

# George Puttenham: Selections from *The Arte of English Poesie* (1589)

## Introduction

© 2000 by David Cope

Published in 1589—just as the great Elizabethan explosion of drama and poetry was beginning—George Puttenham's *The Arte of English Poesie* is among the finest of the poetics texts in a tradition that begins with Roman works such as Cicero's *Ad C. Herennium* and Quintilian's *Institutes of Oratory*, and includes Bede's *De Arte Metrica et de Schematibus et Tropis*, Geoffrey de Vinsauf's *Poetria Nova*, Matthew of Vendome's *The Art of Versification*, and Dante Alighieri's *Il Convivio*, among others. Like Dante's *de Vulgari Eloquentia* and Joachim du Bellay's *Defense et Illustration de la Langue Francaise*, Puttenham promotes the idea of a vernacular poetry—the idea that one's common tongue is the proper vehicle for writing, rather than Latin. *The Arte of English Poesie* is divided into "three Bookes: The first of Poets and Poesie, the second of Proportion, the third of Ornament." Ultimately, I would prefer to see the entire text republished or placed online for poets and students of poetry and drama, but I have, for the time being, chosen to concentrate on those chapters in the first book which relate directly to the argument on poetic purpose and on the nature of dramatic poetry, comedy and tragedy, as well as to the ways in which poets should represent princes and the powerful—a subject particularly important in the playwright's approach to the history play. At times, Puttenham's book seems like a primer for the literary explosion that would follow within a few years, yet as a testimony on critical hindsight, the chapter on poets in the English tradition may give one pause to consider the poets named in the light of a much longer history: his comments are often judiciously precise, humorously so in the case of John Skelton, but some of the poets he names for virtues have dropped off the literary map. Further, adherents of Blake and Shelley may find in Puttenham's third chapter precedents for the Blakean notion that religion grew from the visionary conceptions of poets, and the Shelleyan credo that poets are the "unacknowledged legislators of the world."

For poets and students of poetry and drama, the book's value lies in its recollection of the growth of the poetic and dramatic arts and in its lucid argument on the traditional purpose of the art—to instruct and delight or, as Chaucer once put it, to make "tales of best sentence and moost solaas" (Prologue, line 798). This position crops up again in the various defenses of poetry against the attacks of Puritans, and becomes a veritable credo for Shakespeare's great rival, Ben Jonson, who insisted that his plays would "mix profit with your pleasures" (Prologue to *Volpone*, line 8) and that "the principal end of poesy" is "to inform men in the best reason of living," with a "special aim . . . to put the snaffle in their mouths that cry out we never punish vice in our interludes" (The Epistle preceding *Volpone*, lines 99-100, 105-107). The second book is also valuable as an explanation of poetics proper, explaining measure and the effects of various meters, caesura and other pauses as techniques application to improving oral recitation, the uses of cadence to complement content, the varieties of shaped poems, ending with discussions of the various metrical feet, and their uses in verse. The third and final book explores figurative speech—the various techniques used to intensify and amplify poetic speech, as well as to give it emotive and imagistic clarity.

I put these selections online because no publisher has reprinted them in years, and they should be available to students in those colleges whose libraries can't get them; they are excellent

resources for students researching the above-named subjects from the Shakespearean era. These offerings are not for specialists, but for undergraduate students, and to this end, I have *generally* preserved the spelling and punctuation of the original, modernizing only those letters whose forms have changed (e.g. s for f, as in English for Englifh). This selection is from a 1970 reprint from the 1936 Cambridge University Press edition of Puttenham's *The Arte of English Poesie*, edited by Gladys Doidge Willcock and Alice Walker. As I find time, more of Puttenham's chapters will appear here.

### Selected Source List of Classic Poetics Texts

Annotations © 2000 by David Cope

- Alighieri, Dante. *De Vulgari Eloquentia: Dante's Book of Exile*. Trans. Marianne Shapiro. Lincoln and London: U of Nebraska, 1990. [Though Old English and Norse poets had preceded Dante by writing in their vernaculars, Dante's is the first discussion exploring the theory and importance of writing poetry in the common tongue. As such, it is a revolutionary document—setting a precedent for the much later discussions as Du Bellay's and Puttenham's.]
- - - - . *Il Convivio (The Banquet)*. Trans. Richard H. Lansing. New York and London: Garland, 1990. [With the disputed "Letter to Can Grande," *Il Convivio* is Dante's primary statement of his poetics practice, an excellent substratum of his famous *Commedia*. Derived from ecclesiastical discourse on the four levels of allegorical exegesis, his discussions of literal and figurative levels of meaning in allegory are important contributions to the poetics of the time.]
- Bede. *Libri II De Arte Metrica et De Schematibus et Tropis: The Art of Poetry and Rhetoric*. Trans. alvin B. Kendall. Saarbrücken: AQ Verlag, 1991. [Bede's is the earliest poetics text by an Englishman; his book restates the figures and tropes discussed by Cicero and Quintilian.]
- Campion, Thomas. "Observations in the Arte of English Poesie." *The Works of Thomas Campion*. Ed. Walter R. Davis. New York: Norton, 1969. [Campion's 1602 treatise argued that rime is inappropriate in English poetry and explores the uses of meter in the English line, basing the quantity of English feet on accent (stress) rather than on duration.]
- Cicero. *Ad C. Herennium and De Ratione Dicendi (Rhetorica ad Herennium)*. Trans. Harry Caplan. Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard U P, 1954. [With Quintilian's *Institutes of Oratory* and Longinus's *On the Sublime*, this book completes a triumvirate of early poetics texts, laying the foundation for studies that follow.]
- Du Bellay, Joachim. *Defense et Illustration de la Langue Francaise / oeuvres poetiques diverses*. Paris: Librairie Larousse, 1987. [Du Bellay's 1549 essay was both a defense of the common tongue much like Dante's earlier *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, and the prosodic and theoretical foundation text of the French Pleiade. Chapter four recommends sonnets as a "plaisante invention Italienne" appropriate for French authors. The sonnet was first

introduced into France in 1536 by Clement Marot, who with Mellin de Saint Gelais and Jacques Peletier popularized the form.]

Longinus. *On Great Writing (On the Sublime)*. Trans. G. M. A. Grube. New York: Liberal Arts, 1957. [Longinus's text asserts that great poetry is more than the exercise of natural talent, nor the result of "mere impulse and untutored daring," for great art needs "the bridle as well as the spur" (5). Longinus names several faults to be avoided, including "incongruous turgidity," puerility, parenthysos—"a display of passion, hollow and untimely, where none is needed, or immoderate when moderation is required" (7). He goes on to discuss five characteristics necessary to great writing, with caveats and clarifications.]

Quintilian. *Institutes of Oratory or The Education of an Orator*. 2 vols. Trans. Rev. John Selby Watson. London: George Bell, 1905. [Quintilian's books 8 and 9 are particularly important as poetics discussions, focusing on rhetorical embellishments to verse *and* dangers and faults of style to be avoided, as well as the variety of figures of thought available to the poet.]

Vendome, Matthew of. *The Art of Versification*. Trans. Aubrey E. Galyon. Ames: Iowa State U P, 1980. [A premier medieval rhetoric and poetics text, Vendome's essay presents one of the clearest discussions (with definitions and examples) of figures, tropes, and the famous "rhetorical colors"—techniques of presentation available to shape one's text.]

Vinsauf, Geoffrey de. *Poetria Nova*. Trans. Margaret F. Nims. Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1967. [Most of Geoffrey's writing derives from Cicero's *Ad Herennium* and Horace's *Ars Poetica*, but his discussions of "the order of art" and "the order of nature," amplification, abbreviation, comic and serious forms of writing, and faults to avoid are all worthy of a long look.]

## CONTENTS

### Introduction and Selected Source List 1

### Selections from Book One 2

### Contents 3

Chap. II That there may be an Art of our English Poesie, as well as there is of the Latine and Greeke 5

Chapt. III How Poets were the first priests, the first prophets, the first Legislators and politicians in the world 5

Chap. IIII How the Poets were the first Philosophers, the first Astronomers and Historiographers and Oratours and Musiciens of the world 6

Chap. IX How Poesie should not be employed upon wayne conceits or vicious or infamous 7

Chap. X The Subject or matter of Poesie 7

Chap. XI Of poems and their sundry formes, and how thereby the aunchient Poets  
received surnames 8

Chap. XIII In what forme of Poesie vice and the common abuses of man's life  
was reprehended 9

Chap XIIIII How vice was afterward reproved by two other manner of poems, better reformed  
than the Satyre, whereof the first was Comedy, the second Tragedy 9

Chap. XV In what forme of Poesie the evil and outrageous behaviours of Princes were  
reprehended 10

Chap. XVI In what forme of Poesie the great Princes and dominators of the world  
were honored 11

Chap. XVII Of the places where their enterludes or poems drammaticke were represented to the  
people 11

Chap. XIX Of historicall Poesie, by which the famous acts of Princes and the vertuous and  
worthy lives of our forefathers were reported 12

Chap. XXXI Who in any age have bene the most commended writers in our English Poesie,  
and the Authors censure given upon them 13

## ***From* BOOK ONE: OF POETS AND POESIE**

### **Chap. II That there may be an Art of our English Poesie, as well as there is of the Latine and Greeke**

Then as there was no art in the world till by experience found out: so if Poesie be now an Art, & of al antiquitie hath bene among the Greeks and Latines, & yet were none, untill by studious persons fashioned and reduced into a method of rules & precepts, then no doubt may there be the like with us. And if th'art of Poesie be but a skill appertaining to utterance, why may not the same be with us as wel as with them, our language being no lesse copious pithie and significative then theirs, our conceits the same, and our wits no lesse apt to devise and imitate then theirs were? If againe Art be but a certaine order of rules prescribed by reason, and gathered by experience, why should not Poesie be a vulgar Art with us as well as with the Greeks and Latines, our language admitting no fewer rules and nice diversities then theirs? but peradventure moe by a peculiar, which our speech hath in many things differing from theirs: and yet in the generall points of that Art, allowed to go in common with them: so as if one point perchance which is their feete whereupon their measures stand, and in deede is all the beautie of their Poesie, and which feete we have not, nor as yet never went about to frame (the nature of our language and wordes not permitting it) we have in stead thereof twentie other curious points in that skill more then they ever had, by reason of our rime and tunable concords and simphonie, which they never observed. Poesie therefore may be an Art in our vulgar, and that verie methodicall and commendable.

### **Chapt. III How Poets were the first priests, the first prophets, the first Legislators and politicians in the world**

The profession and use of Poesie is most ancient from the beginning, and not as manie erroneously suppose, after, but before any civil society was among men. For it is written, that Poesie was th'originall cause and occasion of their first assemblies, when before the people remained in the woods and mountains, vagarant and dispersed like the wild beasts, lawlesse and naked, or verie ill clad, and of all good and necessarie provision for harbour or sustenance utterly unfurnished: so as they little diffred for their maner of life, from the very brute beasts of the field. Whereupon it is fayned that *Amphion* and *Orpheus*, two Poets of the first ages, one of them, to wit *Amphion*, builded up cities, and reared walles with the stones that came in heapes to the sound of his harpe, figuring thereby the mollifying of hard and stonie hearts by his sweete and eloquent perswasion. And *Orpheus* assembled the wilde beasts to come in heards to harken to his musicke, and by that meanes made them tame, implying thereby, how by his discrete and wholesome lessons uttered in harmonie and with melodious instruments, he brought the rude and savage people to a more civill and orderly life, nothing, as it seemeth, more prevailing or fit to redresse and edifie the cruell and sturdie courage of man then it. And as these two Poets and *Linus* before them, and *Museus* also and *Hesiodus* in Greece and Archadia: so by all likelihood had mo Poets done in other places, and in other ages before them, though there be no remembrance left of them, by reason of the Recordes by some accident of time perished and failing. Poets therefore are of great antiquitie. Then forasmuch as they were the first that entended to the observation of nature and her works, and specially of the Celestiall courses, by reason of the continuall motion of the heavens, searching after the first mover, and from thence by degrees comming to know and consider of the substances separate & abstract, which we call the divine intelligences or good Angels (*Demonies*) they were the first that instituted sacrifices of placation, with invocations and worship to them, as to Gods: and invented and stablished all the rest of the

observances and ceremonies of religion, and so were the first Priests and ministers of the holy misteries. And because for the better execution of that high charge and function, it behoved them to live chaste, and in all holines of life, and in continuall studie and contemplation: they came by instinct divine, and by deepe meditation, and much abstinence (the same assubtling and refining their spirits) to be made apt to receive visions, both waking and sleeping, which made them utter prophesies, and foretell things to come. So also were they the first Prophetes or sears, *Videntes*, for so the Scripture tearmeth them in Latine after the Hebrue word, and all the oracles and answers of the gods were given in meeter or verse, and published to the people by their direction. And for that they were aged and grave men, and of much wisdom and experience in th'affaires of the world, they were the first lawmakers to the people, and the first polititiens, devising all expedient meanes for th'establishment of Common wealth, to hold and containe the people in order and duety by force and vertue of good and wholesome lawes, made for the preservation of the publique peace and tranquillitie. The same peradventure not purposely intended, but greatly furthered by the aw of their gods, and such scruple of conscience, as the terrors of their late invented religion had led them into.

### **Chap. IIII How the Poets were the first Philosophers, the first Astronomers and Historiographers and Oratours and Musiciens of the world**

Utterance also and language is given by nature to man for perswasion of others, and aide of them selves, I meane the first abilitie to speake. For speech it selfe is artificiall and made by man, and the more pleasing it is, the more it prevaieth to such purpose as it is intended for: but speech by meeter is a kind of utterance, more cleanly couched and more delicate to the eare then prose is, because it is more currant and slipper upon the tongue, and withal tunable and melodious, as a kind of Musicke, and therefore may be tearmed a musically speech or utterance, which cannot but please the hearer very well. Another cause is, for that it is briefer & more compendious, and easier to beare away and be retained in memorie, then that which is contained in multitude of words and full of tedious ambage and long periods. It is beside a maner of utterance more eloquent and rethoricall then the ordinarie prose, which we use in our daily talke: because it is decked and set out with all maner of fresh colours and figures, which maketh that it sooner invegleth the judgement of man, and carieth his opinion this way and that, whither soever the heart by impression of the eare shalbe most affectionately bent and directed. The utterance in prose is not of so great efficacie, because not only it is dayly used, and by that occasion the eare is overglutted with it, but is also not so voluble and slipper upon the tong, being wide and lose, and nothing numerous, nor contrived into measures, and sounded with so gallant and harmonical accents, nor in fine allowed that figurative conveyance, nor so great licence in choise of words and phrases as meeter is. So as the Poets were also from the beginning the best perswaders and their eloquence the first Rethoricke of the world. Even so it became that the high misteries of the gods should be revealed & taught, by a maner of utterance and language of extraordinarie phrase, and brief and compendious, and above al others sweet and civill as the Metricall is. The same also was meetest to register the lives and noble gests of Princes, and of the great Monarkes of the world, and all other the memorable accidents of time: so as the Poet was also the first historiographer. Then forasmuch as they were the first observers of all naturall causes & effects in the things generable and corruptible, and from thence mounted up to search after the celestially courses and influences, & yet penetrated further to know the divine essences and substances separate, as is sayd before, they were the first Astronomers and Philosophists and Metaphisicks. Finally, because they did altogether endeavor themselves to reduce the life of men to a certaine method of good maners, and made the first differences betweene vertue and vice, and then tempered all these knowledges and skilles with the exercise of a delectable Musicke by melodious

instruments, which withall served them to delight their hearers, & to call the people together by admiration, to a plausible and vertuous conversation, therefore were they the first Philosophers Ethick, & the first artificial Musiciens of the world. Such was *Linus, Orpheus, Amphio & Museus* the most ancient Poets and Philosophers, of whom there is left any memory by the prophane writers. King *David* also & *Salomon* his sonne and many other of the holy Prophets wrote in meeters, and used to sing them to the harpe, although to many of us ignorant of the Hebrue language and phrase, and not observing it, the same seeme but a prose. It can not bee therefore that anie scorne or indignitie should justly be offred to so noble, profitable, ancient and divine a science as Poesie is.

### **Chap. IX How Poesie should not be employed upon vayne conceits or vicious or infamous**

Wherefore the Nobilitie and dignitie of the Art considered as well by universalitie as antiquitie and the naturall excellence of it selfe, Poesie ought not to be abased and employed upon any unworthy matter & subject, nor used to vaine purposes, which neverthelesse is dayly seene, and this is to utter conceits infamous or vicious or ridiculous and foolish, or of no good example & doctrine. Albeit in merry matters (not dishonest) being used for mans solace and recreation it may be well allowed, for as I said before, Poesie is a pleasant maner of utteraunce varying from the ordinarie of purpose to refresh the mynde by the eares delight. Poesie also is not onely laudable, because I said it was a metricall speach used by the first men, but because it is a metricall speach corrected and reformed by discreet judgements, and with no lesse cunning and curiositie then the Greeke and Latine Poesie, and by Art bewtified & adorned, & brought far from the primitive rudenesse of the first inventors, otherwise it might be sayd to me that *Adam* and *Eves* apernes were the gayest garmentes, because they were the first, and the shepherdes tent or pavillion, the best housing, because it was the most aunchient & most universall: which I would not have so taken, for it is not my meaning but that Art & cunning concurring with nature, antiquitie & universalitie, in things indifferent, and not evill, doe make them more laudable. And right so our vulgar riming Poesie, being by good wittes brought to that perfection we see, is worthily to be preferred before any other maner of utterance in prose, for such use and to such purpose as it is ordained, and shall hereafter be set downe more particularly.

### **Chap. X The Subject or matter of Poesie**

Having sufficiently sayd of the dignitie of Poets and Poesie, now it is tyme to speake of the matter or subject of Poesie, which to myne intent is, what soever wittie and delicate conceit of man meet or worthy to be put in written verse, for any necessary use of the present time, or good instruction of the posteritie. But the chief and principall is: the laud honour & glory of the immortall gods (I speake now in phrase of the Gentiles.) Secondly the worthy gests of noble Princes: the memoriall and registry of all great fortunes, the praise of vertue & reproofe of vice, the instruction of morall doctrines, the revealing of sciences naturall & other profitable Arts, the redresse of boistrous & sturdie courages by perswasion, the consolation and repose of temperate myndes, finally the common solace of mankind in all his travails and cares of this transitorie life. And in this last sort being used for recreation onely, may allowably beare matter not alwayes of the gravest, or of any great commoditie or profit, but rather in some sort, vaine, dissolute, or wanton, so it be not very scandalous & of evill example. But as our intent is to make this Art vulgar for all English mens use, & therefore are of necessitie to set downe the principal rules therein to be observed: so in mine opinion it is no lesse expedient to touch briefly all the chief points of this aunchient Poesie of the Greeks and Latines, so far forth as it conformeth with ours.

So as it may be knowen what we hold of them as borrowed, and what as of our owne peculiar. Wherefore now that we have said, what is the matter of Poesie, we will declare the manner and formes of poemes used by the auncients.

### **Chap. XI Of poems and their sundry formes, and how thereby the aunchient Poets received surnames**

As the matter of Poesie is divers, so was the forme of their poemes & maner of writing, for all of them wrote not in one sort, even as all of them wrote not upon one matter. Neither was every Poet alike cunning in all as in some one kinde of Poesie, nor uttered with like felicitie. But wherein any one most excelled, thereof he tooke a surname, as to be called a Poet *Heroick*, *Lyrick*, *Elegiack*, *Epigrammatist* or otherwise. Such therefore as gave them selves to write long histories of the noble gests of kings & great Princes entermedling the dealings of the gods, halfe gods or *Heroes* of the gentiles, & the great & waighty consequences of peace and warre, they called Poets *Heroick*, whereof *Homer* was chief and most aunchient among the Greeks, *Virgill* among the Latines: Others who more delighted to write songs or ballads of pleasure, to be song with the voice, and to the harpe, lute, or citheron & such other musical instruments, they were called melodious Poets [*melici*] or by a more common name *Lirique* Poets, of which sort was *Pindarus*, *Anacreon* and *Callimachus* with others among the Greeks: *Horace* and *Catullus* among the Latines. There were an other sort, who sought the favor of faire Ladies, and coveted to bemone their estates at large, & the perplexities of love in a certain pitious verse called *Elegie*, and thence were called *Eligiack*: such among the Latines were *Ovid*, *Tibullus*, & *Propertius*. There were also Poets that wrote onely for the stage, I meane playes and interludes, to recreate the people with matters of disporte, and to that intent did set forth in shewes pageants, accompanied with speach the common behaviours and maner of life of private persons, and such as were the meaner sort of men, and they were called *Comicall* Poets, of whom among the Greeks *Menander* and *Aristophanes* were most excellent, with the Latines *Terence* and *Plautus*. Besides those Poets *Comick* there were other who served also the stage, but medled not with so base matters: For they set forth the dolefull falles of infortunate & afflicted Princes, & were called Poets *Tragicall*. Such were *Euripides* and *Sophocles* with the Greeks, *Seneca* among the Latines. There were yet others who mounted nothing so high as any of them both, but in base and humble stile by maner of Dialogue, uttered the private and familiar talke of the meanest sort of men, as shepherdes, heywards and such like, such was among the Greekes *Theocritus*: and *Virgill* among the Latines, their poems were named *Eglogues* or shepheardly talke. There was yet another kind of Poet, who intended to taxe the common abuses and vice of the people in rough and bitter speaches, and their invectives were called *Satyres*, and them selves *Satyricques*. Such were *Lucilius*, *Juvenall* and *Persius* among the Latines, & with us he that wrote the booke called *Piers plowman*. Others of a more fine and pleasant head were given wholly to taunting and scoffing at undecent things, and in short poemes uttered pretie merry conceits, and these men were called *Epigrammatistes*. There were others that for the peoples good instruction, and triall of their owne witts used in places of great assembly, to say by rote numbers of short and sententious meetres, very pithie and of good edification, and thereupon were called Poets *Mimistes*: as who would say, imitable and meet to be followed for their wise and grave lessons. There was another kind of poeme, invented only to make sport, & to refresh the company with a maner of buffonry or counterfaiting of merry speaches, converting all that which they had hard spoken before, to a certaine derision by a quite contrary sense, and this was done, when *Comedies* or *Tragedies* were a playing, & that betweene the actes when the players went to make ready for another, there was great silence, and the people waxt weary, then came in these maner of conter-

faite vices, they were called *Pantomimi*, and all that had before bene sayd, or great part of it, they gave a crosse construction to it very ridiculously. Thus have you how the names of the Poets were given them by the formes of their poemes and maner of writing.

### **Chap. XIII In what forme of Poesie vice and the common abuses of man's life was reprehended**

Some perchance would thinke that next after the praise and honoring of their gods, should commence the worshippings and praise of good men, and specially of great Princes and governours of the earth in soveraignty and function next unto the gods. But it is not so, for before that came to passe, the Poets or holy Priests, chiefly studied the rebuke of vice, and to carpe at the common abuses, such as were most offensive to the publique and private, for as yet for lacke of good civility and wholesome doctrines, there was greater store of lewde lourdaines then of wise and learned Lords, or of noble and vertuous Princes and governours. So as next after the honours exhibited to their gods, the Poets finding in man generally much to reprove & litle to praise, made certaine poems in plaine meetres, more like to sermons or preachings then otherwise, and when the people were assembled together in those hallowed places dedicate to their gods, because they had yet no large halles or places of conventicle, nor had any other correction of their faults, but such as rested onely in rebukes of wise and grave men, such as at these dayes make the people ashamed rather then afeard, the said auncient Poets used for that purpose, three kinds of poems reprehensive, to wit, the *Satyre*, the *Comedie*, & the *Tragedie*: the first and most bitter invective against vice and vicious men, was the *Satyre*: which to th'intent their bitternesse should breede none ill will, either to the Poets, or to the recitours, (which could not have bene chosen if they had bene openly knowen) and besides to make their admonitions and reproofs seeme graver and of more efficacie, they made wise as if the gods of the woods, whom they called *Satyres* or *Silvanes*, should appeare and recite those verses of rebuke, whereas in deede they were but disguised persons under the shape of *Satyres* as who would say, these terrene and base gods being conversant with mans affaires, and spiers out of all their secret faults: had some great care over man, & desired by good admonitions to reforme the evill of their life, and to bring the bad to amendment by those kinde of preachings, whereupon the Poets inventours of the devise were called *Satyrists*.

### **Chap XIII How vice was afterward reproved by two other manner of poems, better reformed than the Satyre, whereof the first was Comedy, the second Tragedy**

But when these maner of solitary speaches and recitals of rebuke, uttered by the rurall gods out of bushes and briers, seemed not to the finer heads sufficiently perswasive, nor so popular as if it were reduced into action of many persons, or by many voyces lively represented to the eare and eye, so as a man might thinke it were even now a doing. The Poets devised to have many parts played at once by two or three or foure persons, that debated the matters of the world, sometimes of their owne private affaires, sometimes of their neighbours, but never meddling with any Princes matters nor such high personages, but commonly of marchants, souldiers, artificers, good honest housholders, and also of unthrifty youthes, yong damsels, old nurses, bawds, brokers, ruffians and parasites, with such like, in whose behaviours, lyeth in effect the whole course and trade of mans life, and therefore tended altogether to the good amendment of man by discipline and example. It was also much for the solace & recreation of the common people by reason of the pageants and shewes. And this kind of poeme was called *Comedy*, and followed next after the *Satyre*, & by

that occasion was somewhat sharpe and bitter after the nature of the *Satyre*, openly & by expresse names taxing men more maliciously and impudently then became, so as they were enforced for feare of quarell & blame to disguise their players with strange apparell, and by colouring their faces and carying hatts & capps of diverse fashions to make them selves lesse knowen. But as time & experience do reforme every thing that is amisse, so this bitter poeme called the old *Comedy*, being disused and taken away, the new *Comedy* came in place, more civill and pleasant a great deale and not touching any man by name, but in a certaine generalitie glancing at every abuse, so as from thenceforth fearing none illwill or enmitie at any bodies hands, they left aside their disguisings & played bare face, till one *Roscius Gallus* the most excellent player among the Romaines brought up these vizards, which we see at this day used, partly to supply the want of players, when there were moe parts then there were persons, or that it was not thought meet to trouble and pester princes chambers with too many folkes. Now by the change of a vizard one man might play the king and the carter, the old nurse and the yong damsell, the marchant & the souldier or any other part he listed very conveniently. There be that say *Roscius* did it for another purpose, for being him selfe the best *Histrien* or buffon that was in his dayes to be found, insomuch as *Cicero* said *Roscius* contended with him by varietie of lively gestures, to surmount the copy of his speach, yet because he was squint eyed and had a very unpleasant countenance, and lookes which made him ridiculous or rather odious to the presence, he devised these vizards to hide his owne ilfavored face. And thus much touching the *Comedy*.

#### **Chap. XV In what forme of Poesie the evil and outragious behaviours of Princes were reprehended**

But because in those dayes when the Poets first taxed by *Satyre* and *Comedy*, there was no great store of Kings or Emperors or such high estats (al men being yet for the most part rude, & in a maner popularly egall) they could not say of them or of their behaviours any thing to the purpose, which cases of Princes are sithens taken for the highest and greatest matters of all. But after that some men among the moe became mighty and famous in the world, soveraigntie and dominion having learned them all maner of lusts and licentiousnes of life, by which occasions also their high estates and felicities fell many times into most lowe and lamentable fortunes: whereas before in their great prosperities they were both feared and revered in the highest degree, after their deathes when the posteritie stood no more in dread of them, their infamous life and tyrannies were layd open to all the world, their wickednes reproched, their follies and extreme insolencies derided, and their miserable ends painted out in playes and pageants, to shew the mutabilitie of fortune, and the just punishment of God in revenge of a vicious and evill life. These matters were also handled by the Poets and represented by action as that of the *Comedies*: but because the matter was higher then that of the *Comedies* the Poets stile was also higher and more loftie, the provision greater, the place more magnificent: for which purpose also the players garments were made more rich & costly & solemne, and every other thing apperteining, according to that rate: So as where the *Satyre* was pronounced by rusticall and naked *Sylvanes* speaking out of a bush, & the common players of interludes called *Planipedes*, played barefoote upon the floore: the later *Comedies* upon scaffolds, and by men well and cleanly hosed and shod. These matters of great Princes were played upon lofty stages, & the actors thereof ware upon their legges buskins of leather called *Cothurni*, and other solemne habits, & for a speciall preheminece did walke upon those high corked shoes or pantofles, which now they call in Spaine & Italy *Shoppini*. And because those buskins and high shoes were commonly made of goats skinnes very finely tanned, and dyed into colours: or for that as some say the best players reward, was a goate to be given him, or for that as other thinke, a goate was the peculiar sacrifice to the god *Pan*, king of all the

gods of the woodes: forasmuch as a goate in Greeke is called *Tragos*, therefore these stately playes were called *Tragedies*. And thus have ye four sundry formes of Poesie *Dramaticke* reprehensive, & put in execution by the feate & dexteritie of mans body, to wit, the *Satyre*, old *Comedie*, new *Comedie*, and *Tragedie*, whereas all other kinde of poems except *Eglogue* whereof shalbe entreated hereafter, were onely recited by mouth or song with the voyce to some melodious instrument.

#### **Chap. XVI In what forme of Poesie the great Princes and dominators of the world were honored**

But as the bad and illawdable parts of all estates and degrees were taxed by the Poets in one sort or an other, and those of great Princes by Tragedie in especial, (& not till after their deaths) as hath bene before remembred, to th'intent that such exemplifying (as it were) of their blames and adversities, being now dead, might worke for a secret reprehension to others that were alive, living in the same or like abuses. So was it great reason that all good and vertuous persons should for their well doings be rewarded with commendation, and the great Princes above all others with honors and praises, being for many respects of greater moment, to have them good & vertuous then any inferior sort of men. Wherefore the Poets being in deede the trumpeters of all praise and also of slaunder (not slaunder, but well deserved reproch) were in conscience & credit bound next after the divine praises of the immortall gods, to yeeld a like ratable honour to all such amongst men, as most resembled the gods by excellencie of function, and had a certaine affinitie with them, by more then humane and ordinarie vertues shewed in their actions here upon earth. They were therefore praised by a second degree of laude: shewing their high estates, their Princely genealogies and pedegrees, mariages, aliances, and such noble exploites, as they had done in th'affaires of peace & of warre to the benefit of their people and countries, by invention of any noble science, or profitable Art, or by making wholesome lawes or enlarging of their dominions by honorable and just conquests, and many other wayes. Such personages among the Gentiles were *Bacchus*, *Ceres*, *Perseus*, *Hercules*, *Theseus* and many other, who thereby came to be accompted gods and halfe gods or goddesses [*Heroes*] & had their comedations given by Hymne accordingly or by such other poems as their memorie was therby made famous to the posteritie for ever after, as shal be more at large sayd in place convenient. But first we will speake somewhat of the playing places, and provisions which were made for their pageants & pomps representative before remembred.

#### **Chap. XVII Of the places where their enterludes or poems drammatike were represented to the people**

As it hath bene declared, the *Satyres* were first uttered in their hallowed places within the woods where they honoured their gods under the open heaven, because they had no other housing fit for great assemblies. The old comedies were plaid in the broad streets upon wagons or carts uncovered, which carts were floored with bords & made for removable stages to passe them from one streete of their townes to another, where all the people might stand at their ease to gaze upo the sights. Their new comedies or civill enterludes were played in open pavillions or tents of linnen cloth or lether, halfe displayed that the people might see. Afterward when Tragidies came up they devised to present them upon scaffoldes or stages of timber, shadowed with linen or lether as the other, and these stages were made in the forme of a *Semicircle*, whereof the bow served for the beholders to sit in, and the string or forepart was appointed for the floore or place where the players uttered, & had in it sundry little divisions by curteins as traverses to serve for several roomes where they might repaire unto & change their garmets & come in againe, as their

speeches & parts were to be renewed. Also there was place appointed for the musiciens to sing or to play upon their instrumentes at the end of every scene, to the intent the people might be refreshed, and kept occupied. This maner of stage in halfe circle, the Greekes called *theatrum*, as much as to say as a beholding place, which was also in such sort contrived by benches and greeces to stand or sit upon, as no man should empeach anothers sight. But as civilitie and withall wealth encreased, so did the minde of man growe dayly more haultie and superfluous in all his devises, so as for their *theaters* in halfe circle, they came to be by the great magnificence of the Romain princes and people somptuously built with marble & square stone in forme all round, & were called *Amphitheaters*, whereof as yet appears one among the ancient ruines of Rome, built by *Pompeius Magnus*, for capasitie able to receive as ease fourscore thousand persons as it is left written, & so curiously contrived as every man might depart at his pleasure, without any annoyance to other. It is also to be knowne that in those great *Amphitheaters* were exhibited all maner of other shewes and disports for the people, as their fence playes, or digladiations of naked men, their wrastlings, runnings, leapings and other practises of activitie and strength, also their baitings of wild beasts, as Elephants, Rhinoceros, Tigers, Leopards and others, which sights much delighted the common people, and therefore the places required to be large and of great content.

#### **Chap. XIX Of historicall Poesie, by which the famous acts of Princes and the vertuous and worthy lives of our forefathers were reported**

There is nothing in man of all the potential parts of his mind (reason and will except) more noble or more necessary to the active life then memory: because it maketh most to a sound judgement and perfect worldly wisdom, examining and comparing the times past with the present, and by them both considering the time to come, concludeth with a stedfast resolution, what is the best course to be taken in all his actions and advices in this world: it came upon this reason, experience to be so highly commended in all consultations of importance, and preferred before any learning or science, and yet experience is no more than a masse of memories assembled, that is, such trials as man hath made in time before. Right so no kinde of argument in all the Oratorie craft, doth better perswade and more universally satisfie then example, which is but the representation of old memories, and like successes happened in times past. For these regards the Poesie historicall is of all other next the divine most honorable and worthy, as well for the common benefit as for the speciall comfort every man receiveth by it. No one thing in the world with more delectation reviving our spirits then to behold as it were in a glasse the lively image of our deare forefathers, their noble and vertuous maner of life, with other things autentike, which because we are not able otherwise to attaine to the knowledge of, by any of our sences, we apprehend them by memory, whereas the present time and things so swiftly passe away, as they give us no leasure almost to looke into them, and much lesse to know & consider of them throughly. The things future, being also events very uncertaine, and such as can not possibly be knowne because they be not yet, can not be used for example nor for delight otherwise then by hope. Though many promise the contrary, by vaine and deceitful arts taking upon them to reveale the truth of accidents to come, which if it were so as they surmise, are yet but sciences meerely conjecturall, and not of any benefit to man or to the common wealth, where they be used or professed. Therefore the good and exemplarie things and actions of the former ages, were reserved only to the historicall reportes of wise and grave men: those of the present time left to the fruition and judgement of our sences: the future as hazards and uncertaine eventes utterly neglected and layd aside for Magicians and mockers to get their livings by: such manner of men as by negligence of Magistrates and remisses of lawes every countrie breedeth great store of. These historical men neverthesse used not the matter so precisely to wish that all they wrote

should be accounted true, for that was not needfull nor expedient to the purpose, namely to be used either for example or for pleasure: considering that many times it is seene a fained matter or altogether fabulous, besides that it maketh more mirth than any other, works no lesse good conclusions for example then the most true and veritable: but often times more, because the Poet hath the handling of them to fashion at his pleasure, but not so of th'other which must go according to their veritie & none otherwise without the writers great blame. Againe as ye know mo and more excellent examples may be fained in one day by a good wit, then many ages through mans frailtie are able to put in ure, which made the learned and wittie men of those times to devise many historicall matters of no veritie at all, but with purpose to do good and no hurt, as using them for a maner of discipline and president of commendable life. Such was the common wealth of *Plato*, and Sir *Thomas Moores Utopia*, resting all in devise, but never put in execution, and easier to be wished then to be performed. And you shall perceiue that histories were of three sortes, wholly true and wholly false, and a third holding part of either, but for all honest recreation, and good example they were all of them. And this may be apparent to us not onely by the Poeticall histories, but also by those that be written in prose: for as *Homer* wrate a fabulous or mixed report of the siege of Troy, and another of *Ulisses* errors or wandrings, so did *Museus* compile a true treatise of the life & loves of *Leander* and *Hero*, both of them *Heroick*, and to none ill edification. Also as *Theucidides* wrate a worthy and veritable historie, of the warres betwixt the *Athenians* and the *Peloponenses*: so did *Zenophon*, a most grave Philosopher, and well trained courtier and counsellour make another (but fained and untrue) of the childhood of *Cyrus* king of *Persia*, nevertheless both to one effect, that is for example and good information of the posteritie. Now because the actions of meane & base personages, tend in very few cases to any great good example: for who passeth to follow the steps, and maner of life of a craftes man, shepheard, or sailer, though he were his father or dearest frend? yea how almost is it possible that such maner of men should be of any vertue other then their profession requireth? Therefore was nothing committed to historie, but matters of great and excellent persons & things that the same by irritation of good courages (such as emulation causeth) might worke more effectually, which occasioned the story writer to chuse an higher stile fit for his subject, the Prosaicke in prose, the Poet in meetre, and the Poets was by verse exameter for his gravitie and statelinesse most allowable: neither would they intermingle him with any shorter measure, unlesse it were in matters of such qualitie, as became best to be song with the voyce, and to some musicall instrument, as were with the Greeks, all your Hymnes & *Encomia* of *Pindarus* & *Callimachus*, not very histories but a maner of historicall reportes, in which cases they made those poemes in variable measures, & coupled a short verse with a long to serve that purpose the better, and we our selves who compiled this treatise have written for pleasure a little brief *Romance* or historicall ditty in the English tong of the Isle of great *Britaine* in short and long meetres, and by breaches and divisions to be more commodiously song to the harpe in places of assembly, where the company shalbe desirous to heare of old adventures & valiaunces of noble knights in times past, as are those of king *Arthur* and his knights of the round table, Sir *Bevys of Southampton*, *Guy of Warwicke* and others like. Such as have not premonition hereof, and consideration of the causes alledged, would peradventure reprove and disgrace every *Romance*, or short historicall ditty for that they be not written in long meeters or verses *Alexandrins*, according to the nature & stile of large histories, wherein they should do wrong for they be sundry formes of poemes and not all one.

**Chap. XXXI Who in any age have bene the most commended writers in our English Poesie, and the Authors censure given upon them**

It appeareth by sundry records of bookes both printed & written, that many of our countrey men have painfully travelled in this part: of whose works some appeare to be but bare translations,

other some matters of their owne invention and very commendable, whereof some recitall shall be made in this place, to th'intent chiefly that their names should not be defrauded of such honour as seemeth due to them for having by their thankefull studies so much beautified our English tong, as at this day it will be found our nation is in nothing inferiour to the French or Italian for copie of language, subtiltie of device, good method and proportion in any forme of poeme, but that they may compare with the most, and perchance passe a great many of them. And I will not reach above the time of king *Edward* the third, and *Richard* the second for any that wrote in English meeter: because before their times by reason of the late Normane conquest, which had brought into this Realme much alteration both of our langage and lawes, and there withall a certain martiall barbarousnes, whereby the study of all good learning was so much decayd, as long time after no man or very few entended to write in any laudable science: so as beyond that time there is little or nothing worth commendation to be founde written in this arte. And those of the first age were *Chaucer* and *Gower* both of them as I suppose Knightes. After whom followed *John Lydgate* the monke of Bury, & that nameles, who wrote the *Satyre* called Piers Plowman, next him followed *Harding* the Chronicler, then in king *Henry* th'eight times *Skelton* (I wot not for what great worthines) surnamed the Poet *Laureat*. In the latter end of the same kings raigne sprong up a new company of courtly makers, of whom Sir *Thomas Wyat* th'elder & *Henry Earle* of Surrey were the two chieftaines, who having travailed into Italie, and there tasted the sweete and stately measures and stile of the Italian Poesie as novices newly crept out of the schooles of *Dante Arioste* and *Petrarch*, they greatly pollihed our rude & homely maner of vulgar Poesie, from that it had bene before, and for that cause may justly be sayd the first reformers of our English meetre and stile. In the same time or not long after was the Lord *Nicholas Vaux*, a man of much facilitie in vulgar makings. Afterward in king *Edward* the sixth's time came to be in reputation for the same facultie *Thomas Sternehold*, who first translated into English certaine Psalmes of David, and *John Heywood* the Epigrammatist who for the myrth and quicknesse of his conceits more then for any good learning was in him came to be well benefited by the king. But the principall man in this profession at the same time was Maister *Edward Ferrys* a man of no lesse mirth & felicitie that way, but of much more skil, & magnificence in his meeter, and therefore wrate for the most part to the stage, in Tragedie and sometimes in Comedie or Enterlude, wherein he gave the king so much good recreation, as he had thereby many good rewardes. In Queenes *Maries* time florished above any other Doctour *Phaer* one that was well learned & excellently well translated into English verse Heroicall certain bookes of *Virgils Aeneidos*. Since him followed Maister *Arthure Golding*, who with no lesse commendation turned into English meetre the Metamorphosis of *Ovide*, and that other Doctour, who made the supplement to those bookes of *Virgils Aeneidos*, which Maister *Phaer* left undone. And in her Majesties time that now is are sprong up an other crew of Courtly makers Noble men and Gentlemen of her Majesties owne servauntes, who have written excellently well as it would appeare if their doings could be found out and made publicke with the rest, of which number is first that noble Gentleman *Edward Earle* of Oxford. *Thomas* Lord of Bukhurst, when he was young, *Henry* Lord Paget, Sir *Philip Sidney*, Sir *Walter Rawleigh*, Maister *Edward Dyar*, Maister *Fulke Grevell*, *Gascon*, *Britton*, *Turberville* and a great many other learned Gentlemen, whose names I do not omit for envie, but to avoyde tediousnesse, and who have deserved no little commendation. But of them all particularly this is mine opinion, that *Chaucer*, with *Gower*, *Lidgat* and *Harding* for their antiquitie ought to have the first place, and *Chaucer* as the most renowned of them all, for the much learning appeareth to be in him above any of the rest. And though many of his bookes be but bare translations out of the Latin & French, yet are they wel handled, as his bookes of *Troilus* and *Cresseid*, and the Romant of the Rose, whereof he translated but one halfe, the device was *John de Mehunes* a French Poet, the Canterbury tales were *Chaucers* owne invention as I suppose, and where he sheweth more the naturall of his

pleasant wit, then in any other of his workes, his similitudes comparisons and all other descriptions are such as can not be amended. His meetre Heroicall of *Troilus* and *Cresseid* is very grave and stately, keeping the staffe of seven, and the verse of ten, his other verses of the Canterbury tales be but riding ryme, neverthelesse very well becomming the matter of that pleasaunt pilgrimage in which every mans part is playd with much decency. *Gower* saving for his good and grave moralities, had nothing in him highly to be commended, for his verse was homely and without good measure, his wordes strained much deale out of the French writers, his ryme wrested, and in his inventions small subtillitie: the applications of his moralities are the best in him, and yet those many times very grossely bestowed, neither doth the substance of his workes sufficiently aunswere the subtillitie of his titles. *Lydgat* a translatour onely and no deviser of that which he wrate, but one that wrate in good verse. *Harding* a Poet Epick or Historicall, handled himselfe well according to the time and maner of his subject. He that wrote the Satyr of Piers Ploughman, seemed to have bene a malcontent of that time, and therefore bent himselfe wholly to taxe the disorders of that age, and specially the pride of the Romane Clergy, of whose fall he seemeth to be a very true Prophet, his verse is but loose meetre, and his termes hard and obscure, so as in them is litle pleasure to be taken. *Skelton* a sharpe Satirist, but with more rayling and scoffery then became a Poet Lawreat, such among the Greekes were called *Pantomimi*, with us Buffons, altogether applying their wits to Scurrilities & other ridiculous matters. *Henry Earle* of Surrey and Sir *Thomas Wyat*, betweene whome I finde very litle diference, I repute them (as before) for the two chief lanternes of light to all others that have since employed their pennes upon English Poesie, their conceits were loftie, their stiles stately, their conveyance cleanelly, their termes proper, their meetre sweete and well proportioned, in all imitating very naturally and studiously their Maister *Francis Petrarcha*. The Lord *Vaux* his commendation lyeth chiefly in the facillitie of his meetre, and the aptnesse of his descriptions such as he taketh upon him to make, namely in sundry of his Songs, wherein he sheweth the counterfait action very lively & pleasantly. Of the later sort I thinke thus. That for Tragedie, the Lord of Buckhurst, & Maister *Edward Ferrys* for such doings as I have sene of theirs do deserve the hiest price: Th'Earle of Oxford and Maister *Edwardes* of her Majesties Chappell for Comedy and Enterlude. For Eglogue and pastorall Poesie, Sir *Philip Sydney* and Maister *Challenner*, and that other Gentleman who wrate the late shepherdes Callender. For dittie and amourous *Ode* I finde Sir *Walter Rawleyghs* vayne most loftie, insolent, and passionate. Maister *Edward Dyar*, for Elegie most sweete, solempne and of high conceit. *Gascon* for a good meeter and for a plentifull vayne. *Phaer* and *Golding* for a learned and well corrected verse, specially in translation cleare and very faithfully answering their authours intent. Others have also written with much facillitie, but more commendably perchance if they have not written so much nor so popularly. But last in recitall and first in degree is the Queene our soveraigne Lady, whose learned, delicate, noble Muse, easily surmounteth all the rest that have writte before her time or since, for sence, sweetnesse and subtillitie, be it in Ode, Elegie, Epigram, or any other kinde of poem Heroick or Lyricke, wherein it shall please her Majestie to employ her penne, even by as much oddes as her own excellent estate and degree exceedeth all the rest of her most humble vassalls.