

Voltaire

Goût

Translated by Roseanne Silverwood

Source text taken from *OCV* vol.42a (p.92-112)

Translator's Preface

This translation of Voltaire's article 'Goût' is based upon the version included in volume 42a of the *Œuvres complètes de Voltaire (OCV)*. It forms part of *Questions sur l'Encyclopédie par des amateurs (QE)* in volume 6 *Gargantua-Justice*. Surprisingly, over two hundred years after it first appeared in 1771, with a supplement published in 1772, there was no full English translation of this article until now. In addition to the translation of Voltaire's article on taste, I have also translated the critical and editorial peritext taken from the version printed in the *OCV* (vol. 42a, p.92-112). Accuracy has been my goal throughout this translation, not wanting to take liberties with either Voltaire's writing or that of the writer of the critical peritext, whilst also seeking to produce a full translation that is accessible as a standalone text for an anglophone scholar. I hope that I have succeeded in doing justice to both authors, and that I have produced a translation that will prove useful to future scholars of Voltaire.

Typography

The following symbols are used:

- The Greek letter beta (β) indicates the base text.
- The paragraph symbol (\P) marks a new paragraph.
- Two forward slashes(//) indicate the end of a chapter or part of a text.

Principles of this edition

The text chosen as the French source text is W75G*. Other variations referenced here include 70, 71N, 71A, W68 (1774), W75G, K84 et K12.

For more details see *OCV*, vol.42A, p.xxiv-xxvii.

List of Abbreviations

<i>BV</i>	M. P. Alekseev and T. N. Kopreeva, <i>Bibliothèque de Voltaire: catalogue des livres</i> [<i>Voltaire's library: catalogue of books</i> , my translation] (Moscow, 1961)
<i>'Catalogue des écrivains'</i>	Voltaire, 'Catalogue de la plupart des écrivains français qui ont paru dans le siècle de Louis XIV, pour servir à l'histoire littéraire de ce temps' [<i>Catalogue of the majority of French writers who were published in the age of Louis XIV, to serve as a literary history of this time</i> , my translation], <i>Le Siècle de Louis XIV, OH</i> , p.1133-1214
<i>CN</i>	<i>Corpus des notes marginales de Voltaire</i> [<i>Corpus of Voltaire's marginal notes</i> , my translation] (Berlin et Oxford, 1979-)
<i>D</i>	Voltaire, <i>Correspondence and related documents</i> , ed. Th. Besterman, <i>Œuvres complètes de Voltaire</i> , vol.85- 135 (Oxford, 1968-1977)
<i>Encyclopédie</i>	<i>Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers, par une société de gens de lettres</i> [<i>Encyclopaedia, or universal dictionary of sciences, arts and trades by a society of literary people</i> , my translation], ed. J. Le Rond D'Alembert and D. Diderot, 35 vol. (Paris, 1751- 1780)
<i>Kehl</i>	<i>Œuvres complètes de Voltaire</i> [<i>Complete works of Voltaire</i> , my translation], ed. J. A. N. de Caritat, Marquis of Condorcet, J. J. M. Decroix et Nicolas Ruault, 70 vol. (Kehl, 1784- 1789)
<i>M</i>	<i>Œuvres complètes de Voltaire</i> , ed. Louis Moland, 52 vol. (Paris, 1877- 1885)
<i>OCV</i>	<i>Œuvres complètes de Voltaire</i> (Oxford, 1968-) [the present edition]
<i>OH</i>	Voltaire, <i>Œuvres historiques</i> [<i>Historical works</i> , my translation], ed. R. Pomeau (Paris, 1957)
<i>QE</i>	Voltaire, <i>Questions sur l'Encyclopédie</i>
<i>SVEC</i>	<i>Studies on Voltaire and the eighteenth century</i>

TASTE

Is there such a thing as good and bad taste? Yes, undoubtedly, even if men's opinions, lifestyles and customs differ.

The best taste in any artistic genre is to mimic nature with the greatest fidelity, force and grace.

5 But surely grace is arbitrary? Not so, since it consists of giving life and tenderness to the objects being represented.¹

Between two men, one of whom will be uncouth, the other delicate, it is widely acknowledged that one has more taste than the other.

10 Before the glorious times came, Voiture, with his compulsion to exaggerate the slightest thing, occasionally had a lot of sensitivity and charm. He wrote to the Grand Condé about his illness:

^s In K84, K12: Goût / Section I [the article 'Goût' de l'Encyclopédie is added] / Section 2.
Translator's note (TN) 1: The base text for this translation is W75G*.

* The first part of the article 'Goût (Gramm./ Littérat. et Philos.)' from the *Encyclopédie* (vol.7, p.761; *OCV*, vol.33, p.128-32)^{TN2} is by Voltaire himself (*Encyclopédie* vol.7, p.xiii). It is followed by a 'fragment sur le goût que M. le président de Montesquieu destinait à l'*Encyclopédie*, comme nous l'avons dit à la fin de son éloge, tome V de cet ouvrage [par D'Alembert, p.iii-xviii]. Ce fragment a été trouvé imparfait dans ses papiers: l'auteur n'a pas eu le temps d'y mettre la dernière main; mais les premières pensées des grands maîtres méritent d'être conservées à la postérité, comme les esquisses des grands peintres'^{TN3}: this is the 'Essai sur le goût dans les choses de la nature et de l'art'^{TN4} (vol.7, p.762-67; see Frank A. and Serena L. Kafker, *The Encyclopedists as individuals*, *SVEC* 257, 1988, p.265-66). To finish the article, the *Encyclopédie* published 'un morceau [...] lu à l'Académie française le 14 mars 1757'^{TN5} by D'Alembert: 'Réflexions sur l'usage et l'abus de la philosophie dans les matières de goût'^{TN6} (vol.7, p.767-70; D'Alembert, *Mélanges de littérature, d'histoire et de philosophie*, 4 vol., Amsterdam, 1759, vol.4, p.326-33). The article in *QE* was sent to Cramer in May or June 1771 (D17213, 17214). On 19 July 1771, Voltaire recommended to Mme Du Deffand, to whom he sent an 'épreuve d'imprimeur'^{TN7} from vol.7 of the *QE*, 'd'autres articles sur le goût tous remplis de traductions en vers des meilleurs morceaux de la poésie italienne et anglaise'^{TN8}. This article was published in September/October 1771 (70, vol.6), and was expanded upon in February/March 1772 (70, vol.9, 'Supplément')

¹ Voltaire had provided the article 'Grâce (Gramm. Littérat. et Mytholog.)' in the *Encyclopédie* (vol.7, p.805; *OCV*, vol.33, p.133-36): 'Il semble qu'en general le petit, le joli en tout genre, soit plus susceptible de grâces que le grand. On louerait mal une oraison funèbre, une tragédie, un sermon, si on leur donnait l'épithète de gracieux' ['It seems that in general, the small, the pretty in all genres, are more likely to be graceful than grander objects. You would criticise a eulogy, tragedy or sermon if you described them as graceful' *my translation*]. He is also the author of the article 'Gracieux' (vol.7, p.806; *OCV*, vol.33, p.137).

^{TN2} In-text references will follow the Voltaire Foundation's style guide. See the Front Matter for a list of abbreviations and there is also a List of works cited at the end.

^{TN3} Translation: 'Fragment on taste, which M. le Président de Montesquieu intended for the *Encyclopédie*, as we mentioned at the end of his eulogy in volume V of this work. This fragment was found incomplete among his papers: the author did not have the time to put the finishing touches to it. But the first thoughts of great writers are worthy of being preserved for posterity, like the sketches of great painters.' Trans. Nelly S. Hoyt and Thomas Cassirer, 'Taste', (online, 1965, <<https://quod.lib.umich.edu/d/did/did2222.0000.168/--taste?rgn=main;view=fulltext>>).

^{TN4} Translation: 'Essay on taste in matters of nature and art'. Trans. Hoyt and Cassirer, 'Taste'.

^{TN5} Translation: 'some remarks [...] read before the Académie française on March 14, 1757'. Trans. Hoyt and Cassirer, 'Taste'.

^{TN6} Translation: 'Reflections on the use and abuse of philosophy in matters of taste'. Trans. Hoyt and Cassirer, 'Taste'.

^{TN7} Translation: 'printer's proof'. Trans. Mrs Meeke, *The Unpublished correspondence of Mme du Deffand*, 2 vol. (London, 1810) vol.2, p.344.

^{TN8} Translation: 'others articles upon taste, full of translations in verse, of some of the best pieces of English and Italian poetry.' Trans. Meeke, *The Unpublished correspondence of Mme du Deffand*, vol.2, p.344). Translator's note: in this English translation, the letter from Voltaire to Mme Du Deffand is dated 29th July 1771. Correction to the translation: read 'other' rather than 'others'.

Commencez, Seigneur, à songer
 Qu'il importe d'être et de vivre;
 Pensez à vous mieux ménager.
 15 Quel charme a pour vous le danger
 Que vous aimiez tant à le suivre?
 Si vous aviez dans les combats
 D'Amadis l'armure enchantée
 Comme vous en avez le bras
 20 Et la vaillance tant vantée,
 Seigneur, je ne me plaindrais pas.
 Mais en nos siècles où les charmes
 Ne font pas de pareilles armes;
 25 Qu'on voit que le plus noble sang,
 Fût-il d'Hector ou d'Alexandre,
 Est aussi facile à répandre
 Que l'est celui du plus bas rang;
 Que d'une force sans seconde
 30 La mort sait ses traits élancer;
 Et qu'un peu de plomb peut casser
 La plus belle tête du monde,
 Qui l'a bonne y doit regarder.
 Mais une telle que la vôtre,
 35 Ne se doit jamais hasarder.
 Pour votre bien et pour le nôtre,
 Seigneur, il vous la faut garder.
 Quoi que votre esprit se propose,
 Quand votre course sera close,
 40 On vous abandonnera fort.
 Croyez-moi, c'est fort peu de chose
 Qu'un demi-dieu quand il est mort.³

[Start, my Lord, to consider / That it matters to be and to live; / Think about protecting
 yourself more. / What appeal does danger have for you / That you love to follow it so? / If in
 45 combat you had enchanted armour / as Amadis had / As well his strong arm / And his
 courage that was so renowned, / My Lord, I would not complain. / But in our times when
 charms / No longer serve as weapons, / You can see that the noblest blood, / Whether it is
 from Hector or Alexander, / Is as easy to shed / As someone's from the lowest rank; / When
 with an unparalleled force / Death knows how to launch its arrows; / And when a little lead

16 In versions 70 and 71A the French reads 'à suivre?' Using this as the source text 'it' could be removed from line 42.

31 In versions K84, K12: monde; [note: Voltaire imitated and embellished this idea in a letter to the king of Prussia]²

² Cf. *Epître au roi de Prusse* ['Letter to the King of Prussia', *my translation*], from 20 April 1741: 'Songez que les boulets ne vous respectent guère, / Et qu'un plomb dans un tube entassé par des sots / Peut casser d'un seul coup la tête d'un héros / Lorsque, multipliant son poids par sa vitesse, / Il fend l'air qui résiste, et pousse autant qu'il presse' ['Imagine if the cannonballs seldom respected you, / And that a piece of lead in a tube loaded by fools / could break the head of a hero with one shot / When, its speed increases its weight / It cracks the air that resists it, gathering force as it gathers speed (*M*, vol.10, p.318-20; D2465).

³ Vincent Voiture, 'Epître à Monseigneur le Prince, sur son retour d'Allemagne, l'an 1645' ['Letter to His Highness the Prince, upon his return from Germany, in the year 1645' *my translation*], *Les Œuvres* (Paris, 1656), p.181-82.

50 can break / The finest head in the world, / Those whose head is good should be attentive to it
/ But one like yours / Should never be put at risk. / For your benefit and ours, / My Lord,
you must preserve it. / Whatever your mind purposes, / When your journey has ended, /
you will be abandoned for good. / Believe me, nothing is so weak / As a demi-god when he is
dead. *My translation*].

55 These lines of verse are still thought of as being in fine taste today and as Voiture's
best.

In the same era, L'Etoile, who passed for a genius, l'Etoile, one of the five authors
who worked on Cardinal Richelieu's tragedies, l'Etoile, who was also one of Corneille's
critics, wrote these lines of verse that are printed after those of Malherbe and Racan;⁴

60 Que j'aime en tout temps la taverne!
Que librement je m'y gouverne!
Elle n'a rien d'égal à soi.
J'y vois tout ce que j'y demande,
Et les torchons y sont pour moi
De fine toile de Hollande.⁵

65 [How I love the alehouse at all times! / How freely I can behave there! / There is nothing to
equal it. / I see everything that I want there, / And to me the rags there are like / Fine cloth
from Holland. *My translation*].

70 There can be no reader who does not agree that the lines by Voiture are by a courtier
who is endowed with good taste, and those by l'Etoile are by an unrefined man devoid of
intellect.

It is a shame that one can say of Voiture: On that occasion, he had taste. There is
certainly nothing but abominable taste in more than a thousand lines similar to these.

75 Quand nous fûmes dans Etampes
Nous parlâmes fort de vous.
J'en soupirai quatre coups,
Et j'en eus la goutte crampe.

⁴ Claude de L'Estoille, Sieur of Saussay and La Boissière, poet, playwright, and member of the Académie française. He read a speech there on 14 May 1635 'de l'excellence de la poésie, et de la rareté des parfaits poètes', ^{TN9} about which Paul Pellisson ironically says that he 'déclame fort agréablement contre la servitude de la rime, et se venge de tout le mal qu'elle lui a jamais fait souffrir' ^{TN10} (*Relation contenant l'histoire de l'Académie française*, Paris, 1672, p.101-102). He was one of the five authors, one of whom was Pierre Corneille, who would write plays whose storylines were devised by Richelieu, L'Estoille would have worked on the *Comédie des Tuileries* (1638) and *L'Aveugle de Smyrne* (1638). See Richard Alexander Parker, *Claude de L'Estoille poet and dramatist, 1597-1652* (Baltimore, MD, 1930).

⁵ 'Chanson à boire' [Drinking song, *My translation*] in the *Recueil des plus beaux vers de Messieurs de Malherbe, Racan, Maynard, Bois-Robert, Monfuron, Longendes, Touvant, Motin, de l'Estoille, et autres divers auteurs des plus fameux esprits de la cour* (Paris, 1638, BV 2906), p. 916. See Frédéric Lachèvre, *Bibliographie des recueils collectifs de poésies publiés de 1597 à 1700* (4 vol., Paris, 1901), vol.1, p.66-69.

^{TN9} Translation: 'Of the excellence of Poetry, and the scarcity of complete Poets.' Trans. Henry Some, *The History of the French Academy*, (London, 1657,

<http://eebo.chadwyck.com/bris.idm.oclc.org/search/full_rec?SOURCE=config.cfg&ACTION=ByID&ID=99863198>

p.68. A more modern translation could be 'about the excellence of poetry and how rare true poets are' [*my translation*]. good

^{TN10} Translation: 'declames very handsomely against the servileness of Ryme, and revenges himself of all the mischief he suffer'd by it.' Trans. Some, *The History of the French Academy*, p. 68. A more modern translation could be 'recites [his speech] loudly and pleasantly, fighting against the constraints of rhyme, and gets his revenge for all the pain it caused him' [*my translation*].

80 Etampe et crampe vraiment
 Riment merveilleusement.
 Nous trouvâmes près Sercote,
 (Cas étrange et vrai pourtant)
 Des bœufs qu'on voyait broutant
 Dessus le haut d'une motte.
 Et plus bas quelques cochons
 Avec nombre de moutons, etc.⁶

85 [When we were in Etampes / We spoke much about you. / Yearning for you, I quaffed four
 glasses [of Etampes wine], / And then got gouty cramp. / Etampe and cramp rhyme / Truly
 marvellously. / Near to Sercote we found, / (Strange but true) / Bullocks that we saw grazing
 / On top of a mound. / And lower down some pigs / With a number of sheep, etc. *My*
translation].

90 The famous letter from the carp to the pike,⁷ that gave him such a reputation, is it not
 too forced a joke, too long, and in some parts too contrived? Is it not a mix of delicacy and
 rudeness, of true and false? Was it necessary to say to the Grand Condé, called the *pike* by
 certain company at court⁸, that *the whales of the north dripped with sweat* at his name, and that the
 emperor's people were thinking about frying him and eating him with a grain of salt?

95 Is it in good taste to write so many letters just to display a little of the wit that consists
 of wordplay and pointed remarks?
 Is one not outraged when Voiture says to the Grande Condé on the taking of Dunkirk, *Je crois*
que vous prendriez la lune avec les dents?^{TN12} 9

⁶ Voiture, song 'Sur l'air du Branle de Metz' ['On the tune of the Branle de Metz', ^{TN11} *my translation*], *Les Œuvres*, p.77. In a note to Pierre Costar, Voiture saw the funny side of the rhyme 'bien riche' ['very rich'. *My translation*.]: 'Estampes / goutte-crampe' (*Œuvres. Lettres et poésies*, Ed. Abdolonyme Ubicini, 2 vol., Paris, 1855, vol.2, p.148). Very knowledgeable about medieval poetry, which he would gladly imitate in some 'vers en vieux langage' ['lines in the old language'. *My translation*.], Voiture had, undoubtedly, taken the rhyme from *La Bataille des vins* ['The Battle of the wines'. *My translation*] by Henri d'Andeli, a poem from the start of the thirteenth century, lines 55-56 (Albert Henri, 'La bataille des vins, édition avec introduction, notes, glossaire et tables', *Bulletin de la classe des lettres et des sciences morales et politiques*, 6th series, vol. 2, no. 6-9, 1991, p.203-48). Voltaire had an edition of the *Œuvres de Monsieur de Voiture*, 4th ed. (Paris, 1654, BV 3459). A bookmark was between p. 78-79, which marked 'Sur l'air du branle de Metz' (CN, vol.9).

⁷ Voiture, letter to the Duke of Enghien, called 'Lettre de la carpe au brochet' ['Letter from the carp to the pike', *my translation*.] from November 1643 (*Œuvres. Lettres et poésies*, letter 155, vol.1, p.401-404). In his copy of the *Œuvres de Monsieur de Voiture*, Voiture writes next to the notes of Etienne-Martin de Pinchesne on this letter: 'lettres du brochet / plaisanterie trop longue' ['letters from the pike / a joke that has gone on too long' *my translation*] (CN, vol.9). See Sophie Rollin's analysis of this letter in *Le Style de Vincent Voiture: une esthétique galante* (Sainte-Etienne, 2006), p.293-99. In chapter 32 of the *Siècle de Louis XIV*, Voltaire alludes to the 'grâces légères de [son] style épistolaire qui n'est pas le meilleur, puisqu'il ne consiste que dans la plaisanterie' ^{TN13} (OH, p.1003).

⁸ '[A]vant que M. le Duc parût de Paris, étant en compagnie de dames avec lesquelles il vivait très familièrement, il se mit à jouer avec elles à de petits jeux, et particulièrement à celui des poissons, où il était le brochet. Ce qui donna sujet à l'auteur, qui était aussi du jeu sous le nom de la carpe, de lui écrire cette raillerie ingénieuse' ['Before the Duke left for Paris, being in the company of ladies with whom he lived in a very familiar fashion, he started to play little games with them, in particular ones about fish, where he would be the pike. This gave the author, who was also part of the game under the name of carp, the idea of writing this ingenious parody about him' *my translation*.]: footnote by Etienne-Martin de Pinchesne, Voiture's nephew and editor, reproduced by A. Ubicini (*Œuvres. Lettres et poésies*, vol.1, p.401-402). The Grand Condé's very angular face did, in fact, make you think of the head of a pike: see the bust by Antoine Coysevox (Louvre).

⁹ Voiture, letter 193, October 1646 (*Œuvres. Lettres et poésies*, vol.2, p.36).

^{TN11} The 'Branle de Metz' was a dance to music that was in fashion at the time Voiture was writing.

^{TN12} Translation: 'I believe you cou'd take the Moon by the Teeth' Trans. Mr. Dryden, *Familiar and courtly letters written by Mons. Voiture*, (London, 1700, <

[^{TN13} Translation: 'superficial graces of \[his\] epistolary stile, which is not the best kind, because it consists merely in entertaining.' Trans. R. Griffith, *The Age of Louis XIV*, 2. vol. \(London, 1780,](http://ebo.chadwyck.com.bris.idm.oclc.org/search/full_rec?SOURCE=pgimages.cfg&ACTION=ByID&ID=14576578&FILE=&SEARCHSCREEN=param(SEARCHSCREEN)&VID=102651&PAGENO=24&ZOOM=FIT&VIEWPORT=&SEARCHCONFIG=config.cfg&DISPLAY=param(DISPLAY)&HIGHLIGHT_KEYWORD=undefined >) p.31.</p>
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100 It seems that this false taste was inspired in Voiture by Marini¹⁰ who had come to France with
 Queen Marie de Médicis. Voiture and Costar quote him often as a model in their letters.
 They admire his description of ‘la rose fille d’avril, vierge et reine, assise sur un trône épineux,
 tenant majestueusement le sceptre des fleurs, ayant pour courtisans et pour ministres la
 105 famille lascive des zéphyr, et portant la couronne d’or et le manteau d’écarlate.’^{TN14} [‘the
 rose, daughter of April, virginal and queen-like, seated on her throne of thorns, majestically
 extending her sceptre of flowers, with the sensual family of zephyrs as her courtiers and
 ministers, and wearing the gold crown and scarlet cloak. *My translation*].¹¹

110 *Bella figlia d’Aprile*
Verginella e reina
Su lo spinoso trono
Del verde cespo assisa
De’ fior’ lo scettro in maestra sostiene;
E corteggiata intorno
Da lasciva famiglia
 115 *Di zephiri ministri*
*Porta d’or la corona e d’ostro il manto.*¹²

Voiture, in his thirty-fifth letter to Costar, praises Marini’s musical atom, ‘la voix
 emplumée, le souffle vivant vêtu de plumes, la plume sonore, le chant ailé, le petit esprit
 d’harmonie caché dans de petites entrailles’,^{TN15} [‘the feathered voice, the lively breath
 covered in feathers, the melodious quill-pen, the winged song, the little harmonious spirit
 120 hidden in its little entrails’ *my translation*.], and all of that to say, a nightingale.

<https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=C05XgspHUIIC&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false>, vol.2, p.280.

98 In this version of ‘Goût’, (W75G*) the original French reads ‘dans ses lettres’, whereas in 70, 71N, 71A it reads ‘dans leurs lettres’. The latter puts more emphasis on the fact there are two authors of the letters.

¹⁰ Gianbattista Marino, better known in France as the *Cavalier Marin* (1569-1625), came to Paris in 1615 at the invitation of the queen mother, Marie de Médicis, where he published his poem *L’Adone* (1623), whose success was the root of ‘marinism’, an extreme and complex form of the baroque literary style. See *Adone*, Ed. Giovanni Pozzi (Milan, 1988); Marie-France Tristan, *La Scène de l’écriture, essai sur la poésie philosophique du Cavalier Marin* (Paris, 2002).

¹¹ Letter 12, 1640, to Pierre Costar, his favourite correspondent and friend (1603-1660), about ‘les étoiles, les fleurs du ciel’ [‘the stars, the flowers of the sky’ *my translation*]: ‘Il ciel fiorito, e’l terren stellato’ (*Œuvres. Lettres et poésies*, vol.2, p.110); and in particular there are numerous references in the *Entretiens de Monsieur de Voiture et de Monsieur Costar* (Paris, 1655, BV 3460), p.208, 258-59,267,301,317-18, etc.

¹² The ‘rose porte la couronne d’or et le manteau de pourpre. Elle est toujours assise sur un trône entouré d’épines, comme le sont tous les autres trônes. Ses courtisans ordinaires sont les Zéphirs; et toutes les autres fleurs sont ses sujets’: [‘rose wears the gold crown and purple cloak. She is always seated on a throne surrounded by thorns, as all the other thrones are. Her ordinary courtiers are zephyrs; and all of the other flowers are her subjects’, *my translation*.] quoted by Voiture (*Entretiens*, p.375). See *Marino e i marinisti*, Ed. G. G. Ferrero (Milan and Naples, 1954), p.507 (‘Idilli favolosi: Europa’). The quotation differs from the text by Voiture.

^{TN14} Voltaire’s original French retained here as it is a French translation of the Italian lines that follow (lines 103-111). My translation follows in square brackets afterwards.

^{TN15} As above, Voltaire’s original French retained as it is a French translation of the Italian lines that follow (lines 117-121). My translation follows in square brackets afterwards.

*Una voce pennuta, un suon' volante
E vestito di penna, un vivo fiato
Una piuma canora, un canto alato,
Un spiritual che d'armonia composto
Vive in anguste viscere nascoto.¹³*

Guez de Balzac had poor taste of quite the opposite sort; he would write letters to friends in a strange, grandiose style. He wrote to Cardinal de la Valette, that neither in the deserts of Lybia, nor in the seas' abysses, was there ever a monster as furious as sciatica; and that if the tyrants whose memory is odious to us, had had similar instruments of cruelty, it would have been sciatica that martyrs would have endured for religion.¹⁴

These pompous exaggerations, these long, measured periods, so contrary to the epistolary style, these tedious disquisitions, interlarded with Greek and Latin on the subject of two rather mediocre sonnets that divided the court and the town¹⁵, and on the pitiful tragedy of Herod the infanticide,¹⁶ all of that came from a time when taste was not yet formed. Even *Cinna*, and the *Lettres provinciales* that amazed the nation, did not refine it.

Connoisseurs can, most importantly, distinguish in that same man the point at which his taste was formed, the time when it reached its height and when it fell into decline. What man with an ounce of culture would not notice the extreme difference between the fine passages from *Cinna*, and those by the same author in his last twenty tragedies?

Dis-moi donc, lorsque Othon s'est offert à Camille,
A-t-il été content? a-t-elle été facile?

134 in this version of *Goût*, (W75G*) the original French reads 'distinguent surtout dans', whereas in 70, 71N, 71A it reads 'distinguent encore dans'. 'Encore' and 'surtout' have a similar meaning (in this case 'surtout' is translated as 'in particular' and the change by Voltaire shows the modernisation of French).

135 in this version of *Goût*, (W75G*) the original French reads 'de ceux du', whereas in 70, 71A it reads 'de ceux-ci du'. Both have a similar meaning in English.

140 70, 71N, 71A: eu plus d'effet? Translation: 'have more of an effect' rather than 'have the full effect'.

142 70, 71N, 71A, W68, W75G, β: (elle.) [error corrected by the editors of Keh]l

¹³ *Adone*, song 7: 'Le delizie', five lines taken from stanzas 37-38 (Milan, 1988), p.344. Read 'nascosto' and not 'nascoto' in the last line.

¹⁴ Jean-Louis Guez de Balzac, *Les Premières Lettres, 1618-1627*, Ed. H. Bibas and K.T. Butler, 2 vol, (Paris, 1933-1944), letter 21 (vol.I, p.96): from Rome, 10 December 1621 to Louis, Cardinal of la Valette (1593-1639), Archbishop of Toulouse, then Lieutenant General in the king's armies. Voltaire is relatively less harsh to Voiture than he is towards the letter writer Guez de Balzac: 'ses lettres étaient des harangues ampoulées' ['his letters were pompous orations', *my translation*], but 'il charmait l'oreille' ['he charmed the ear', *my translation*] (according to the 'Catalogue des écrivains' from *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*, OH, p.1003). Voltaire possessed several editions of the *Œuvres* de Guez de Balzac (BV 251-53) and two editions of his *Lettres* (BV 255-56) with numerous traces of reading (CN, vol.I, p.197-209).

¹⁵ A famous quarrel during the period of the Fronde (1648-1649) pitting the *uranistes* and the *jobelins*^{TN16} against each other in two sonnets: one to Urania ('Il faut finir mes jours en l'amour d'Uranie' ['my days in love with Urania must end' *my translation*]) by Voiture (*Les Œuvres*, p.52) and another to Job by Isaac de Benserade ('Job de mille tourments atteint' ['Job of a thousand torments attacks [...]', *my translation*], *Les Œuvres*, 2 vol, Paris, 1697, vol.1, p.174). A poetic battle followed. See the detail in the *Mémoires de littérature* by Albert-Henri de Sellengre (2 vol., The Hague, 1715-1717), vol.1, p.120-34, and in Claude-Joseph Goujet, *Bibliothèque française* (18 vol., Paris, 1741-1756), vol.18, p. 296-300.

¹⁶ *Herodes infanticida*, neo-Latin tragedy by Daniel Heinsius written in 1607-1608, but only published in 1632. His play was strongly criticised by Guez de Balzac in his *Discours sur une tragédie de Monsieur Heinsius intitulée Herodes infanticida* (Paris, 1636). Raymond Lebègue, 'L'Herodes infanticida en France', *Neophilologus* 23, no. 1 (December 1938), p.388-94. See the edition by Anne Duprat of *De Constitutione tragoediae La Constitution de la tragédie dite La Poétique d'Heinsius* (Geneva, 2001), where, in 1611, the 'docteur hollandais' ['Dutch doctor', *my translation*] defended the humanist and Senecan concept of the tragic act that was regarded as archaic twenty years later.

¹⁷ Corneille, *Othon* (1664), act 2, scene 1, lines 373-76, ridiculous according to Voltaire (see the *Commentaires sur Corneille*, OCV, vol.55, p.920).

^{TN16} The Fronde refers to the civil wars that divided France between 1648 to 1653, and the *uranistes* and the *jobelins* were two groups divided by a literary quarrel after Voiture's death in 1648.

Son hommage auprès d'elle a-t-il eu plein effet?
Comment l'a-t-elle pris? et comment l'a-t-il fait?¹⁷
(Corneille)

145 [Tell me then, when Othon offered himself to Camille, / Was he happy? Was she amenable?
/ Did his adoration of her have the full effect? / How did she take it? And how did he do it?
My translation].

150 Is there anyone in literary circles that does not recognise Boileau's sophisticated taste
in his *Art poétique*, and his as yet unrefined taste in his satire of the overcrowding of Paris,
where he describes the stray cats?

L'un miaule en grondant comme un tigre en furie,
L'autre roule sa voix comme un enfant qui crie;
Ce n'est pas tout encore, les souris et les rats
Semblent pour m'éveiller s'entendre avec les chats.¹⁸

155 [One miaows by growling like a raging tiger, / Another's voice is piercing like a crying child;
/ That still is not all, the mice and the rats / Seem to have made a pact with the cats to wake
me. *My translation*].

At the time, if he had mixed in the right circles, he would have been advised to apply
his talent to more dignified objects than cats, rats and mice.

160 Just as an artist develops his taste little by little, so does a nation. It stagnates for
centuries of barbarity, then a faint dawn begins to break; finally,
the light of day appears, then after that we see only a long and sad dusk.¹⁹

165 We have all been in agreement for a long time that, despite François I's efforts to
nurture taste in the fine arts in France, good taste could only ever be achieved towards the
end of the age of Louis XIV; and we are starting to complain that the current era is in
decline.

The Greeks of Late Antiquity would admit that the good taste predominant in the age
of Pericles was lost to them. Modern Greeks agree that they have no taste at all.

170 Quintilian recognised that the taste of the Romans was starting to deteriorate in his
time.

We saw in the article 'Art Dramatique',²⁰ how much Lopez de Vega complained
about the poor taste of the Spanish.

175 The Italians were the first to realise that everything Italian declined sometime after
their immortal *Seicento*, and that they were witnessing the death of most of the arts that they
had created.

147 The original French is written 'encore raffiné dans' in the source text (W75G*), meaning [not] 'yet refined in' as written above, whereas in K12 the French is written 'encore purifié dans' meaning [not] 'yet purified in'.

160 In versions 70,71N, 71A the French 'et triste' ('and sad') is omitted.

¹⁸ Boileau, satire 6, lines 7-10.

¹⁹ A recurring idea in Voltaire's work, fully developed in *Le Siècle de Louis XIV* (1751) and also found in his article 'Goût' in the *Encyclopédie*: 'Le goût peut se gâter chez une nation; ce malheur arrive d'ordinaire après les siècles de perfection' ^{TN17} (vol.7, p.761; *OCV*, vol.33, p.131).

²⁰ *OCV*, vol. 39, p.50-51.

^{TN17} Translation: 'The taste of a nation can become debased. Such a misfortune usually happens after a century in which perfection was reached.' Trans. Hoyt and Cassirer, 'Taste'.

Addison often attacks the poor taste of his compatriots in more than one genre, either when he makes fun of a statue of an admiral in a periwig^{TN18}, or when he shows his contempt for puns being used in serious writing, or when he condemns introducing jongleurs into tragedies.²¹

180 If, therefore, the greatest minds of a country agree that taste has been lacking at certain times in their homeland, their neighbours can feel it as their compatriots do. And just as it is clear that amongst us one man has good taste and the other poor, it could also be clear that between two contemporary nations, one has taste that is coarse and uncouth, while the other's is delicate and natural.

185 The misfortune is that when this truth is openly stated, the entire nation in question is offended, just as a man of bad taste is insulted when you want to guide him away from it.

The best thing, therefore, is to wait for time and example to instruct a nation lacking in taste. That is how the Spanish are starting to reform their theatre, and how the Germans are trying to create theirs.

190 *On the particular taste of a nation*

There are examples of beauty common to all periods and from all countries, but there are also beauties that are local. Eloquence must be persuasive everywhere, just as pain must be touching, anger impetuous, wisdom calm; but the details that may please a citizen of London, may not have any effect at all on an inhabitant of Paris; the English will aptly draw their
195 comparisons and their metaphors from the seas, which Parisians, who rarely see any ships, will never do. Anything that is closely related to the freedom of an Englishman, to his rights, to his customs, will make a greater impression on him than on a Frenchman.²²

In in a cold and damp country, the temperature of the climate will bring about a taste in architecture, in furniture and in clothing, which is very good, and could not be accepted in
200 Rome, or in Sicily.

Theocritus and Virgil were bound to speak highly of shade and cool water in their eclogues. Thompson in his description of *The Seasons*,²³ will have felt obliged to write completely different descriptions.

205 A nation that is enlightened but not greatly given to social pleasures will not have the same objects of ridicule as a nation that is just as intellectual, but where social intercourse

²¹ Joseph Addison, *The Spectator*, 30 March 1711, vol.1, no.26; 18 April 1711, vol.1, no.42; 10 May 1711, vol.1, no.61. On Addison the playwright, see later lines 237-247 and n.32.

²² Voltaire had read the *Lettres sur les Anglais et les Français et sur les voyages* by Bêat de Muralt (BV2534), that he quotes in his *Lettres Philosophiques* (vol.2, p.103-105). This parallel between the two nations, both in terms of habits and social norms, was the sentiment of the Swiss traveller which supported Voltaire's own experience.

²³ *The Seasons* (1726-1730) by James Thomson was translated into French by Marie-Jeanne de Châtillon, Lady Bontemps (1759) and republished many times (1761, 1779, etc.). See Margaret M. Cameron, *L'influence des 'Saisons' de Thomson sur la poésie descriptive en France (1759-1810)* (Paris, 1927).

^{TN18} Original English from Addison's *The Spectator*: 'Instead of the brave rough English Admiral, which was the distinguishing Character of that plain gallant Man, he is represented on his Tomb by the Figure of a Beau, dress'd in a long Perriwig, and reposing himself upon Velvet Cushions under a Canopy of State.' Joseph Addison, *The Spectator*, 30 March 1711, vol.1, no.26, p. 110-111.

verges on indiscretion. Consequently, these two peoples will not have the same type of comedy.

Poetry will be different in a society that restricts women compared with one where they are granted unlimited freedom.

210 But it will always be true to say that Virgil painted his pictures better than Thompson painted his, and that there was more taste on the banks of the Tiber than on those of the Thames; that the natural scenes of *Il Pastor Fido* are infinitely better than Racan's *Les Bergeries*;²⁴ and that Racine and Molière are divine compared to writers of other plays.

On the taste of connoisseurs

215 In general, fine and sure taste consists of an immediate sensation of beauty amid imperfection, and of imperfection amid beauty.

A gourmet is someone who would be able to discern the mixing of two wines,²⁵ who would be able to recognise the dominant tastes in a dish, whilst the other guests would only be left with feelings of confusion and disorientation.

220 Is it not a mistake to say that it is a misfortune to have too delicate a taste, or to be too much of a connoisseur? That you would then be too offended by imperfections and too indifferent to beauties? That ultimately you would lose by being too difficult? On the contrary, is it not the case that true pleasure exists only for people with taste? They see, they hear, they can smell that which escapes men who are less sensitive, and who are less refined.

225 A connoisseur of music, of paintings, of architecture, of poetry, of medals etc.²⁶ experiences feelings that ordinary people would not suspect; even the pleasure of discovering a fault would please him and make him appreciate beauties more deeply. This is the advantage of true perspectives over false ones. The man of taste has other eyes, other ears, a different sense of touch compared to an uncouth man. He is appalled by Raphael's inferior draperies, but he admires the fine perfection of his drawings.²⁷ He takes pleasure in noticing that Laocoon's children are not in proportion to the height of their father; but he is stirred by the group as a whole, whilst other spectators are unmoved.²⁸

209 in this version of *Gottt* (W75G*), the original French reads 'à l'égard des auteurs des autres', whereas in W68 it reads 'à l'égard des autres'. The latter would translate as 'compared to others'.

²⁴ The pastoral tragedy of Giovanni Battista Guarini was published with enormous success in 1589. Racan was influenced by it, as shown in the pastoral landscape of *Les Bergeries* (1625). Voltaire had two editions of *Il Pastor fido* (Paris, 1729, BV1561; Amsterdam, 1736, BV1562) that bear numerous signs of reading (*CN*, vol.4, p.201-38). In the eighteenth century the tragedy was still, amongst other works, the inspiration for an opera by Georg Friedrich Handel (*Il Pastor fido*, 1712, 1734) and for a cantata by Jean-Philippe Rameau (*Le Berger fidèle*, 1728).

²⁵ A turn of phrase taken from the article 'Goût' in the *Encyclopédie* (vol.7, p.761; *OCV*, vol.33, p.129), that in particular develops the concept of taste in the field of eating habits. The first part of the article 'Goût (Physiolog.)' from the *Encyclopédie* compiled by Jaucourt deals with taste as a 'sensation particulière à la bouche' ['feeling that is specific to the mouth', *my translation*] (vol.7, p.760-61).

²⁶ Three short articles in the *Encyclopédie* (vol.7, p.770) concern themselves with these particular subjects: 'Goût (en architecture)' by Jacques-François Blondel, 'Goût du chant' by Jean-Jacques Rousseau and 'Goût (en peinture)' by Paul Landois.

²⁷ This judgement on Raphael comes from Roger de Piles, picked up again by the Marquis d'Argens in his *Reflexions critiques sur les différentes écoles de peinture* (Paris, 1752), where Frederic's chamberlain praises French over Italian paintings. In his parallel between Raphael and Eustache Lesueur, he maintains the former 'faisait des draperies d'une petite manière' ['painted draperies in a limited fashion', *my translation*] (p.42), but that 'il a dessiné avec la correction, l'élégance et la précision de l'antique' ['he sketched with the correctness, elegance and precision of antiquity', *my translation*] (p.41). In his curious 'Balance des peintres' ['Balance of painters', *my translation*], Roger de Piles notes (17) the 'composition' ['composition', *my translation*] in Raphael's work, (12) the 'coloris' ['colouring', *my translation*], but also (18) the 'expression' ['expression', *my translation*] and the 'dessin' ['design', *my translation*] (*Cours de peinture par principes*, Paris, 1708, a table on an unnumbered page at the end of the volume).

²⁸ Kept in Pio Clementino Museum, this famous ancient sculpture group was excavated in Rome in 1506. It greatly influenced the art of the Renaissance, and Michelangelo in particular. In the eighteenth century, it was central to the

235 The famous sculptor, man of letters and genius, who created the colossal statue of Peter I in St. Petersburg, quite rightly criticises the pose of Michelangelo's Moses, and his tight little robe that could not even be described as oriental clothing; at the same time, he is enraptured by the appearance of the head.²⁹

Examples of good and bad taste, taken from French and English tragedy

240 I will not speak here of certain English authors who, having translated some of Molière's plays, insulted him in their prefaces,³⁰ nor those who made one tragedy out of two of Racine's, and who moreover filled it with new events to give themselves the right to censor the prolific and noble simplicity of this great man.³¹

245 Out of all the authors in England who wrote about taste, about intellect and imagination, and claimed to be fair critics, Addison is the one with the most authority. His publications are very useful, if only he had not sacrificed his own taste so often in the name of pleasing his party and ensuring brisk sales for *The Spectator*, which he published with Steele.

250 However, he regularly has the courage to favour openly theatre in Paris over theatre in London; he makes known the flaws of the English stage; and when he wrote *Cato*, he took good care to avoid imitating Shakespeare's style. If he had known how to handle the passions of tragedy, if the warmth of his feelings had matched the dignity of his style, he would have reformed his nation. His play, being a matter of party politics, was enormously successful. But once the factions ceased to exist, all that was left of the tragedy of *Cato* were very fine lines of verse and a cold lack of feeling.³² Nothing has contributed more to the strengthening of Shakespeare's empire. The common people in any country do not recognise fine poetry and the common Englishman prefers princes who trade insults, women who roll around on stage, murders, executions of criminals, ghosts who fill the theatre in droves, and sorcerers, to the most dignified and restrained eloquence.³³

aesthetic reflections of Johann Joachim Winckelmann (*Gedanken über die Nachahmung der griechischen Werke in Malerei und Bildhauerkunst*, 1755, trans.fr. 1756), and of *Laocoon oder über die Grenzen der Malerei und Poesie* (1766) by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (*Laocoon*, trans. A. Courtin, 1997).

²⁹ Beginning in 1766, Étienne Falconet created the equestrian statue of Peter the Great in St. Petersburg for Catherine II: it was not unveiled until 1782 by the tsarina. A friend of Diderot, Falconet had published an essay *Du Moïse de Michel Ange et de son Bacchus*, republished in his *Œuvres diverses concernant les arts*, 3 vol. (Paris, 1787), vol.3, p.146-61. Falconet drafted the article 'Sculpture (Beaux-Arts)' in the *Encyclopédie* (vol.14, p.834-36).

³⁰ 'Il n'y a que les mauvais auteurs anglais qui aient dit du mal de ce grand homme'^{TN19} (*Lettres philosophiques*, vol.2, p.109). In his second letter on the topic of English theatre, Muralt said about the English: 'c'est à Molière surtout qu'ils aiment à se préférer, et c'est lui qu'ils maltraitent'^{TN20} (*Lettres sur les Anglais et les Français*, s.l. [Geneva], 1725, p.35). He cites at length the preface of the translation of *L'Avare* by Thomas Shadwell (*The Miser*, 1671) that claims to have improved Molière's play (p.44).

³¹ On the translations and adaptations of Racine for the English stage from the seventeenth century to the start of the eighteenth century, see F. E. Eccles, *Racine in England* (Oxford, 1922), p.3-17, and Dorothea F. Canfield, *Corneille and Racine in England: A Study of the English translations of the two Corneilles and Racine, with special reference to their representation on the English stage* (New York, 1904).

³² Voltaire, in his *Lettres philosophiques* (vol.2, p.85-87), almost unreservedly praised *Cato, a tragedy* (1713; trans.fr. A. Boyer, 1713) by Addison; he comes back to it for a few lines in the article 'Art dramatique' in *QE* (*OCV*, vol.39, p.62).

³³ See the eighteenth letter 'Sur la tragédie' in *Lettres philosophiques* (vol. 2, p.79-88) and, once more, the article 'Art dramatique' from *QE* (*OCV*, vol. 39, p.52-63).

^{TN19} Translation: 'none but the contemptible writers among the English have endeavoured to lessen the character of that great comic poet'. Trans. P.F. Collier, *French and English philosophers: Descartes, Rousseau, Voltaire, Hobbes: with introductions and notes*, (New York, c.1910, < <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/mod/1778voltaire-lettres.asp> >), Letter XIX.

^{TN20} Translation: 'But 'tis from Moliere they would carry the Prize, and 'tis he they abuse'. Trans. Eng, *Letters describing the character and customs of the English and French nations with a curious essay on travelling*, 2nd ed.(London, 1726), letter 2, p.18.

Collier was very well aware of the flaws of English theatre; but being an enemy of this art because of a barbaric superstition that had a hold on him, he displeased the nation too much for it to deign to be enlightened by him; he was hated and scorned.³⁴

260 Warburton, Bishop of Gloucester, commented on Shakespeare together with Pope. But his commentary turned only on words.³⁵ The writer of the three volumes of *Elements of Criticism*, sometimes censors Shakespeare; but he censors Racine and our tragic authors much more.³⁶

265 The great failing for which all English critics take us to task, is that our heroes are French, and our characters are like those in a novel, lovers like those found in *Clélie*, *Astrée* and *Zaïde*. The author of *Elements of criticism* reprimands Corneille very severely in particular, for having made Caesar speak in this way to Cleopatra.

270 C'était pour acquérir un droit si précieux
Que combattait partout mon bras ambitieux;
Et dans Pharsale même il a tiré l'épée
Plus pour le conserver que pour vaincre Pompée.
Je l'ai vaincu, princesse, et le dieu des combats
M'y favorisait moins que vos divins appas:
Ils conduisaient ma main, ils enflaient mon courage;
Cette pleine Victoire est leur dernier ouvrage.³⁷

275 The English critic finds these platitudes ridiculous and extravagant.³⁸ No doubt he is right. Frenchmen of good judgment had said it before him. We regard these guidelines from Boileau as an unbreakable rule.

Qu'Achille aime autrement que Tirsis et Philène;
N'allez pas d'un Cyrus nous faire un Artamène.³⁹

³⁴ Jeremy Collier, *A Short View of the immorality and profaneness of the English stage* (1698; rpt. London, 1996), a work where he attacks the plays of William Congreve and Sir John Vanbrugh in particular, who respond to these attacks. The volume was translated into French by Joseph de Courbeville, under the adapted title: *La Critique du théâtre anglais compare au théâtre d'Athènes, de Rome et de France* (Paris, 1715). Courbeville writes: 'dès que le livre de M. Collier parut, toutes les Muses d'outre-mer se soulevèrent contre lui' ['as soon as Mr Collier's book was published, all of the poets from overseas rose up against him', *my translation*] (from the 'Avertissement du traducteur' ['Translator's preface', *my translation*], that talks about his curiosity when he heard about 'la nouvelle de cette guerre littéraire' ['the news about this literary war', *my translation*]; n.pag.). Pages 263-66 are about a certain 'Chacspér'.

³⁵ Commentary published in *The Works of Shakespeare [...] with a comment and notes, critical and explanatory* (London, 1747, BV3161) by William Warburton, with a preface by Alexander Pope. On this edition, see *La Défense de mon oncle* (OCV, vol.64, p.345, n.2). William Warburton (1698-1779) was chaplain for the King of England, then Anglican Bishop of Gloucester (from 1759)

³⁶ Henry Homes, Lord Kames, author of *Elements of Criticism* (3 vol., Edinburgh, 1762), already stigmatised in the article 'Art dramatique' in *QE* (OCV, vol.39, p.66-67).

³⁷ *La Mort de Pompée* (1644), act 4, scene 3, lines 1267-74. See the *Commentaires sur Corneille* (OCV, vol.54, p.437). ^{TN21}

³⁸ *Elements of Criticism*, ch.16: 'Sentiments', 3rd ed. (2 vol., Edinburgh, 1765), vol.1, p.469-71.

³⁹ Boileau, *Art poétique*, ch.3, lines 99-100. ^{TN22}

^{TN21} Translation: 'Twas to acquire that valuable Right, / That my Ambitious Arm did always fight. / And in Pharsalia rather my Sword drew / To Preserve that, then Pompey to subdue. / I Conquer'd, and the God of Battles, less / Then your bright Eyes, afforded me success. / They rais'd my Courage, and my hand did sway, / And I owe them that memorable day.'

Trans. Eng. *Pompey a tragedy*, (London, 1663), act 4, scene 3, p. 42-43.

^{TN22} Translation: 'Let not Achilles be like Thirsis seen, / Or for a Cyrus show an Artamen?'. Trans. Eng. *The Art of poetry, written in French by The Sieur de Boileau, Made English* (London, 1683), p.35. This translation removes the reference to 'Philène', 'and Philene' should really follow immediately after 'Thirsis'.

280 We know that since Caesar did indeed love Cleopatra, Corneille should have had him speak otherwise, and that above all this love is insipid in the tragedy of *la Mort de Pompée*. We know that Corneille, who included love in all of his plays, never dealt with this emotion appropriately, except in some scenes of *Le Cid*, imitated from the Spanish.⁴⁰ But, every nation also agrees with us that he showed great genius, deep meaning, a superior strength of mind in

285 *Cinna*, in several scenes from the *Horatii*, *Pompée*, *Polyeucte* and in the last scene of *Rodogune*.⁴¹

If love is insipid in almost all of his plays, we are the first to say it; we all agree that his heroes are just *raisonneurs* in his last fifteen or sixteen works. The lines of these plays are difficult, obscure, without harmony, without grace. But, if he rose infinitely beyond Shakespeare in the tragedies of his heyday, he did not ever stoop so low in the others; and if

290 he infelicitously has Caesar say, *Qu'il vient ennoblir par le titre de captif, le titre de vainqueur à présent effectif*,⁴² he does not allow him the unbridled excess that we find in Shakespeare.⁴³ His heroes do not make love to Catau like King Henry V;⁴⁴ in his works you do not see a prince exclaiming like Richard II:

280 In this version of *Goût*, (W75G*) the original French reads '*Pompée, de Polyeucte, dans la dernière scène de Rodogune.*', whereas in 70, 71N, 71A it reads '*Pompée et de Polyeucte ¶Si*'. Therefore 'and in the last scene of *Rodogune*' would be omitted in this case.

⁴⁰ An allusion to the 'comedia' by Juan Bautista Diamante, *El Honrador de su padre* (1658) that Voltaire wrongly thought was a source of *Le Cid* (*Commentaires sur Corneille*, *OCV*, vol.54, p.40) and that, on the contrary, inspired it. See also the article 'Exagération' from the *QE* (*OCV*, vol.41, p.293-94).

⁴¹ There is an almost identical list in the article 'Art dramatique' from the *QE* (*OCV*, vol.39, p.79), that nevertheless devotes its key observations about the genius of French tragedy to Jean Racine.

⁴² *La Mort de Pompée* (1644), act 4, scene 3, lines 1279-80: 'C'est ce glorieux titre à présent effectif / Que je viens ennoblir par celui du captif' (Corneille, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. G. Couton, 3 vol., Paris, 1980-1987, vol.1, p.1118).^{TN23} See the *Commentaires sur Corneille* (*OCV*, vol.54, p.438).

⁴³ Voltaire had published a translation of three acts of *Julius Caesar* by Shakespeare following his *Théâtre de Pierre Corneille avec des commentaires* (*OCV*, vol.54, p.175-228).

⁴⁴ Katherine, in *The Life of Henry the fifth* (1599), which has some suggestive remarks in act 2 and a romantic scene in act 5.

^{TN23} Translation: '[I] would ennoble that high title I wear, / [B]y the Addition of your Prisoner.' Trans. Eng. *Pompey a tragedy*, act 4, scene 3, p.43. The letters in square brackets have been obscured in the translation so are my interpretation.

295 'O terre de mon royaume! Ne nourris pas mon ennemi; mais que les araignées qui
sucent ton venin, et que les lourds crapauds soient sur sa route; qu'ils attaquent ses pieds
perfides, qui les foulent de ses pas usurpateurs. Ne produis que de puants chardons pour eux;
et quand ils voudrant cueillir une fleur sur ton sein, ne leur présente que des serpents en
embuscade.'⁴⁵

300 In Corneille's works you do not see an heir to the throne having a discussion with an
army general, with all the natural refinement which Shakespeare bestows on the Prince of
Wales, who would later become King Henry IV. (a)

The general asks the prince what time it is. The prince responds: 'Tu as l'esprit si gras
pour avoir bu du vin d'Espagne, pour t'être déboutonné après souper, pour avoir dormi sur
305 un banc après dîner, que tu as oublié ce que tu devrais savoir. Que diable t'importe l'heure
qu'il est? à moins que les heures ne soient des tasses de vin, que les minutes ne soient des
hachis de chapons, que les cloches ne soient des langues de maquerelles, les cadrans des
enseignes de mauvais lieux, et le soleil lui-même une fille de joie en taffetas couleur de feu.'⁴⁶

310 How did Warburton not blush when he commented on this foul rudeness? Did he
work for the honour of the theatre and the Anglican Church?⁴⁷

292 70, 71N, 71A: 'qui le foulent'

(a) Scene 2 from the first act of the life and death of Henry IV.

⁴⁵ Adaptation of several lines from *King Richard the second* (1595), act 3, scene 2. ^{TN24}

⁴⁶ The Prince Hal with John Falstaff in *King Henry the fourth* (1598), act 1, scene 2. ^{TN25}

⁴⁷ See above, n.35.

^{TN24} Original English: 'Feed not thy sovereign's foe, my gentle earth, / Nor with thy sweets comfort his ravenous sense, / But let thy spiders that suck up thy venom / And heavy-gaited toads lie in their way, / Doing annoyance to the treacherous feet / Which with usurping steps do trample thee. / Yield stinging nettles to mine enemies / And when they from thy bosom pluck a flower, / Guard it, I pray thee, with a lurking adder,' William Shakespeare, *Richard II* (Online, 2012, < <https://www.oxfordscholarlyeditions-com.bris.idm.oclc.org/view/10.1093/actrade/9780198186427.book.1/actrade-9780198186427-book-1> >), p.206. [Back translation of Voltaire's adaptation: 'O earth of my kingdom! do not feed my enemy; but may spiders that suck your venom, and may heavy toads be on your route; may they attack the treacherous feet, that tread on them with usurper's steps. Only produce stinking thistles for them; and when they want to pick a flower from your bosom, present them only with snakes lying in wait' *my translation*]

^{TN25} Original English: 'Thou art so fat-witted with drinking of old sack, / and unbuttoning thee after supper, and sleeping upon / benches after noon, that thou hast forgotten to demand / that truly which thou wouldst truly know. What a devil / hast thou to do with the time of the day? Unless hours / were cups of sack, and minutes capons, and clocks the / tongues of bawds, and dials the signs of leaping-houses, / and the blessed sun himself a fair hot wench in flame / -coloured taffeta,' William Shakespeare, *King Henry IV Part 1* (online, n.d., < <https://www.dramaonlinelibrary-com.bris.idm.oclc.org/plays/king-henry-iv-part-1-arden-shakespeare-third-series-iid-133226/do-9781408160381-div-00000027> >), act 1, scene 2. [Back Translation of Voltaire's French Translation: 'You have a mind so fat from having drunk wine from Spain, from having unbuttoned yourself after supper, from having fallen asleep on a bench after dinner, that you have forgotten what you ought to know. What the devil does it matter to you what time it is? Unless the hours are cups of wine, the minutes are minced capons, the clocks are tongues of bawds, the dials are signs of places of ill-repute, and the sun itself a lady of the night in flame-coloured taffeta', *my translation*].

The scarcity of people with taste

315 It is distressing to consider (especially in cold and damp climates) the vast crowd of men who do not have the least scintilla of taste, who do not like any of the fine arts, who never read, and among whom a few flick through a newspaper once a month at most to keep up to date, and to be able to talk at random about things that they can only have confused ideas about.

320 Go to a small provincial town and you will seldom find a bookseller or two there. There are some towns that have none at all.⁴⁸ The judges, the canons, the bishop, the subdelegate, the representative, the salt-tax collector, the well-to-do citizen, nobody has any books, no one has a cultured mind; they are no more advanced than they were in the twelfth century. How rare taste is in provincial capitals, even in those that have learned societies!

325 Only in the capital of a great kingdom can good taste be found; even then it is the preserve of only a very small number of people; the riffraff are excluded from it. It is unknown amongst bourgeois families who are continually occupied by care of their fortunes, by domestic details and by a coarse indolence, entertained by gaming. All of the positions that are related to law-making, finance and commerce close the door to fine arts. It is the disgrace of the human mind that, normally, taste can only develop in opulent idleness. I knew a *commis* from the offices of Versailles,⁴⁹ born with a lot of intelligence, who said, “I am truly
330 unfortunate, I do not have the time to have taste.”

In a town like Paris, with a population of over six hundred thousand people, I do not believe that there are three thousand who have taste in the fine arts. When a dramatic masterpiece is put on stage, an event that is, as it should be, so very rare, all Paris, they say, is enchanted; but at most three thousand copies are printed.⁵⁰

335 If you travel across Asia, Africa or half of the North today, where will you see taste in terms of oratory, poetry, art or music? Practically the entire universe is uncivilised.

Taste is therefore like philosophy; it is possessed only by a very small number of privileged souls. France’s great stroke of good fortune was to have in Louis XIV a king who was born with taste.

340
*Pauci quos equus amavit,
Jupiter aut ardens evexit ad aethera virtus
Diis geniti potuere.*⁵¹

⁴⁸ A very Parisian outlook from Voltaire. For example, the *Almanach de la librairie* (Paris, 1781) by Antoine Perrin provides a ‘Tableau des libraires et imprimeurs du royaume’ [‘Table of booksellers and printers of the kingdom’, *my translation*.] from Abbeville to Vitry-le-François that covers several tens of pages (p.36-81). The modern editor of this *Almanach* (Aubel, 1984), P.-M. Gason, notes that in 1777 there were 25 printers, 251 printer-booksellers and 557 booksellers in 238 localities in provincial areas and that Paris only made up 25.94 percent of this count (p.xvii).

⁴⁹ A ‘*commis*’ is a senior official in the ministries based in Versailles. ‘Les secrétaires d’Etat, les financiers ont des *commis* dans leurs bureaux’ [‘Secretaries of state, financiers have *commis* in their offices’, *my translation*] (Antoine Furetière, *Dictionnaire universel*, 3 vol., The Hague and Rotterdam, 1690, article ‘Commis’, vol.1, sig.3H2r). See *L’Ingénu* (1767), ch.9.

⁵⁰ This is a significant print run, despite what Voltaire says of it. ‘Novelties’ generally had smaller print runs, estimated to be between 500 to 1500 for each edition. See Henri-Jean Martin, ‘Comment mesurer un succès littéraire. Le problème des tirages’ [‘How can a literary success be measured. The problem of print runs’, *my translation*], *Le Livre français sous l’Ancien Régime* (Paris, 1987), p.209-23.

⁵¹ Virgil, *Aeneid*, VI, lines 129-131: ‘Some few, whom / kindly Jupiter has loved, or shining worth uplifted to heaven, sons / of the gods, have availed.’ Trans. H. Rushton Fairclough, revised by G.P. Goold, *Virgil. Eclogues. Georgics. Aeneid I-VI*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1999), p.541-543. (Prophecy by the Sibyl of Cumae to Aeneas before the descent into Hell).

It was in vain that Ovid said that God created us to look at the sky, *Erectos ad sydera tollere vultus*;⁵² men are almost always bowed down towards the ground.

345 Why is an ill-formed statue, or a poor painting where the figures are badly proportioned, never considered to be a masterpiece? Why is a wretched, ill-proportioned house never regarded as a fine architectural monument? How does it come about that in terms of music, discordant and shrill sounds do not please anybody's ear? And how can very poor, uncivilised tragedies written in the *Allobroge* style⁵³ have succeeded, even after the sublime scenes that can be found in Corneille, and in Racine's touching tragedies, and the few well-written plays that we have had since this elegant playwright? It is only in theatre that

350 you sometimes witness the success of detestable works, be they tragic or comic.

355 What is the reason for this? It is because illusion can only prevail in the theatre; it is because there, success is dependent on two or three actors, sometimes on just one, and above all on a cabal that spares no effort, while people with taste do nothing. This conspiracy often lasts an entire generation. It is all the more effective, because its aim is not so much to elevate an author, as to put down another. Only in this genre, does it take a century for the true value of things to be appreciated.

351 In version K12, the text does not finish here and continues as follows ¶ It is people with taste alone who rule in the long run in the empire of the arts. Poussin was forced to leave France to make way for a poor painter.⁵⁴ Lemoine killed himself in despair.⁵⁵ Van Loo was prepared to go and practise his talents elsewhere.⁵⁶ Only the connoisseurs have been able to put

⁵² *Metamorphoses*, book 1. Translation of a slightly longer extract: 'he gave to man an uplifted face and / bade him stand erect and turn his eyes to heaven' Trans. Frank Justus Miller, revised by G.P Goold, *Metamorphoses*, (online, 1916, < https://www.loebclassics.com/view/ovid-metamorphoses/1916/pb_LCL042.9.xml?result=10&rskey=tQua4v>), vol.1, p.9, line 86.

338-351 In versions 70, 71N, 71A the text finishes after '...ground.' // [*The rest of the article was added in the 'Supplément' in 1772*]

338 In this version of *Goût*, (W75G*) the original French reads 'Pourquoi jamais une', whereas in 71A and K12 it reads 'Pourquoi une', so 'never' in line 337 would be changed to 'not' in that case for a more accurate translation.

⁵³ 'Aujourd'hui par Allobroges nous n'entendons que les Savoyards; et de là est venu que dans le style comique et burlesque, il est pris pour grossier, rustre, ou homme qui a le sens de travers' ['Today by *Allobroges* we only mean the Savoyards; and only in relation to the comic and burlesque style, they are seen as rude and boorish, or men who have poor judgment, *my translation*] (*Dictionnaire de Trévoux*, 7 vol., Paris, 1752, vol.1, p.447).

⁵⁴ Voltaire had given a short biography of Poussin in *Le Temple du goût*: 'Appelé en France par le secrétaire d'Etat Desnoyers, il y établit le bon goût de la peinture. Mais persécuté par les envieux, il s'en retourna à Rome' ['Called to France by the Secretary of State Desnoyers, he established good taste in painting there. But, persecuted by those who were envious of his success, he returned to Rome', *my translation*] (*OCV*, vol.9, p.152, note). In the 'Catalogue des artistes' from the *Siècle de Louis XIV*, he comments on Poussin again: 'Rappelé de Rome à Paris, il y ceda à l'envie et aux cabales; il se retira'^{TN26} (*OH*, p.1217). It is Simon Vouet (1590-1649) whom Voltaire cites as a 'mauvais peintre' ['poor painter', *my translation*]. He was the *premier peintre* [official painter, *my translation*] to Louis XIII: 'on ne peut s'empêcher de vouloir quelque mal à Vouet, d'avoir forcé ce grand homme de quitter la France' ['one cannot help but wish Voet ill for having forced this great man to leave France', *my translation*]; François Desportes, 'Discours préliminaire sur l'état de la peinture et de la sculpture en France [...] avant Charles le Brun' ['Preliminary discourse on the state of painting and sculpture in France [...] before Charles le Brun', *my translation*], in François-Bernard Lépicié, *Vie des premiers peintres du roi depuis Le Brun jusqu'à présent*, 2 vol. (Paris, 1752. Vol.1, p.lxix).

⁵⁵ François Lemoine (1688-1737), *premier peintre* to Louis XV, killed himself, 'se croyant mal récompensé de M. le cardinal de Fleury'^{TN27} (according to the 'Catalogue des artistes' in the *Siècle de Louis XIV*, *OH*, p.1219), an expression used again in the *Encyclopédie*, vol.5. p.322. For the account of his suicide, see the 'Vie de François le Moyne, premier peintre du roi' [The Life of François le Moyne, *premier peintre* to the king', *my translation*] by Anne-Philippe, Comte de Caylus, in F.-B. Lépicié (*Vie des premiers peintres*, vol.2, p.115-16).

⁵⁶ Frederick of Prussia asked in vain for Carle Van Loo (1705-1765) 'de passer à Berlin. Dans une conjuncture aussi intéressante et aussi delicate, l'attachement respectueux de C. Vanloo pour son roi pouvait seul le fixer à Paris' ['to come to Berlin. In circumstances that were interesting but also delicate, only the respectful affection that C. Vanloo had for his king could keep him in Paris', *my translation*]: Michel Dandré-Bardon, *Vie de Carle Vanloo* (Paris, 1765), p.28.

^{TN26} Translation: 'Being invited from Rome to Paris, he fell a victim to envy and party, which made him quit his country.' Trans. R. Griffith, *The Age of Louis XIV*, 2. vol. (London, 1780,

them all in their proper place. It is often the case that in all genres the worst works can be prodigiously successful. Solecisms, barbarisms, sentiments of the falsest kind, the most ridiculous pompous statements pass unnoticed for a time, because the cabal and the foolish enthusiasm of the ignorant bring about a senseless intoxication. In the end, only the connoisseurs can win over the public, and that is the only difference that exists between the most enlightened and most ignorant nations, because the common people of Paris are no better than the common folk elsewhere; but in Paris there are enough cultivated minds to lead the crowd. That crowd can find its way almost immediately in popular movements; but it takes a number of years to establish taste in the arts.

<https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=PKBJAAAAMAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false>), vol. 1, p. clxxvii.

^{TN27} Translation: 'thinking himself not sufficiently recompensed by the Cardinal' Trans. R. Griffith, *The Age of Louis XIV*, vol. 2, p. clxxix.

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