

III. *A Letter from Dr Thomas Molyneux, F. R. S. to the Right Reverend St George, Lord Bishop of Clogher in Ireland, containing some Thoughts concerning the Ancient Greek and Roman Lyre, and an Explanation of an obscure Passage in one of Horace's Odes.*

My very much Honour'd Lord.

OUT of the abundance of your good Nature, and the undeserved kindness you have always shewed me, your Lordship has formerly been pleas'd, not to dislike some Thoughts I have communicated to you on several Subjects, as they occasionally came in my way; this has given me encouragement to trouble you again in the like manner, and send you the following Remarks, which I accidentally made, as I was reading over one of *Horace's Odes* to my little Cozen *Samuel Molyneux*; whom I find, I thank God, a Child of very pregnant Parts, and likely to follow the steps of his late Father, your good Friend.

Perhaps you may think what I am going to write the more considerable, and the better deserving your Lordships notice, because it explains, and as I imagine, retrieves an ingenious Thought, that for ought that appears, had been wholly lost in a piece of Poetry, which the Learnedst Criticks both of the past and present Age, have esteem'd one of the most correct Master pieces Antiquity has left us in its kind, I mean the 3d Ode of the 4th Book, beginning with these Words,

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Quem

Quem Tu Melpomene, &c.

This with an other of Horaces *Odes*, the famous *Julius Caesar Scaliger* in his Treatise *de Re Poetica lib. 6.* makes choice of to recommend above all the rest, and gives it a most extravagant *Encomium*; declaring he would rather be the true Author of this little Poem, than absolute King of *Arragon*, so high an opinion he had of its matchless Excellency.

And the celebrated *Monsieur D'Acier* in his Commentary upon this *Ode*, says, he believes one cannot find either among the *Greek* or the *Latin* Poets, any thing more correct and elaborate than this, so delicate and natural, says he, are its Thoughts, and the turn of its Expressions carry with them such a noble loftiness and vivacity.

However, after all these extraordinary recommendations the Criticks have been pleased to bestow upon this performance, of certainly the best tho the first of the *Roman Lyrick* Poets; yet one of the most beautiful passages, and surprizing fancies of the *Ode*, seems to me, and I should be glad to know your Lordships opinion in the point, to have been so overlookt by them, that neither they nor any of the Commentators, I have hitherto had an opportunity to consult, and I have examined the most chief of them, as *Lambin, Menelius, Bond, Despres, Meur Dacier, &c.* have fully comprehended the meaning of the Poet, or the whole scope of his sence, which he expresses in these Words,

*O Testudinis aureæ
Dulcem quæ strepitum, Pieri, temperas !
Omnis quoque Piscibus
Donatura Cygni si libeat sonum !*

I must freely own, my Lord, when first I reflected on these Lines, and observed *Horace's* great Heat and Vehemency in his repeated exclamation, upon admiring his *Muse's* power

power, because she could give when she pleased even to *Mute Fishes*, the melodious Voice of the Swan, I was not a little shockt and confounded, for I lookt upon the fancy as perfectly forced and groundless; founded upon nothing that was real or true Nature; and therefore could pass for no more, than a wild rant or extravagant Whim of the Poets, signifying little if any thing at all; and brought fresh into my Mind, the Character he himself gives in another place of ill Verses.

Versus Inopes Rerum Nugæq; canora.

For I could not conceive in any sense whatever, how he could suppose his *Muse* to be able to give to a *Dumb Fish* this sweet melodious Voice.

None of his Commentators gave me the least satisfaction towards the clearing of this passage, or the solution of this difficulty; I found they were all silent as to the main Point, and yet I could not with quietness of Mind, raise even but in my own Thoughts, so railing and high an Accusation as this was against the Prince of the Lyrick Poets: nor could I conceive so great a Judge and Master in the art of Poetry, so particularly remarkt for his Propriety of thought, and delicacy of expression, in so labour'd and exquisite a Poem as this, could possibly have been guilty of so weak a failure, or rather have run into so gross a fault.

This made me soon alter my Opinion, by giving quite another turn to my Judgment, and immediately conclude the fault must not be in the excellent Author, but rather in my dull and imperfect apprehension of his true sense; and that there must be certainly couched in these words, some further meaning than what occur'd to every one at the first transient Reading, or from the bare construction of the Words according to the common *Syntax*.

So I put myself to consider a little, whether upon second thoughts, I could not discover what might be the true intention

tion or full purport of the Poet in these lines, and after perusing them a while, what was before dark and obscure, appeared so plain and evident, that I was immediately convinced in myself, he could not possibly have any other meaning than this.

After he had in the Verses going before, acknowledged how much he was owing to the bounty of his Muse, here he makes a sudden exclamation to extol her great Art and Mystery, who by mixing various Notes, could compose such sweet Harmony upon the *Guilded Lyre* or *Testudo*, and by her surprizing Power could when she pleased, give even to mute Fishes, or the hollow Shells of the *Testudines Aquaticæ* or *Water Tortoises*, a sort of Fish, of which I imagined they made their Lyres in old Times, the sweet melody of the Swan.

As for the comparison he makes to the voice of a dying Swan; tho' this were granted an error, yet I thought it such a one, as might pass very well, since it serves here only as an allusion, and might be used for that end, because it was certainly a received vulgar opinion in *Horace's* days, as it prevails still in ours; and therefore might properly enough, tho' a Fiction, illustrate this mighty attribute he in such positive Terms, and in so surprizing a manner ascribes here to his *Muse*: for even a *Vulgar Error* universally imbraced, was ever Authority sufficient for either a Poet or an Orator to draw from it a comparison or a simile.

Monsieur Dacier I confess, to whom we are obliged for the fullest, most learned and judicious comment extant upon this Author, has nothing that in the least favours the foregoing explanation; but on the contrary in his Gloss upon these Words in the same Ode,

Totum Muneris hoc tui est, &c.

Says, *Horace* could not have given a more ample Testimony of his Modesty, than he has shewn in this Expression which

which ascribes all the merit he had wholly to the gift of his Muse, who might, says he, if she so pleased, have made even a mute Fish speak; which intimates, 'twas a thing he imagin'd she had never done; tho' according to my sentiments, the Harmony of every speaking Lyre, was then no less than the voice of a dumb Fish, raised by the power of the Muse in the Allegorick manner of speaking they affected in those days, which now we should say was done by the skill of the Musician.

Tho' this exposition is so very easy and natural, that it seems to me at the first proposal to carry along with it its own evidence, yet being my sense alone, and backt with no other Authority, I could not thoroughly acquiesce in it, or be satisfied I had truly lit upon the same Ideas that were in *Horace's* thoughts when he wrote those words, unless I plainly found, that the *Testudo* or *Lyre* of the Ancients, was made of the back or hollow shell of the *Tortoise*, as the name seem'd fully to import.

This put me upon the search, whether I might not find passages in some of the older Authors, that speak of this as matter of Fact; which, if I discover'd I thought it would evince the true meaning of these Lines of *Horace* beyond all contradiction.

And upon inquiry, it appears from several Hands, 'twas a current piece of History generally received among the Ancients, that *Mercury* was the first inventor of the *Lyre* (whence *Horace* in his 10th Ode of the 1st Book stiles him *Curva Lyra Parentem*) and that he made it of the shell of a dead *Tortoise*, he accidentally found on the Banks of the River *Nile*. I might produce several Testimonies to this Point, but I think two will be sufficient, and shall trouble your Lordship with no more.

The first I shall take from an old Physician, a Greek Poet, that writ above a hundred years before *Horace*, I mean *Nicander* in his Poem he calls *Alexipharmaca*, where speaking of the Antidotes proper against the Poison of the *Salamander*,

mander, he recommends both the Sea and the Mountain Tortoise in these Words,

Ἀμμιγδὸν ἀλίοιο κραιτέρον δύνει χελώνης
 Ἑλλοίς, ἢ παραῖσι διαπλάει πτερυγέσων
 Ἄλλοτε δούραϊς κυτισσόμεν ἢν τ' ἀκρόμια
 Ἀυδέεσσαν ἔδμεν ἀνάυδντον περ' εἴουον
 Ἑμοίσι, ἕσπεδ' γὰρ ἀπόνισσιος χελειον
 Ἄϊδρον, ἀγκύρας δὲ δύνω παρεταίνατο πέζαις.

Which I find so well turned into Verse and so closely translated by *Johannes Gorrens* a *Parisian* Professor of Medicine of the last Age, that I cannot omit giving your Lordship his *Latin* Version.

Cum curva auxilio veniunt Testudine — —
Quæ Pelagi fluctus velocibus innatant alis,
Aut montana etiam Cytiso quæ vescitur & quam
Reddidit e muta modulanti voce canoram
Mercurius, picto insontis qui Cortice carnem
Exemit, geminumq; Ancona intendit in oris.

Jacobus Grevinus in his Treatise *de Venenis* in the Chapter *de Salamandra* pag. 119. gives us an ample Comment on these Verses, and relates at large the History of the first Lyre, which I refer your Lordship to, rather than transcribe it here; but this I cannot but take notice of (by way of Supplement to what he says) this Verse—

Ἀυδέεσσαν ἔδμεν ἀνάυδντον περ' εἴουον;
Reddidit e muta Modulanti voce canoram — —

—Is so home and apposite to our present purpose, and comes up so close to *Horace's* Thought.

*O mutis quoq; Piscibus
Donatura Cygni si libeat sonum.*

That it does not only explain the true meaning of it, but makes me inclinable to believe the *Roman* might have in his view this very passage of the *Greek* Poet when he writ these Lines; for whoever is moderately conversant in the *Greek* and *Latin*, will easily be of opinion, that the latter frequently borrow'd not only their thoughts and fancies from the former, but even sometimes they copied as near as possible, their very turns and expressions, considering they writ in a differing Language; yet this must be allow'd, they usually surpass'd those they drew from, and the Copies went beyond their first Originals, as *Horace* I think has here outdone *Nicanor* in his fancy, which I perceive he has been so fond of, that he was not only satisfied to use it in this place, but has it again, tho' not so fully and expressly in his 11th Ode of the 3d Book, where he invokes his Lyre in this manner.

*Tuq; Testudo resonare septem
Calida nervis
Neque Loquax olim neque grata --*

Which last Line is a plain comment to shew what he means in this place.

*O mutis quoq; piscibus
Donatura sonum, &c.*

The other instance I shall mention, is from one of *Lucian's* Dialogues, who writ above a hundred years after *Horace*, whence tis plain the Mechanism of the Ancient Lyre, and the Opinion concerning its first invention, prevail'd since as well as before *Horace's* days. In this Dialogue he introduces
Apollo

Apollo and Vulcan talking after his jaoofe way of Mercury to this purpose.

Απ. χελώνων πη νεκρὸν εὐράν, ἔργαρον ἀπ' αὐ-
τῆς συνεπέξαιτο, πήχαις γὰρ εναρμοστας, καὶ ζυγώ-
σας, ἔπειτα κελάρυες ἐμπήξου, καὶ μαγὰδον ὑπο-
θεῖς, κατὰ ἰντενάμενος ἑπτά χορδάς, μελοδία πά-
νυ γλαρυρὸν ὧ Ἡφαίσει καὶ ἀαρμόνιον.

Which might be better translated thus to exprefs the Au-
thors fence, than as the *Latin* Editor has turned it.

*Ap. Testudinem mortuam alicubi offendens Instrumentum ex
ca concinnavit ; Brachia enim adaptans Jugum opposuit,
deinde Clavos insigens, & Hemisphereum repandum in
fra subjiciens, septem Cordas extendebat. atq; modulaba-
tur quiddam valde sonorum O Vulcane & ad Musicae Me-
lodium compositum.*

I thought it not amifs to fet down *Lucians* words at length,
not only because they are clear and full in the point, as to
what the Musical *Testudo* of the Ancients was first made of,
but because they accurately describe and enumerate all its
parts giving each its peculiar name : So that they as well
serve to explain the following Figure, as manifestly shew
'twas really taken from a genuine piece of Antiquity.

I borrowed the first of the following Figures from that
excellent Treatise of the Harmonicks of the learned Father
Marinus Mersennus (*lib. 1. de Instrumentis pag. 7.*) and
have added it as a surplufage if your Lordship should still
require a further and stronger proof of what I here advance,
for this being taken from the things themselves, that will
not lie and cannot deceive, as Words and the dubious
fence of old Authors may, I thought it might carry with it
a greater evidence than what I have yet said.

Figure the first represents the Ancient *Lyra* or *Testudo*, and the Father tells us he copied this Figure (which I have express'd in somewhat a larger size, that it might the better agree with the proportion of the annex'd Scheme) from the Sculpture of an Antique Gemme that belong'd to one *Jacobus Gaffarellus* A A shew the *πρυγεις* of *Lucian* the *Ἀγρῶνες* or *Brachia* of *Nicander*, made of the Horns of some Beast B the *Ζέρος* or *Jugum*, in which were fasten'd the *κλάμοι* *Clavi* Pegs that rais'd or depress'd c. c. the *χορδαί* or Strings, which were fix'd at their t'other end to D the *μυρῶδιον* *Hemispherium* or Belly. Of the Lyre of this part of the Instrument the good Father not having I suppose, well consider'd, or thoroughly inquired into the matter, says, that it seem'd *Testudinis Dorsum Ventrem seu Testam representare*; whereas 'tis plain 'twas more than a resemblance, and was really design'd to express the thing itself; as appears by the second Figure of an intricate *Testudo Aquatica* or rather *Fluviatilis*, as *Cicero* calls it (in his *Natura Deorum*) taken from *Johnstonus de Animalibus* as delineated in his eightieth Table *de Quadrupedibus*.

Whoever compares these two Figures, tho' but little conversant in the natural History of Animals, and will but make allowances for their different posture, one being represented full and in a flat posture, whilst only half of the t'other appears, because 'tis shewn side ways, will soon be convinc'd of this truth.

For if we observe how the Belly of *Mersennus* his Ancient Lyre markt D. agrees nicely in Figure and Shape with the Back or Shell of *Johnstonus* his *Testudo Aquatica*, markt E. how they are both curiously tessellated and checker'd into Arcs or Scales F. F. F. F. F. F. of somewhat a Square Figure, and each of these Scales again in both so neatly wrought about their edges with a line running parallel to their Margins g. g. g. g. g. g. and how the Shell of the Lyre, as that of the Tortoise, terminates in a narrow Limb or Verge, cut into smaller Scales h. h. h. h. h. h. incompassing the whole; whoever, I say, remarks this accurate agreement of the two

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Figures in all these particulars must at the first view be satisfied they were taken from the same object, and tho drawn by different Artists, may be at two thousand years distance, yet both manifestly own the lineaments of the same natural Original.

This too fully appears from a passage in *Pausanias* his description of Greece, as I find it quoted by *Gesner* (for I have not the Author himself by me) which mentions a Mountain in *Arcadia* called *Paribenijs Mons qui Testudines exhibet ad componendas Lyras aptissimas*; and the same Author again says in another place, *Arcadium Querceta ingenti magnitudine Testudines exhibent, ex quibus Lyras conficeres æquales illis quæ ex Indica Testudine componuntur*. From whence 'tis plain the Ancients made their *Lyres* of the Shells of *Tortoises*; and we may likewise conclude from hence, that in the beginning of times, e're the skill of Musick, or the art of making its Instruments arrived to any perfection, the greatest Masters in both ways were not over-nice and curious in the choice of their materials, but promiscuously the *Land* or *River Tortoise* to make their Instruments of, as this or that came more opportunely in their way, which occasions *Pausanias* and *Nicander* to mention the *Mountain* whereas *Horace* speaks of the *River Tortoise*; of which therefore we may suppose his *Lyre* was made.

And indeed, if we consider the true rise or way of Invention of all the sorts of *Tools*, *Weapons*, *Machines* and *Instruments* that now prevail in the *World* (especially those of *Musick* which are what we are now discoursing of) from their first Beginnings, we shall find they constantly derived their Origine, and borrowed their first materials from somewhat that was natural, rude, plain, simple and easy to come at, thus all the variety of curious *Pipes* now in use, as the *Flute*, *Flagelet*, *Hautboy* and *Organs* themselves, tho so artificially contrived and exquisitely wrought, certainly owe their Beginnings to, and are only refined improvements of the *Tennes Avenæ* or *Oaten Pipes* of the *Field*, or
the

the *Calami impares Juncti* of the Ancients, *Reeds* of unequal lengths rudely put together ; and thus we see the Trumpets of old, were at first made only of rude *Horns* the easy spoils of Beasts, and sometimes of the common *Buccina Whelks* or large Sea shells that were obvious, and readily found on every Rock or Sea shore, hence that of *Virgil*.

Rauco strepuerunt Cornua cantu.

And that of *Perseus*,

Buccina jam prisca cogebat ad arma Quirites.

And afterwards when the *Roman* People enlarged their Empire, grew more polite, and all their Mechanick Arts received mighty improvements, tho they had then learnt to make these same Instruments of different and more commodious shapes, and framed them of quite other sorts of materials, yet still they retained their first old Names, and so the *Testudo* did, by which we might as easily trace it as these to their primitive originals.

For 'tis very manifest, that in succeeding Ages, as the skill of the Mechanick Artist, that wrought and contrived the *Lyre*, as well as that of the Musician that used the Instrument, arrived at a greater height, the model of the old *Testudo* was much alter'd, the number of the strings increased, and the shape so mightily diversifyed, that at length they wholly laid aside the *Tortoise shell*, and the sonorous part or Belly of the *Lyre*, was made of such different Figures, that they bore not the least resemblance to its first model.

This plainly appears from those other Schemes *Mersennus* gives us in the same Table of several sorts of the Ancient *Lyres* (but these I take to be more modern than that which is here exprest) and from those described by *Leonardo Agostini*, in the second part of his Collection of the *Gemme*

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Antichæ,

Anticbe, which shew us, that as the fancy of the Workman, mode of the times, real convenience or an imaginary Beauty in the Instrument determined it, they were fashioned into various shapes, and frequently like their *Lamps* of old into capricious fantastical odd Figures.

Thus, my Lord, I have ventur'd to give you my Thoughts towards the recovering the true sense of an obscure passage in one of the best of the *Latin* Poets, and have endeavour'd to set in-a clearer light, a dark piece of Antiquity relating to the old *Greek* and *Roman* Lyre ; yet after all, I must own 'tis too much a trifle to trouble your Lordship with, and I cannot but expect you will secretly blame me in your Thoughts, for taking up so much of yours and my own time, in prosecuting such *Difficiles Nugæ*s these are, when I might have employed it in something far more useful to us both : If you censure me thus, all I will say is, you could not desire one better disposed, readily to acknowledge his fault than truly I am ; and in token of my future amendment, I promise your Lordship never to be guilty of the like again, and profess now 'tis past, it only pleases me as it gives me a new occasion of shewing what I am always proud to own that I am,

My very good Lord,

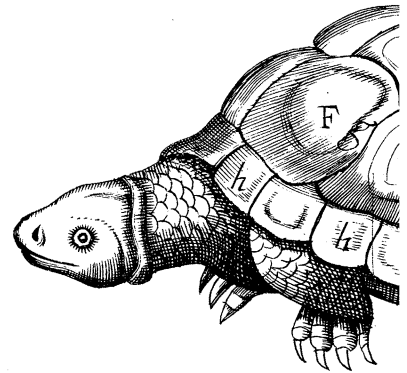
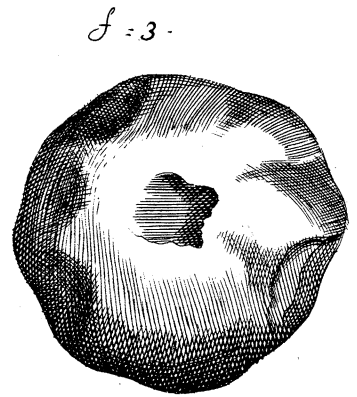
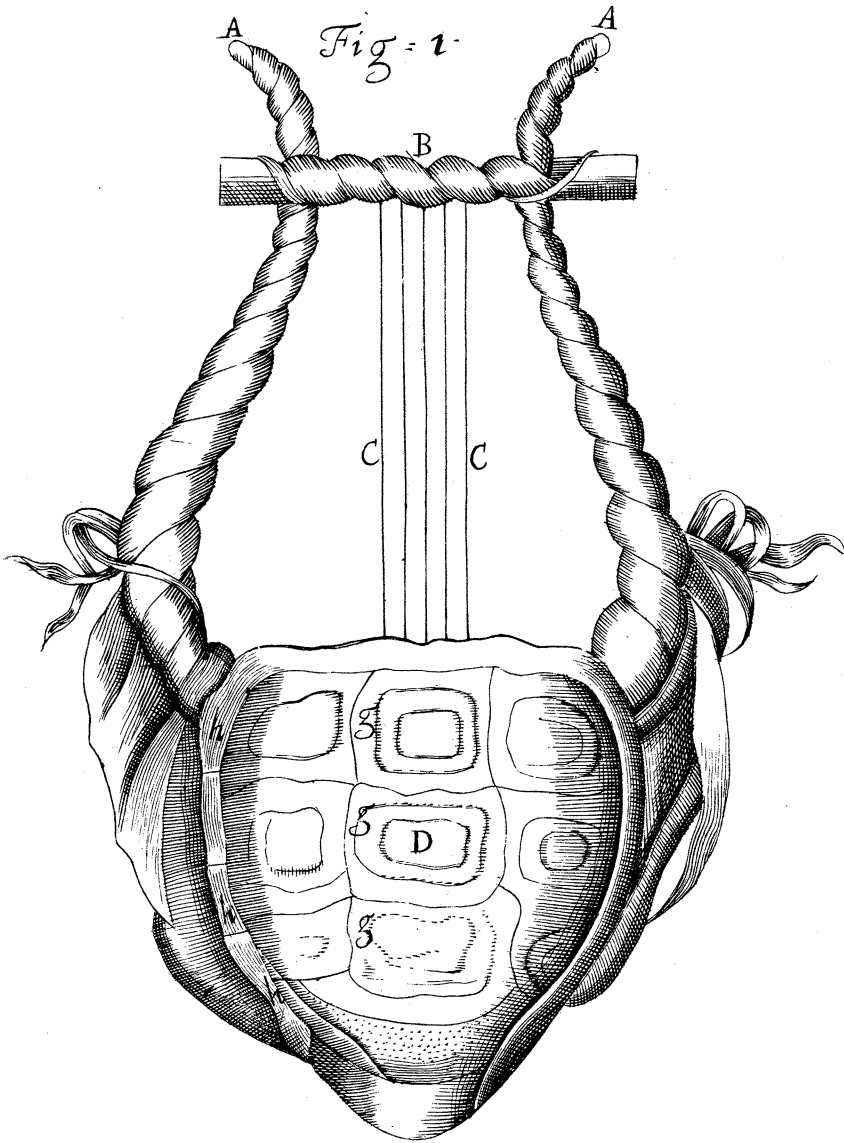
Your Lordships

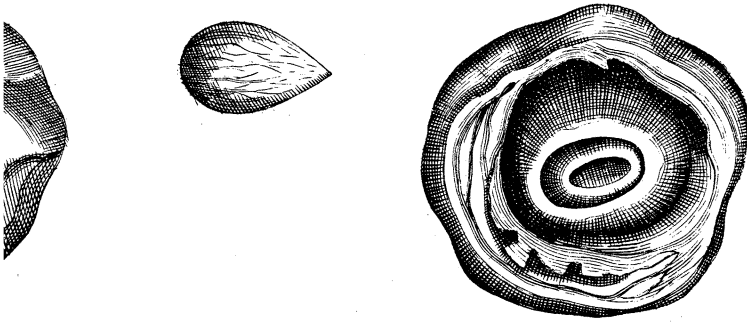
most Dutiful, Affectionate

and Humble Servant.

Tho. Molyneux.

*Dublin, Decemb.
14th, 1701.*





f. 2.

