

Emily Dickinson

Tell all the truth but tell it slant — (1263)

Tell all the truth but tell it slant —  
Success in Circuit lies  
Too bright for our infirm Delight  
The Truth's superb surprise  
As Lightning to the Children eased  
With explanation kind  
The Truth must dazzle gradually  
Or every man be blind —

Plato

Excerpt from *The Republic* (c. 375 BC)

**Book III (Excerpts: 392c-394d)**

SOCRATES: Our discussion of the content of stories is complete, then. Our next task, I take it, is to investigate their style. And then we will have completely investigated both what they should say and how they should say it.

ADEIMANTUS: I don't understand what you mean.

SOCRATES: Well, we must see that you do. Maybe this will help you to grasp it better: isn't everything said by poets and storytellers a narration of past, present, or future events?

ADEIMANTUS: Of course.

SOCRATES: And don't they proceed by narration alone, narration through imitation, or both?

ADEIMANTUS: I need a still clearer understanding of that, too.

SOCRATES: What a ridiculously unclear teacher I seem to be! So, I will do what incompetent speakers do: I won't try to deal with the subject as a whole. Instead, I will take up a particular example and use that to explain what I mean. Tell me, do you know the beginning of the *Iliad* where the poet tells us that Chryses begged Agamemnon to release his daughter, that Agamemnon got angry, and that Chryses, having failed to get what he wanted, prayed to his god<sup>37</sup> to punish the Achaeans?

ADEIMANTUS: I do.

SOCRATES: You know, then, that up to the lines, "He begged all the Achaeans, but especially the commanders of the army, the two sons of Atreus," the poet himself is speaking and is not trying to make us think that the speaker is anyone but himself. After that, however, he speaks as if he himself were Chryses, and tries as hard as he can to make us think that the speaker is not Homer, but the priest himself, who is an old man. And all the rest of his narration of the events in Ilium and Ithaca, and all of the *Odyssey*, are written in pretty much the same way.

ADEIMANTUS: Yes, they are.

SOCRATES: Now, each of the speeches, as well as the material between them, is narration, isn't it?

ADEIMANTUS: Of course.

SOCRATES: But when he makes a speech as if he were someone else, won't we say that he makes his own style as much like that of the person he tells us is about to speak?

ADEIMANTUS: We certainly will.

SOCRATES: Now, to make oneself like someone else in voice or appearance is to imitate the person one makes oneself like, isn't it?

ADEIMANTUS: Of course.

SOCRATES: Then in a passage of that sort, it seems, he, and the rest of poets as well, produce their narration through imitation.

ADEIMANTUS: Yes, indeed.

SOCRATES: But if the poet never disguised himself, his entire poem would be narration without imitation. To prevent you from saying that you still do not understand, I will tell you what that would be like. If Homer said that Chryses came with a ransom for his daughter to supplicate the Achaeans, especially the kings, and if after that Homer had gone on speaking, not as if he had become Chryses, but still as Homer, you know that it would not be imitation but narration pure and simple. It would have gone something like this—I will speak without meter since I am not a poet: the priest came and prayed that the gods would grant it to the Achaeans to capture Troy and have a safe return home, and he entreated them to accept the ransom and free his daughter, out of reverence for the god. When he had said this, the others approved of it and consented. But Agamemnon was angry and ordered him to leave and never return, or else his priestly wand and the wreaths of the god would not protect him. He said that the priest's daughter would grow old in Argos by his side sooner than be freed. He ordered Chryses to leave and not make him angry if he wanted to get home safely. When the old man heard this, he was frightened and went off in silence. And once he had left the camp, he prayed at length to Apollo, invoking the cult names of the god, reminding him of his past gifts, and asking to be repaid for any that had found favor with him, whether they were temples he had built or victims he had sacrificed. He prayed that, in return for these things, the arrows of the god would make the Achaeans pay for his tears. That, comrade, is how we get pure narration without any imitation.

ADEIMANTUS: I understand.

SOCRATES: Also understand, then, that the opposite occurs when one omits the words between the speeches and leaves the speeches on their own.

ADEIMANTUS: I understand that, too; it is what happens in tragedies, for example.

SOCRATES: You have got it absolutely right. And now I think I can make clear to you what I could not before. One sort of poetry and storytelling employs only imitation—tragedy, as you said, and comedy. Another sort, which you find primarily in dithyrambs, employs only narration by the poet himself. A third sort, which uses both, is what we find in epic poetry and many other places. Do you follow me?

ADEIMANTUS: Yes, now I understand what you meant.

SOCRATES: And before that, as you remember, we said that we had already dealt with content, but that we had yet to investigate style.

ADEIMANTUS: Yes, I remember.

SOCRATES: What I meant, then, was just this: we need to come to an agreement about whether to allow our poets to narrate as imitators, or as imitators of some things, but not others—and what sorts of things these are; or not to allow them to imitate at all.

ADEIMANTUS: I imagine that you are considering whether we will admit tragedy and comedy into our city or not.

SOCRATES: Perhaps so, but it may be an even wider question than that. I really do not know yet. But wherever the wind of argument blows us, so to speak, that is where we must go.

# Aristotle

## Excerpt from *Poetics* (c. 335 BC)

### Chapter 9 (excerpt)

It is, moreover, evident from what has been said, that it is not the function of the poet to relate what has happened, but what may happen- what is possible according to the law of probability or necessity. The poet and the historian differ not by writing in verse or in prose. The work of Herodotus might be put into verse, and it would still be a species of history, with meter no less than without it. The true difference is that one relates what has happened, the other what may happen. Poetry, therefore, is a more philosophical and a higher thing than history: for poetry tends to express the universal, history the particular. By the universal I mean how a person of a certain type on occasion speak or act, according to the law of probability or necessity; and it is this universality at which poetry aims in the names she attaches to the personages. The particular is- for example- what Alcibiades did or suffered. In Comedy this is already apparent: for here the poet first constructs the plot on the lines of probability, and then inserts characteristic names- unlike the lampooners who write about particular individuals. But tragedians still keep to real names, the reason being that what is possible is credible: what has not happened we do not at once feel sure to be possible; but what has happened is manifestly possible: otherwise it would not have happened. Still there are even some tragedies in which there are only one or two well-known names, the rest being fictitious. In others, none are well known- as in Agathon's *Antheus*, where incidents and names alike are fictitious, and yet they give none the less pleasure. We must not, therefore, at all costs keep to the received legends, which are the usual subjects of Tragedy. Indeed, it would be absurd to attempt it; for even subjects that are known are known only to a few, and yet give pleasure to all. It clearly follows that the poet or 'maker' should be the maker of plots rather than of verses; since he is a poet because he imitates, and what he imitates are actions. And even if he chances to take a historical subject, he is none the less a poet; for there is no reason why some events that have actually happened should not conform to the law of the probable and possible, and in virtue of that quality in them he is their poet or maker.

Plutarch

Excerpt from *Life of Antony* (Early 2<sup>nd</sup> Century AD)

So when all was proceeded with, according to their plan, and Cæsar had fallen in the senate-house, Antony, at the first moment, took a servant's dress, and hid himself. But, understanding that the conspirators had assembled in the Capitol, and had no further design upon any one, he persuaded them to come down, giving them his son as a hostage...

As Cæsar's body was conveying to the tomb, Antony, according to the custom, was making his funeral oration in the market-place, and, perceiving the people to be infinitely affected with what he had said, he began to mingle with his praises language of commiseration, and horror at what had happened, and, as he was ending his speech, he took the under-clothes of the dead, and held them up, shewing them stains of blood and the holes of the many stabs, calling those that had done this act villains and bloody murderers. All which excited the people to such indignation, that they would not defer the funeral, but, making a pile of tables and forms in the very market-place, set fire to it; and every one, taking a brand, ran to the conspirators' houses, to attack them.

# William Shakespeare

## Excerpt from *Julius Caesar* (1599)

*You are encouraged to watch Marlon Brando's performance of Marc Antony's forum speech in the 1953 film adaptation of Julius Caesar in addition to reading the text below. Visit <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=101sKbH-IMQ> to watch.*

### **ANTONY**

Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears;  
I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him.  
The evil that men do lives after them;  
The good is oft interred with their bones;  
So let it be with Caesar. The noble Brutus  
Hath told you Caesar was ambitious:  
If it were so, it was a grievous fault,  
And grievously hath Caesar answer'd it.  
Here, under leave of Brutus and the rest--  
For Brutus is an honourable man;  
So are they all, all honourable men--  
Come I to speak in Caesar's funeral.  
He was my friend, faithful and just to me:  
But Brutus says he was ambitious;  
And Brutus is an honourable man.  
He hath brought many captives home to Rome  
Whose ransoms did the general coffers fill:  
Did this in Caesar seem ambitious?  
When that the poor have cried, Caesar hath wept:  
Ambition should be made of sterner stuff:  
Yet Brutus says he was ambitious;  
And Brutus is an honourable man.  
You all did see that on the Lupercal  
I thrice presented him a kingly crown,  
Which he did thrice refuse: was this ambition?  
Yet Brutus says he was ambitious;  
And, sure, he is an honourable man.  
I speak not to disprove what Brutus spoke,  
But here I am to speak what I do know.  
You all did love him once, not without cause:  
What cause withholds you then, to mourn for him?  
O judgment! thou art fled to brutish beasts,  
And men have lost their reason. Bear with me;  
My heart is in the coffin there with Caesar,  
And I must pause till it come back to me.

### **First Citizen**

Methinks there is much reason in his sayings.

### **Second Citizen**

If thou consider rightly of the matter,  
Caesar has had great wrong.

**Third Citizen**

Has he, masters?  
I fear there will a worse come in his place.

**Fourth Citizen**

Mark'd ye his words? He would not take the crown;  
Therefore 'tis certain he was not ambitious.

**First Citizen**

If it be found so, some will dear abide it.

**Second Citizen**

Poor soul! his eyes are red as fire with weeping.

**Third Citizen**

There's not a nobler man in Rome than Antony.

**Fourth Citizen**

Now mark him, he begins again to speak.

**ANTONY**

But yesterday the word of Caesar might  
Have stood against the world; now lies he there.  
And none so poor to do him reverence.  
O masters, if I were disposed to stir  
Your hearts and minds to mutiny and rage,  
I should do Brutus wrong, and Cassius wrong,  
Who, you all know, are honourable men:  
I will not do them wrong; I rather choose  
To wrong the dead, to wrong myself and you,  
Than I will wrong such honourable men.  
But here's a parchment with the seal of Caesar;  
I found it in his closet, 'tis his will:  
Let but the commons hear this testament--  
Which, pardon me, I do not mean to read--  
And they would go and kiss dead Caesar's wounds  
And dip their napkins in his sacred blood,  
Yea, beg a hair of him for memory,  
And, dying, mention it within their wills,  
Bequeathing it as a rich legacy  
Unto their issue.

**Fourth Citizen**

We'll hear the will: read it, Mark Antony.



**All**

The will, the will! we will hear Caesar's will.

**ANTONY**

Have patience, gentle friends, I must not read it;  
It is not meet you know how Caesar loved you.  
You are not wood, you are not stones, but men;  
And, being men, bearing the will of Caesar,  
It will inflame you, it will make you mad:  
'Tis good you know not that you are his heirs;  
For, if you should, O, what would come of it!

**Fourth Citizen**

Read the will; we'll hear it, Antony;  
You shall read us the will, Caesar's will.

**ANTONY**

Will you be patient? will you stay awhile?  
I have o'ershot myself to tell you of it:  
I fear I wrong the honourable men  
Whose daggers have stabb'd Caesar; I do fear it.

**Fourth Citizen**

They were traitors: honourable men!

**All**

The will! the testament!

**Second Citizen**

They were villains, murderers: the will! read the will.

**ANTONY**

You will compel me, then, to read the will?  
Then make a ring about the corpse of Caesar,  
And let me show you him that made the will.  
Shall I descend? and will you give me leave?

**Several Citizens**

Come down.

**Second Citizen**

Descend.

**Third Citizen**

You shall have leave.

*ANTONY comes down*

# Edward Hall

## Excerpts from *Hall's Chronicle* (1548)

### Evil May Day Riots of 1517

In this season, the Genoese, Frenchmen, and other strangers said and boasted themselves to be in such favor with the king and his council that they set naught by the rulers of the city. And the multitude of strangers was so great about London that the poor English artisans could scarce get any living. And most of all the strangers were so proud, that they disdained, mocked, and oppressed the Englishmen, which was the beginning of the grudge.

[...]

When Easter came and Dr. Beale should preach the Tuesday in Easter week, he came into the pulpit, and there declared that to him was brought a pitiful bill, and read it in this wise:

...As birds would defend their nest, so ought Englishmen to cherish and defend themselves, and to hurt and grieve the aliens for the common weal. And upon this text *pugna pro patria*, he brought in how by God's law it was lawful to fight for their country, and ever so subtly he moved the people to rebel against the strangers, and break the king's peace, nothing regarding the league between princes and the king's honor.

Of this sermon many a light person took courage, and openly spoke against strangers. [...]

Then all the young men resisted the Alderman and took him from Master Monday, and cried "Prentices!" and "Clubs!" Then out at every door came clubs and weapons and the Alderman fled, and was in great danger. Then more people arose out of every quarter, and out came serving men, and water men and Courtiers, and by 9 of the clock there were in Cheap six or seven hundred. And out of St. Paul's churchyard came three hundred who knew not of the others, and so out of all places they gathered, and broke up the Counters (prisons), and took out the prisoners, that the Mayor had thither committed for hurting of the strangers, and came to Newgate and took out Studley and Petit, committed thither for that cause. The Mayor and the Sheriffs were there present, and made proclamation in the king's name, but nothing was obeyed. Thus they ran amok through St. Nicholas Shambles and at St. Martin's Gate, there met with them *Sir Thomas More* and others, desiring them to go to their lodgings. And as they were entreating, and had almost brought them to a stay, the people of St. Martin's threw out stones and bats, and hurt diverse honest persons, that were persuading the riotous people to cease, and they bade them hold their hands, but still they threw out bricks and hot water. Then a sergeant at arms called Nicholas Downs, which was there with *Master More*, entreating them, being sore hurt, in a fury cried "Down with them!" Then all the misruled persons ran to the doors and windows of St. Martin, and spoiled all that they found, and caste it into the street, and left few houses unspoiled.

# Anthony Munday, Henry Chettle, William Shakespeare, and Others Excerpt from *Sir Thomas More* (1593)

*You are encouraged to watch Sir Ian McKellen's 2012 performance of this speech in addition to reading the text below. Visit <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AjEAeOshUGQ> to view the performance.*

**SCENE IV.** St. Martin's Gate.

[Enter Lincoln, Doll, Clown, George Betts, Williamson, others; and a Sergeant at Arms.]

[Enter the Lord Mayor, Surrey, Shrewsbury, More.]

**LORD MAYOR.**

Hold! in the king's name, hold!

**SURREY.**

Friends, masters, countrymen—

**LORD MAYOR.**

Peace, ho, peace! I charge you, keep the peace!

**SHREWSBURY.**

My masters, countrymen—

**WILLIAMSON.**

The noble earl of Shrewsbury, let's hear him.

**BETTS.**

We'll hear the earl of Surrey.

**LINCOLN.**

The earl of Shrewsbury.

**BETTS.**

We'll hear both.

**ALL.**

Both, both, both, both!

**LINCOLN.**

Peace, I say, peace! are you men of wisdom, or what are you?

**SURREY.**

What you will have them; but not men of wisdom.

**ALL.**

We'll not hear my lord of Surrey; no, no, no, no, no! Shrewsbury, Shrewsbury!

**MORE.**

Whiles they are o'er the bank of their obedience,  
Thus will they bear down all things.

**LINCOLN.**

Sheriff More speaks; shall we hear Sheriff More speak?

**DOLL.**

Let's hear him: 'a keeps a plentyful shrievaltry, and 'a made my  
brother Arthur Watchins Seriant Safes yeoman: let's hear Shrieve  
More.

**ALL.**

Shrieve More, More, More, Shrieve More!

**MORE.**

Even by the rule you have among yourselves,  
Command still audience.

**ALL.**

Surrey, Surrey! More, More!

**LINCOLN:**

Peace, peace, silence, peace!

**BETTS.**

Peace, peace, silence, peace!

**MORE.**

You that have voice and credit with the number

Command them to a stillness.

**LINCOLN.**

A plague on them! They will not hold their peace. The devil cannot rule them.

**MORE.**

Then what a rough and riotous charge have you,  
To lead those that the devil cannot rule?—  
Good masters, hear me speak.

**DOLL.**

Aye, by th' mass, will we, More: th' art a good housekeeper, and I thank thy good worship for my brother Arthur Watchins.

**ALL.**

Peace, peace.

**MORE.**

Look, what you do offend you cry upon,  
That is, the peace. Not one of you here present,  
Had there such fellows lived when you were babes,  
That could have topped the peace, as now you would,  
The peace wherein you have till now grown up  
Had been ta'en from you, and the bloody times  
Could not have brought you to the state of men.  
Alas, poor things, what is it you have got,  
Although we grant you get the thing you seek?

**BETTS.**

Marry, the removing of the strangers, which cannot choose but much advantage the poor handicrafts of the city.

**MORE.**

Grant them removed, and grant that this your noise  
Hath chid down all the majesty of England;  
Imagine that you see the wretched strangers,  
Their babies at their backs and their poor luggage,  
Plodding to th' ports and coasts for transportation,  
And that you sit as kings in your desires,  
Authority quite silenced by your brawl,  
And you in ruff of your opinions clothed;  
What had you got? I'll tell you: you had taught  
How insolence and strong hand should prevail,  
How order should be quelled; and by this pattern  
Not one of you should live an aged man,

For other ruffians, as their fancies wrought,  
With self same hand, self reasons, and self right,  
Would shark on you, and men like ravenous fishes  
Would feed on one another.

**DOLL.**

Before God, that's as true as the Gospel.

**LINCOLN.**

Nay, this is a sound fellow, I tell you: let's mark him.

**MORE.**

Let me set up before your thoughts, good friends,  
One supposition, which if you will mark,  
You shall perceive how horrible a shape  
Your innovation bears: first, 'tis a sin  
Which oft the apostle did forewarn us of,  
Urging obedience to authority;  
And 'twere no error, if I told you all,  
You were in arms against your God himself.

**ALL.**

Marry, God forbid that!

**MORE.**

Nay, certainly you are;  
*For to the king God hath his office lent  
Of dread, of justice, power and command,  
Hath bid him rule, and willed you to obey;  
And, to add ampler majesty to this,  
He hath not only lent the king his figure,  
His throne and sword, but given him his own name,  
Calls him a god on earth. What do you, then,  
Rising against him that God himself installs,  
But rise against God? What do you to your souls  
In doing this? O, desperate as you are,  
Wash your foul minds with tears, and those same hands,  
That you like rebels lift against the peace,  
Lift up for peace, and your unreverent knees,  
Make them your feet. To kneel to be forgiven  
Is safer wars than ever you can make,  
Whose discipline is riot.  
In, in, to your obedience! Why, even your hurly*

*Cannot proceed but by obedience.  
Tell me but this: what rebel captain,  
As mutinies are incident, by his name  
Can still the rout? Who will obey a traitor?  
Or how can well that proclamation sound,  
When there is no addition but a rebel  
To qualify a rebel? You'll put down strangers,  
Kill them, cut their throats, possess their houses,  
And lead the majesty of law in line,  
To slip him like a hound. Say now the king  
(As he is clement, if th' offender mourn)  
Should so much come too short of your great trespass  
As but to banish you, whither would you go?  
What country, by the nature of your error,  
Should give you harbor? Go you to France or Flanders,  
To any German province, to Spain or Portugal,  
Nay, any where that not adheres to England,—  
Why, you must needs be strangers. Would you be pleased  
To find a nation of such barbarous temper,  
That breaking out in hideous violence  
Would not afford you an abode on earth,  
Whet their detested knives against your throats,  
Spurn you like dogs, and like as if that God  
Owed not nor made not you, nor that the elements  
Were not all appropriate to your comforts,  
But chartered unto them, what would you think  
To be thus used? This is the strangers case;  
And this your mountanish inhumanity.*

**ALL.**

Faith, a says true: let's do as we may be done to.

**LINCOLN.**

We'll be ruled by you, Master More, if you'll stand our friend to procure our pardon.

**MORE.**

Submit you to these noble gentlemen,  
Entreat their mediation to the king,  
Give up yourself to form, obey the magistrate,  
And there's no doubt but mercy may be found,  
If you so seek.  
To persist in it is present death: but, if you  
Yield yourselves, no doubt what punishment  
You in simplicity have incurred, his highness  
In mercy will most graciously pardon.

**ALL.**

We yield, and desire his highness' mercy.

[They lay by their weapons.]