

Horace

(Quintus Horatius Flaccus,
65-8 B.C.)

ARS POETICA 128-144
(c.19-17 B.C.)

'Tis hard, to speake things common properly:
And thou maist better bring a *Rhapsody*
Of *Homers*, forth in acts, then of thine owne,
First publish things unspoken, and unknowne.
Yet common matter thou thine owne maist make,
If thou the vile, broad-troden ring forsake.
For, being a Poët, thou maist feigne, create,
Not care, as thou wouldst faithfully translate,
To render word for word: nor with thy sleight
Of imitation, leape into a streight,
From whence thy Modestie, or Poëmes law
Forbids thee forth againe thy foot to draw.
Nor so begin, as did that circler late,
I sing a noble Warre, and Priam's Fate.
What doth this Promiser such gaping worth
Afford? The Mountaines travail'd, and brought forth
A scorned Mouse! O, how much better this,
Who mought assaies unaptly, or amisse?
Speake to me, Muse, the Man, who, after Troy was sack't
Saw many Townes, and Men, and could their manners tract.
Hee thinkes not, how to give you smoake from light,
But light from smoake; that he may draw his bright
Wonders forth after :

(Transl. by Ben Jonson, 1573?-1637; published 1640)
