INELOCUTIO: SHAKESPEARE & THE RHETORIC OF THE PASSIONS

Keir Elam University of Pisa

I'd like to begin with a potentially explosive, if, in the end, somewhat anticlimactic historical anecdote. In 1605, in the wake of the Gunpowder Plot, twelve Privy Councillors signed a warrant permitting a visitor to interview their prize prisoner Guy Fawkes in the Tower. What is perhaps surprising about this concession is that Fawkes's privileged visitor was a fellow Catholic, the ex-Jesuit and prolific polemicist Thomas Wright. Naturally, the warrant was not a disinterested act of ecumenical magnanimity but a strategic political move, motivated by the hope that Wright might succeed, where others had failed, in persuading Fawkes to confess all he knew of the Plot, prior to his (in any case inevitable) trip to the gallows. The choice of interlocutor was decidedly canny. Wright's qualifications as potential persuader were not limited to his religious creed, which made him acceptable to Fawkes, nor to his Jesuit training in logic, rhetoric and what Protestants like Shakespeare termed "equivocation", which was obviously not unique to him. Wright's claim to supposed persuasive prowess was his recent fame as theorist and practitioner of the difficult art of discovering and moving the human passions.

Wright wrote his renowned treatise, *The Passions of the Mind*, in the late 1590's, during his own long spell of imprisonment, as a victim of religious persecution, care of the Gatehouse and Bridewell. The text was first published in 1601 and again, in a much enlarged edition, in 1604, just a year before the Plot. This second edition in particular has a double purpose: it offers, on the one hand, a formidable guide to the signs and symptoms of the affections or perturbations, thus attempting what one might not unfairly term a semiotics of the passions, and gives practical advice, on the other hand, to the oratorical manipulation of emotions, thereby constituting what we might call a rhetoric of the passions. In this second, rhetorical guise, the treatise makes strong claims indeed for the pathetic powers of language over the strategically worked listener, powers which derive, however, from the speaker's semiological and psychological knowledge of passional behaviour: the appropriately trained orator, says the author, "perfectly understanding the natures and proprieties of

men's passions, questionless may effectuate strange matters in the minds of his Auditors". Wright goes on to narrate a spectacular public instance of such all-conquering discursive pathos: "I remember a Preacher in Italy who had such power over his Auditors' affections that when it pleased him he could cause them to shed an abundance of tears, yea, and with tears dropping down their cheeks presently turn their sorrow into laughter; and the reason was because he himself being extremely passionate, (he knew) moreover the Art of moving the affections of those Auditors." (Ibid.).

It is easy to see why the Privy Council should have turned to one who professed such scientific knowledge of, and such rhetorical control over hidden psychic forces, one who possessed the secret of unlimited access to the mind and its effects. Wright's task, evidently, was to cause Guy Fawkes, like the Italian audience, to "shed an abundance of tears" of remorse, opening his heart as a means to opening his mouth. Unhappily for the Council and for him, however, Wright's oratorical mission appears to have been as unsuccessful as the Gunpowder Plot itself, and to have ended not with a bang but a debacle. Fawkes, our school textbooks tell us, was indeed brought to confess, but through other and less verbal means of persuasion. While Wright himself, some time later, under renewed persecution, was forced into exile. If there is pathos in the episode, it is not of the kind that Wright probably anticipated.

This rather melancholy story illustrates two significant points concerning the state of the art of persuasion at the beginning of the seventeenth century. First, the traditional boundaries of rhetoric have been considerably expanded under the influence of a new interest in the individual and collective psyche, so that the first prerequisite to mastery of the arts of discourse has become -in theory if not always in practice- the psycho-semiological understanding of human disposition and behaviour. And second, its association with passion theory gives the art of discursive persuasion a renewed and potentially sinister *kudos* in the real of political strategy. A famous contemporary of Wright's, the French essayist Pierre Charron, recommends in his *De la Sagesse*, published in the same year as the first edition of *The Passions* (1601), the pathetic force of discourse as source of absolute power.

If we consider (speech) with regard to the Persons to whom it is directed, thus it is a powerful and an imperious Master:

enters the Castle, seizes the Governour; it moves and stirs him, it animates and encourages, it provokes and appeases, it raises and dejects him; it overwhelms him with Grief, and transports him with Joy; makes what Impressions, inspires what Passions it pleases; manages and remoulds the Soul into any form, and bends it all manner of ways: Nay, it extends its Dominion over the body too; makes that the Red with Blushes, and Pale with Fear; provokes Laughter and Tears; forces it to start and shiver; to tremble with Anger, leap for joy, swoon and faint with Violence of Passion [...]. In short, the *Tongue* is a Tool converted to all manner of Uses; and instrument of the Good and Evil [...]".²

The violent military metaphors of invasion and conquest here are not casual. Charron, an active participant in the Catholic League, was aware of the political implications of the oratorical manipulation of the passions, and the ideological force of the Sagesse is that of an unambiguous apology for absolutism, looking forward to the *Raison d'Etat*".³

Thomas Wright also juxtaposes an ideological with a cognitive aim in his treatise. If the study of our motivating passions and their modes of behavioral manifestation leads to individual self-knowledge "[Nosce teipsum] 'know thyself'; the which knowledge principally consisteth of a perfect experience every man hath of himself in particular, and an universal knowledge of men's inclinations in common" (Thomas Wright, *The Passions*, pp. 92-3), the translation of such knowledge into oratorical action leads to the political seduction of collectivities:

whosoever would persuade a multitude, [...] if once they can stir a Passion or Affection in their Hearers, then they have almost half persuaded them for that the forces of strong Passions marvellously allure and draw the wit and will to judge and consent unto that they are moved (Wright, *The Passions*, p. 90).

And if Wright exhorts his readers to exercise such mind control in the interests of "the Church and the Common weal", he admits to its dangerous potential for

less salutary forms of influence: "Rhetoric in an ill cause is a two-edged sword in the hand of a furious man" (Ibid., p. 162).

The theory of the passions at the turn of the century identifies two species of object and two species of danger, deriving from two distinct but related concepts of pathos. Pathos is first a psychosomatic phenomenon, the suffering and expression of affections or perturbations on the part of the individual. And it is second, an oratorical phenomenon, the arousing of emotions in the listener through skilful persuasion. Analytical and applied passion psychology of the kind professed by Wright takes the first, psychosomatic, species of pathos as its object of study, and the second, oratorical species as its practical goal.

The problem, or the danger, in all this, is that pathos is studyable and arousable but scarcely controllable, so that the semiotics of the passions and still more the rhetoric of the passions, constitute an ambiguous rationalizing of the irrational, an imposition on pathos of a scientific but also manipulative logos. Which is tantamount to toying with hidden but potentially all-engulfing fire. Wright warns, in a literally colourful optical simile, that an insufficiently controlled passion is like a pair of green spectacles which colour all our perception and judgment, and "hindereth and stoppeth the eyes of the understanding" (Ibid., p. 127). While Charron, in a characteristic military hyperbole, talks of the passions as a "Regiment of Mutineers, which disturb the Content, and break the Peace of our Souls", and as being "of very dangerous consequence", "outrageous and mischievous". (Pierre Charron, *Of Wisdom*, 1604, I, 208).

One is led to wonder how a professedly peace-fostering divine such as Wright can justify a rhetoric that aims explicitly to unleash such perils to public and private order. Aware of the ambiguity of his position, Wright simply affirms his Christian faith in the powers of the logos over pathos, of reason over passion, and claims, indeed, that a duly tamed passion can be a precious ally to reasons: "Passions well used may consist with wisdom -against the Stoics- and if they be moderated, to be very serviceable to virtue" (Wight, *The Passions*, p. 102). It is the individual's Christian duty to know and control his own passions through intelligent introspection, and to awake and control those of others through the good offices of rhetoric. Wright's optimistic rationalism turns out, therefore, to be on the other side of the ideological divide from

Charron's more sceptical absolutism, according to which only the intervention of a strong central political force can keep the passionate populace in order.

"You shall offend him and extend his passion (3. 4. 56); "This noble passion, child of integrity" (4. 3. 114-5). These are the two explicit references to the passions found in a play probably written soon after the Gunpowder Plot, and thus soon after Wright's and Charron's texts, namely Shakespeare's Macbeth,⁴ and they appear to express the opposing ideologies of pathos subscribed to bey the English and French passionologists respectively. The first reference, by Lady Macbeth ("You shall offend him and extend his passion"), is to her husband's dangerous and increasingly violent state of anger, suspicion and fear, by way of a warning to his dinner guest not to aggravate this state any further. The second reference, by Malcolm, (This noble passion, child of integrity") is to Macduff's outburst of righteous indignation, provoked or manipulated by Malcolm's own feigned villainy. Here, then, is passion first as uncontrollable peril, which will lead Macbeth and Scotland to a state of private and public disorder, and second as ally to reason and virtue, leading Malcolm and Macduff to restore peace and order to the perturbed body politic of Scotland.

The relationship between Shakespeare's tragedy and Wright's treatise is of course indirect, by way, as it were, of the Gunpowder plot. *Macbeth*, with its allusions to Jesuitical equivocators, with its apparent apology for the strong Christian (and specifically Scottish) ruler, and its equally apparent dramatization of the dangers of usurpation under the pressure of passion, is full, as is well known, of traces of the politically and ideologically explosive moment of its composition in James's London, just as Wright's Christian rhetoric of the passions is in part a moderate and mediating Catholic response to the same moment. Wright's involvement in that moment was pragmatic, Shakespeare's symbolic. Their texts share the same central topics: both reflect an intense interest in the relations between passion and reason, in the modes of manifestation of passion, in the expressive and persuasive powers of language, and in the ethics of personal and political rule. Both texts, in a word, explore the confines between logos, pathos and ethos.

Nor is it altogether surprising or inappropriate that a text for the stage should have such affinities with Wright's discourse on the passions. Wright himself, in keeping with an ancient rhetorical tradition, draws an analogy between the mastery of the passions in oratory and in the theatre. The affinity between drama and oratory is not simply that they are two modes of verbal and corporeal performance ("In the substance of external action for the most part oratours and stage plaiers agree"), but that the drama, like Wright's Christian rhetoric, is itself dedicated to the representation and achievement of pathos, as Sidney teaches us ("For, as Aristotle saith, it is not gnosis but praxis must be the fruit. And how praxis cannot be, without being moved to practice, it is no hard matter to consider")⁵. What most effectively moves the listener to pathos, and from pathos to praxis, is, says Sidney, the represented praxis and pathos of dramatic poetry, with its seductive discourse and its persuasive narrative action. And of all modes of represented pathos and praxis, the most persuasive is "high and excellent tragedy, that openeth the greatest wounds [...] that maketh kings fear to be tyrants, and tyrants manifest their tyrannical humours". (Sidney, An Apology, p. 117).

If the aim of the rhetoric of the passions and the rhetoric of the drama is to achieve pathos, in both cases the means to this end is ethos, the representation of an oratorical or dramatic self in action or in movement. Like the actor, the able orator acts out the movements of the passions, with the aim of arousing analogous passions in the mind or soul of the auditor.

And in the substance of external action [says Wright] for most part orators and stage-players agree; and only they differ in this, that these act feignedly, those really [...] to stir up all sorts of passions according to the exigency of the matter (Ibid., p. 215).

The most suggestive ethical/pathetical relationship between passion theory and drama, however, has to do with the specific figural means to the simulation and arousing of the passions. Wright, like other rhetoricians and the passionologists, asserts that the immediate point of contact between the oratorical and dramatic arts lies the fifth and final rhetorical phase, namely the actio or pronuntiatio, or delivery.

Action (actio) then universally is a natural or artificial moderation, qualification, modification, or composition of the voice, countenance, and gesture of body, proceeding from some passion and apt to stir up the like. [...] and this the best may be marked in stage-players who act excellently, for as the perfection of their exercise consisteth in imitation of others, so they that imitate best act best. (Wright, *The Passions*, p. 214).

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In itself this seems merely to make the obvious point that both oratory and stage acting are kinds of verbal-corporeal performances. But on further reflection the emphasis on actio is less banal than it may appear. Wright's suggestion is that the performance of a convincing ethos or role, be it dramatic or rhetorical, in the sense of a moving and persuasive representation of the passions, is less a matter of eloquent style or elocutio, and still less of propositional content (inventio) and its argumentational ordering (dispositio), than it is of the interaction between language and body in the very production of discourse, the act of literally giving body to discourse through the corporeal orchestration of the discursive performance. The first means to moving, he says in a pathetic (in both senses) pun is moving, gesturally ("Thus we move because by the passions we are moved": Wright, The Passions, p. 214); it is in the first instance the kinesic and paralinguistic choreography of speech that persuades, "an eloquence of the body" (Ibid., p. 213) together with the vocal and intonational modulation of the utterance:

a flexible and pliable voice, accommodated in manner correspondent to the matter whereof a person entreateth, conveyeth the passion most aptly, pathetically, and almost harmonically, and every accent, exclamation, admiration, increpation, indignation [...] is [...] a flash of fire to incense a passion". (Ibid., p. 213).

One is reminded of Thomas Heywood's recommendation of rhetoric as a means to actorial control of speech production and above syntax and punctuation, "it [...] instructs [the actor] to speake well, [...] to observe his comma's colons, & full poynts, his parentheses, his breathing spaces, and distinctions".

This, it seems to me, is the single most significant tenet of the rhetoric of the passions. The affective expressivity of discourse, and thus its pathetic power over the listener, is not primarily a question of semantic content or social function, but of the mode of its production, orientation and embodiment. This is the real sense of rhetorical simulation, namely that the performer acts out, kinetically, phonetically, syntactically, and punctuationally, the movement of the passions.

What this means, in strictly rhetorical terms, is that the most effective figures in the expression of the passions are not semantic figures, the tropes,

nor the so-called figures of thought, but, on the one hand, those figures of orientation and appeal intimately related to the movements of the body, and that allow the speaker to simulate dialogue and direct address, and, on the other, those material, phonetic, syntactic punctuational figures classed generically as the schemes.

All of the verbal-corporeal schemes of address and appeal are defined by passionologists and rhetorical legislators alike in terms of their ethical and pathetical power. Under the general figural rubric of excusitatio ("When the speaker being much moved with some vehement affection in himself doth show it by the utterance of his speech and thereby moveth the minds of his hearers")⁷, the most potent schemes of kinesic and deictic orientation are apostrophe ("A turning of your speech to some new person [...] that yourself gives show of life to"⁸ and interrogatio ("when we ask not with intent or desire to receive an answer but because we would thereby make our speech more sharp and vehement" (Henry Peacham, The Garden, p. 105).

As for the syntactic and punctuational schemes, only a limited number of figures are credited with particular affective efficacy. They do not include the more artificial "auricular" schemes such as anaphora, chiasmus, etc., which betoken calculated textual patterning, and so suggest the deliberate and reasoned shaping of discourse (logos), but, on the contrary, the least elegant and eloquent species of figure, those which evoke a tenuous and faltering control over the articulation of discourse. Thus figures of omission such ellipsis ("When in an extreme indication of emotion words fail us, thus giving expression to admiration, love, hate, anger"),9 zeugma, asyndeton, dectractio; figures of self-interruption, such as paraposiopesis ("When we interrupt the oration, usually with an apostrophe or exclamation of emotion": Scaliger, Poetices Libri, III, lxxvii) aposiopesis ("The orator through some affection, as either of fear, anger, sorrow, bashfulness [...] breaketh of his speech before it be all ended": Peacham, The Garden, p. 118), parenthesis; or on the contrary figures of heavy iteration, where this is not interpretable as premeditated patterning but rather as emphatic emotional redundancy (such as epizeuxis, whereby "A word is repeated, for the greater vehemency, and nothing put between": Ibid., p. 47), and ploche "A figure which repeateth a word putting but one word in between [...] may be used to express any affection, but it is most fit for a sharp invective or exprobation": (Ibid., p. 48). The rhetorical repetition compulsion,

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together with its kinesic and paralinguistic coordinates, is, according to Wright, particularly characteristic of the irascible perturbations such as anger:

Hatred and ire exact a vehement voice and much gesture, a pronunciation sharp, often falling with pathetical repetitions, iterated interrogations proving, confirming, and urging reasons. (Thomas Wright, *The Passions*, p. 216).

What is striking about these figures is that they have nothing to do with eloquence, and thus with elocutio, in the traditional sense of perfect oratorical command over the semantic and syntactic articulation of one's discourse. On the contrary, they enact a mise-en-scene of inarticulateness, made up of hesitations, digressions, omissions, self-interruptions, and the general fragmentation of the body of discourse accompanied by the frenzied dis-/and re-orientation of the body tout court. What all of this seems to amount to is a rhetorical doctrine of what we might term inelocutio, whereby the ethical, and thus the pathetical, power of discourse grows with the apparent degree of syntactic and articulatory effort expended by the speaker. Shakespeare explores this notion, doctrinally though not in direct discursive practice, in comedies such as Midsummer Night's Dream and Love's Labour's Lost. In Love's Labour's Lost the semiotically puritanical Princess of France praises the rhetorical ineloquence or inarticulateness of the Worthies and their pageant not only as a sign of their real emotional involvement but also, in consequence, as a source of pleasurable persuasion:

That sport best pleases that doth least know how, Where zeal strives to content, and the contents Dies in the zeal of that which it presents.

It might be noted that the Princess's own highly artificial chiastic pun directly relates the passionate commitment behind the Worthies' performance to its lack of semantic clarity: "zeal strives to content, and the contents/ Dies in the zeal". As much as to say, it is the incompleteness and opacity of the content that moves or contents.

In A Midsummer Night's Dream, Theseus, referring to the similarly ingenuous performance by the mechanicals, elaborates a fuller version of the

same doctrine of the persuasiveness of awkward but (apparently) sincere reticence

Where I have come, great clerks have purposed To greet me with premeditated welcomes; Where I have seen them shiver and look pale, Make periods in the midst of sentences, Throttle their practis'd accents in their fears, And, in conclusion, dumbly have broke off, Not paying me a welcome. Trust me, sweet, Out of this silence yet I pick'd a welcome, And in the modesty of fearful duty I read as much as from the rattling tongue Of saucy and audacious eloquence (5. 1. 93-103).

The Princess of France's phrase "best pleases that doth least know how" might be taken as a motto or slogan for the apparently paradoxical poetics implied in the doctrine of the pathetic ethos. Because what is at stake is not, of course, that genuinely ingenuous inarticulacy praised by Shakespeare's royal fans of sincerity -who, as spectators, betray their own doctrine by behaving badly and laughing at the simple shows offered them.

What the notion of expressive ethos involves is, rather, what one might call the competence of incompetence. That is to say, the kinds of awkward effects best designed to portray affects are themselves part of, perhaps, the highest and most sophisticated part of, the rhetorical repertory. It is one of the more surprising features, but undoubtedly one of the greatest resources, of the figural repertoire, that at a certain point, namely where it already borders on delivery or performance, the whole system of *elocutio* suddenly implodes or self-destructs in advocating modes of discursive disintegration, fragmentation, hesitation, reticence, compression and opacity. The simulacrum, or *simulation* of the struggling speaker about to lose control of his own discourse, and perhaps of his thought processes, under the pressure of passion, is perhaps the highest achievement to which the rhetoric of pathos through ethos can aspire,

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since there is nothing so delicate and so difficult to get away with as an artfully constructed artlessness.

Where Shakespeare begins to work out an actual practice or poetics of eloquent ineloquence is, I believe, precisely in *Macbeth*, a tragedy which abundantly explores the relationship between public and private ethos, and which experiments an extraordinary and in many ways revolutionary expressionistic (or perhaps mannerist) rhetoric of the passions. Particularly emblematic, in this sense, is the scene of the discovery of Duncan's death, in which the Macbeths have to give a public performance of affliction. There is a marked difference between the modes of simulation/dissimulation adopted by Macbeth and his wife respectively. Lady Macbeth, at Macduff's announcement of the non-news regarding the King's murder, produces what appears to be an almost comically inappropriate and inadequate response, brief, elliptical and oblique, making no reference to the event or to her emotional state and expressing only proprietorial concern over the venue:

Macduff:

O Banquo, Banquo,
Our royal master's murdered!
Lady Macbeth:

Woe, alas What, in our house?

(2.3.85-87).

which explicates and hyperbolizes his horror:

Macbeth:

Had I but died an hour before this chance I had lived a blessed time, for from this instant There's serious in mortality (etc).

Which of the two simulations is the better-judged and the more convincing in context can be gauged by the other, less suspect responses to the news notably Malcolm's, which is of the awkward, elliptical, near-mute Lady Macbeth variety:

Macduff:

Your royal father's murdered.

Malcolm:

0, by whom?

In the event, it is Macbeth's elocutio, his syntactic and semantic and command of his own discourse, which appears out of place, and which indeed arouses suspicion. His public ethos, moreover, is in direct contrast with those private monological performances in which pathos, the movement or perturbation of fear, remorse, disgust, erodes logos, the propositional and syntactic order of speech. The extraordinary concentration, in Macbeth's monologues, of ellipses, zeugmas, and other grammatical lacunae, together with their opposite, the rhetorical repetition compulsion, result in a discursive density or opacity that has no equal in earlier plays:

If it were done, when 'tis done, then 'twere well, It were done quickly: If th' assassination Could trammel up the consequence, and catch With his surcease success [...] (1. 7. 1ff.).

The extension of the *inelocutio* principle into a full expressionistic, manneristic poetics of the passions takes place in the years following *Macbeth*, particularly in the late romances. This development is announced in *Pericles*, whose protagonist, reflecting on his own perturbations, makes what is presumably a knowing reference to Thomas Wright's tract:

Pericles:

the passions of the mind,
That have their first conception by misdread,
Have after-nourishment and life by care [...] (1. 2. 11ff).

The purest instance of the patho-logical, of pathos triumphing over logos in the production of expressive ineloquence, is undoubtedly the language of Leontes in *The Winter's Tale*, that veritable case history of what Wright would have termed irascible perturbation. If Leontes's actions and movements correspond

to the fixated repetitiveness prescribed by Charron ("[jealousy] makes us busy and inquisitive to out own Ruin; desirous and impatient to know ... [the jealous man] hunts after every word he hears every whisper ... he pries into every corner, follows close, observes to a hair" (Charron, *Of Wisdom*, I, p. 217), his discourse is a feast of false starts and non sequiturs, self-interruptions and self-interrogations, manic iterations (Wright's "pathetical repetitions, iterated interrogations"), ellipses, zeugmas, unfinished propositions, and violent apostrophic and bodily reorientations, as in his oscillations between self and absent son as addressee of his lexically thick and syntactically truncated first irascible outburst:

Leontes:

Gone already.

Inch-thick, knee-deep, o'er head and ears a forked one!-

Go play, boy, play. Thy mother plays, and I Play too; but so disgraced a part, whose issue Will hiss me to my grave. Contempt and clamour Will be my knell. Go play, boy, play. (1. 2. 186ff);

or his fixated self-questioning under the pressure of suspicion:

Leontes:

Is whispering nothing?
Is leaning cheek to cheek? Is meeting noses?
Kissing with inside lip? Stopping the career
Of laughter with a sigh? -a note infallible
Of breaking honesty. (1. 2. 285ff).

or the final disintegration of the subject-predicate order of his discourse in a frenzy of negation and incomplete affirmation:

Leontes:

Nor night nor day, no rest! It is but weakness To bear the mater thus, mere weakness. If The cause were not in being -part o'th'cause,

She, th'adultress [...]. (2. 3. 1ff).

An eloquently persuasive conclusion is doubtless called for at this point, but to remain faithful to my topic, and so as not to test your patience any further, I will myself try out a bit of inelocutio, namely a rapid ellipsis. So here it is: (...).

NOTES

- 1.- Thomas Wright, The Passions of the Mind in General. ed. William Webster Newbold, New York and London, Garland, 1986, p. 90.
 - 2.- Pierre Charron, Of Wisdom, vol. I, pp. 117-8.
 - 3.- Heléne-Hedy Ehrlich, Montaigne: La Critique et la Langage. Paris, 1972, pp. 24-5)
- 4.- All quotations from, and references to, Shakespeare are relative to the Complete Works, general editors Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor, London, Oxford University Press, 1986.
- 5.- Philip Sidney, An Apology for Poetry (1595), ed. Geoffrey Shepherd, London, Nelson, 1965, p. 112.
- 6.- Thomas heywood, An Apology for Actors (1612), in G. E. Bentley, ed., The Seventeenth-Century Stage, Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1968, pp. 13-4.
 - 7.- Henry Peacham, The Garden of Eloquence, p. 177.
 - 8.- John Hoskins, Direction for Speech and Style p. 48.
- 9.- Julius Caesar Scaliger, Poetices Libri Septem, Heidelberg, 1581, IV, xxvii; quoted in Lee A. Sonnino, A Handbook to Sixteenth-Century Rhetoric, London, Routledge, 1968.