it can be used in the various ways of managing horses. Hence we see that the artifice of the fabricating arts takes its direction from another art whose sole aim is to represent and resemble; therefore I say that the fabricating arts cannot be called imitative. But those arts which have the idol as object, have an object with no other end in its artifice than to represent and resemble; hence they are justly called imitative. And just as philosophy has called the logical faculty rational, not because it uses reason—for in this sense all the arts and faculties are rational—but because it has an object which takes all its being from reason and in reason; so I say that the imitative arts are so named not because they use imitation—for in this sense all the arts are more or less some kind of imitation—but because they have objects which have no other existence or use except by reason of imitation or in imitation. This I believe is what Plato wished to show in the second book of the *Laws* where he said, "The rightness of an imitation consists in this, as we said, that it is made of such a nature and size that the imitation expresses the nature and size of the object itself."³ . . .

In this way, therefore, the idol is the object of the imitative arts. . . . [9] The idol . . . is an image and similitude of some other thing, and it can come into being, as Plato has taught us in the *Sophist* and in the sixth book of the *Republic*, either with or without our agency. And that which comes into being without human agency has its origin either in material things or in spiritual. Those which originate in material things are understood to be in that portion of visible being which Plato in the sixth book of the *Republic* calls obscure. And so that everyone may understand what I mean it must be remembered that Plato divides existing things into two species: one he called intelligible; the other, visible. And again he wished to subdivide both species into two parts, the clear and the obscure. Now he calls that portion of visible things clear which includes plants, animals, the heavens, the elements, and all complex and simple things. But about the obscure portion of the visible he has reasoned as follows: "A portion of the visible kind contains images, for I call images first shadows, then simulacra, which appear in water

³*Laws*, II. 668. Jowett translates this passage: "And the truth of an imitation consists, as we were saying, in rendering the thing imitated according to quantity and quality."

and in solid bodies as denseness, lightness, etc."⁴ . . . I believe idols are of this species. . . .

[12] Now coming to our proposition I say that when I earlier concluded that idols are the objects of the imitative arts, I did not refer to the sort of idols which originate without human artifice, . . . but to those which do originate by our artifice, which are born only in our imagination and our intellect by means of our choice and will, as idols in painting, sculpture, and similar things. I conclude, then, that this species of idol is that which is a suitable object of human imitation and that when Aristotle says in the first chapter of the *Poetics* that all the species of poetry are imitation, he means that imitation which has for its object idols which derive totally from human artifice.⁵ . . . But it appears that the words of Suidas are contrary to this proposition; he believes that idols which derive from human artifice are not suitable objects for the imitative arts, but that idols joined to a different thing, which he calls similitudes, are. Here are his words: "Idols are effigies of things which do not subsist, such as Tritons, Sphinxes, Centaurs. But similitudes are the images of things which do subsist, such as beasts and men."⁶ According to this statement of Suidas, we have two sorts of imitation. One represents the true, as a painter does when he depicts with colors the effigy of a man who is known; and the other represents the caprice of the imitator, as the painter when he depicts according to the whim of his imagination; and we see at the same time that the idol is the object of this second sort of imitation and that the similitude is the object of the first. Therefore it is not true that the idol which derives from human artifice is a suitable object for every imitation.

[I reply that that view of Suidas about idols is too restricted and also contrary to that held by other writers. . . . [13] In addition, Plato in the *Sophist* has left a statement that there are two species of imitation, one of which he calls icastic, representing things which are truly found to exist, or at least have been found to exist; the other he calls fantastic, of which we have examples in paintings which are made according to the caprice of the artist. And moreover he himself says in the tenth book of the *Republic* that the idol is the

Idol ← Similitude / Image / Concept +

⁴Plato, *Republic*, VI. 509–10. See also *Sophist*, 253–36.

⁵Mazzoni expands his concept of the idol in Book III, the main body of his *Defense*: "[564] I say therefore that anyone who with words expounds some true concept in a certain fashion creates idols by means of his speaking, since each concept is a similitude and image of the thing to which it corresponds, and likewise names appear, according to Plato and also Aristotle, to be like idols and imitations of things. In this way not only history, but also natural philosophy and every one of the other arts which teaches something or deals with truth, makes quasi-idols with its languages and imitates things with concepts and names."

⁶Suidas is the supposed compiler of the *Suda Lexicon* (c. 1000), a combined dictionary and encyclopedia gathered from a wide variety of sources.

on Idols, from imagination, all that's artifice, on sciences, idol, on similitude, see the note #5 below

icastic / fantastic / similitude / image / concept

insects and object of study

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book where he asks whether the Athenians have acquired greater glory through arms or letters, writes as follows:

They say also that one of the friends of Menander said to him, "The feasts of Bacchus are approaching; have you not made a comedy?" And Menander replied, "I have made a comedy, for I have discovered the fable and given it its order. All that remains is to add the verse." For poets believe the fable to be more essential than the words. Corinna said to Pindar when he was still young and boldly using his eloquence, that he was ignorant of poet-ics because he put no fables in his writings, which is the proper work of a poet.

And Plutarch adds, "It is certain also that Plato himself wrote that the occupation of poetry is the composition of fables."¹⁴ *Critique @ notion - poetry concerns the false!*

* On the basis of all these authorities and many others, one could easily fall in with the view of those who say that poetry has no other subject but the fabulous and false, though joined to the verisimilar, since according to the rule of Aristotle, verisimilitude is required in the fables of poets. Nevertheless I say that this opinion is not correct for many reasons, some of which I shall select as they come to mind. . . . Consider first that the false verisimilar occurs in some other arts which are different from poetry, as in rhetoric. . . . [37] And in this respect I recall having read a very fine dialogue by Signor Camillo Paleotti . . . in which he . . . shows . . . that the false verisimilar is greatly abused by the corrupt world in that it is a nearly universal subject of the arts, sciences, and education. Therefore it cannot be concluded that it is a fit and adequate subject of the poet's art. For if this were the true subject of poetry, it would mean that poetry could not in any way be capable of truth, and yet Plato writes, and Aristotle confirms, and reason convinces us, that quite the contrary is so. Therefore Plato in the *Republic* and the *Laws*, having approved that kind of poetry that deals with the gods in accordance with the truth, showed that as a consequence the truth is not alien to poetry.¹⁵ Likewise Aristotle has confirmed this conclusion in three places in the *Poetics*.¹⁶ . . . In all three places, and especially in the last, we see plainly that Aristotle concedes that poetry sometimes has the

true for its subject, and we see that because of all that has been said above, the idols of icastic imitation are, according to Aristotle, poetic idols.

* But besides the authority of Plato and Aristotle, there is also reason which proves that the poet sometimes speaks the truth, for in narrating the wandering of certain heroes, he often could not help but describe the location of cities. When the poet adheres to geographical truth, it must be [38] said that either he forfeits the name of poet for the time being (which is completely ridiculous) or we must confess that sometimes the true can be a poetic subject. And we have already shown that idols and images can be made from true things, both narratively and dramatically. According to all these considerations we ought to affirm two conclusions as true. The first is that the false is not always necessarily the subject of poetry. The second is that, since the subject of poetry is sometimes the true and sometimes the false, it is therefore necessary to establish a poetic subject that in itself can be sometimes true and sometimes false.¹⁷ * *Conclusion 2*

Therefore it seems that we ought to reject that point of view which seemed to prove that poetic subjects are always false. . . .

* Now if we remove the false and accept the true in its place, we do not thereby destroy poetry, since we have already said that it can tolerate the true. The same can be said of the possible, because if in poetry we put the impossible in its place, it does not by this become either improved or deficient. But if the credible is removed and the incredible put in its place, the nature of poetry is totally destroyed. And on the other hand whoever takes the credible and totally removes the possible, nevertheless has a poetic subject, as Ar- * *Credible - responsibility* * *See Poetics, p. 64* * *110*

* ¹⁷For Mazzoni this involves the purpose for which idols and images are used. In Book III he argues to this point: "[564-65] But yet I say that the language of history and the arts and sciences does not use poetic imitation, and that the poet who treats either of history or of the arts or sciences will use poetic imitation, which we have above called similitudinousness (*similitudinaria*). According to the understanding of those who ought to know . . . the idol is that which has no other use in itself but to represent and resemble. And because the concepts of philosophy are not true and perfect idols (since they are not made solely to represent but to instruct and to disclose the truth of things), therefore we can say that history, and whatever else teaches things that are true, even if by means of its concepts it forms idols, does not form them insofar as they are idols, that is, it does not form them for the sole purpose of representing and resembling something else. Rather it moves to another mode and another cause of the object, that is, to recount the truth of what has happened or to teach some doctrine. But the imitator fabricates the perfect idol, that is, the idol insofar as it is an idol, which means . . . the idol insofar as it represents and resembles something else. (So we can conclude that the historian and the poet who has history for the subject of his poem are different in that the historian will recount things in order to leave behind a memory of the truth, but the poet will write to imitate and leave behind a simulacrum, insofar as it is a simulacrum, of the truth. And the poet will be constrained to write with greater diligence than the historian and to ornament his writing with many poetic lights and colors so that the simulacrum which he wishes to form may be better seen and understood by everyone who reads his poem."¹⁷) * *history - poetry* * *idol - represents* * *resembles* * *See imitation* * *idol* * *simulacrum*

¹⁴"Were the Athenians More Famous in War or in Wisdom?" *Moralia* (Loeb edition, Vol. IV, p. 507).
¹⁵See *Republic*, pp. 37-38. Mazzoni is reading Plato in his own way. In this passage cited Plato asserts that only poetry containing acceptable doctrine belongs in the state, and in the passage from the *Republic* he says flatly that poetry, "is not to be regarded seriously as attaining to the truth."
¹⁶See *Poetics*, IX, 1-4, and XXV, 1 and 5-8, pp. 55 and 64.

at the poet is also if he sets out to ner. Therefore in e suitable to nar- oetic narration is d is consequently . [22] I believe it ative poetry from tic representation But we ought not, tely poetic narra- according to the tooed as a firm and s imitation and so ols and images in ie rightness of im- representation of l error in poetics similarity. . . . For d book of the *Re- tally in his imita- s of the gods and e opposite by rep- s and heroic na- s justified the dis- / vices to the gods gories.¹¹ . . . ject and material they are falsehood ar they are an ade- mselves be per- hat the true poet is ention, adding that ewhere other than ame of a true poet. e's view when he sopher than a poet of natural things in ention.¹² . . . It also ie *Phaedo* when he not only to put to- utarch, in the little*

of Book III, "[807-08] s on the literal level they ometimes been conceded hile following the cred- : liberally illustrated with ries, chiefly Homer and