

To The Gentlemen Students Of Both Universities.

Courteous and wise, whose judgements (not entangled with envy) enlarge the deserts of the learned by your liberal censures, vouchsafe to welcome your scholarlike shepherd with such university entertainment as either the nature of your bounty or the custom of your common civility may afford. To you he appeals that knew him *ab extrema pueritia*, whose *placet* he accounts the *plaudite* of his pains, thinking his day-labour was not altogether lavished *sine linea* if there be anything at all in it that doth *olere Atticum* in your estimate. I am not ignorant how eloquent our gowned age is grown of late, so that every mechanical mate abhorreth the English he was born to, and plucks, with a solemn periphrasis, his *ut vales* from the ink-horn, which I impute, not so much to the perfection of arts, as to the servile imitation of vainglorious tragedians, who contend not so seriously to excel in action as to embowel the clouds in a speech of comparison, thinking themselves more than initiated in poets' immortality if they but once get Boreas by the beard and the heavenly bull by the dewlap. But herein I cannot so fully bequeath them to folly as their idiot art-masters, that intrude themselves to our ears as the alchemists of eloquence, who (mounted on the stage of arrogance) think to outbrave better pens with the swelling bombast of bragging blank verse. Indeed, it may be the engrafted overflow of some kill-cow conceit that overcloyeth their imagination with a more than drunken resolution (being not extemporal in the invention of any other means to vent their manhood) commits the digestion of their choleric encumbrances to the spacious volubility of a drumming decasyllabon. 'Mongst this kind of men that repose eternity in the mouth of a player, I can but engross some deep-read schoolmen or grammarians, who, having no more learning in their skull than will serve to take up a commodity, nor art in their brain than was nourished in a serving-man's idleness, will take upon them to be the ironical censors of all, when God and poetry doth know they are the simplest of all. To leave all these to the mercy of their mother tongue, that feed on naught but the crumbs that fall from the translator's trencher, I come (sweet friend) to thy Arcadian *Menaphon*, whose attire (though not so stately, yet comely) doth entitle thee above all other to that *temperatum dicendi genus* which Tully in his *Orator* termeth true eloquence. Let other men (as they please) praise the mountain that in seven years bringeth forth a mouse, or the Italianate pen that, of a packet of pilferies, affords the press a pamphlet or two in an age, and then, in disguised array, vaunts Ovid's and Plutarch's plumes as their own, but give me the man whose extemporal vein in any humour will excel our greatest art-masters' deliberate thoughts, whose inventions, quicker than his eye, will challenge the proudest rhetorician to the contention of like perfection with like expedition.

What is he among students so simple that cannot bring forth (*tandem aliquando*) some or other thing singular, sleeping betwixt every sentence? Was it not Maro's twelve years' toil that so famed his twelve *Aeneidos*? Or Peter Ramus' sixteen years' pains that so praised his petty logic? How is it then our drooping wits should so wonder at an exquisite line that was his master's day-labour? Indeed, I must needs say the descending years from the philosophers' Athens have not been supplied with such present orators as were able in any English vein to be eloquent of their own, but either they must borrow invention of Ariosto & his countrymen, take up choice of words by exchange in Tully's *Tusculans* & the Latin historiographers' storehouses (similitudes, nay, whole sheets & tractates verbatim from the plenty of Plutarch and Pliny), and, to conclude, their whole method of writing from the liberty of comical fictions that have succeeded to our rhetoricians by a second imitation, so that well may the adage *Nil dictum quod non dictum prius* be the most judicial estimate of our latter writers. But the hunger of our unsatiate humorists being such as it is, ready to swallow all draff without difference that insinuates itself to their senses under the name of delights, employs oft-times many threadbare wits to empty their invention of their apish devices, and talk most superficially of policy, as those that never wore gown in the university, wherein they revive the old-said adage, *Sus Mineruam*, and cause the wiser to quip them with *Asinus ad lyram*. Would gentlemen and riper judgements admit my motion

of moderation in a matter of folly, I would persuade them to physic their faculties of seeing and hearing as the Sabaeans do their dulled senses with smelling, who (as Strabo reporteth), overcloyed with such odoriferous savours as the natural increase of their country (balsamum, amomum, with myrrh and frankincense) sends forth, refresh their nostrils with the unsavoury scent of the pitchy slime that Euphrates casts up, & the contagious fumes of goats' beards burned; so would I have them, being surfeited unawares with the sweet satiety of eloquence which the lavish of our copious language may procure, to use the remedy of contraries, and recreate their rebated wits, not, as they did, with the scenting of slime or goats' beards burned, but with the overseeing of that *sublime dicendi genus* which walks abroad for waste paper in each serving-man's pocket, and the otherwhile perusing of our Gothamists' barbarism; so should the opposite comparison of purity expel the infection of absurdity, and their over-racked rhetoric be the ironical recreation of the reader.

But so far discrepant is the idle usage of our unexperienced and illiterate puisnes from this prescription that a tale of Joan of Brainford's will and the unlucky frumenty will be as soon entertained into their libraries as the best poem that ever Tasso eternished, which, being the effect of an undiscerning judgement, makes dross as valuable as gold and loss as welcome as gain, the glow-worm mentioned in Aesop's *Fables*, namely the ape's folly, to be mistaken for fire, whenas, God wot, poor souls, they have naught but their toil for their heat, their pains for their sweat, and (to bring it to our English proverb) their labour for their travail. Wherein I can but resemble them to the panther, who is so greedy of men's excrements that, if they be hanged up in a vessel higher than his reach, he sooner kills himself with the overstretching of his windless body than he will cease from his intended enterprise. Oft have I observed what I now set down: a secular wit that hath lived all days of his life by *What do you lack?* to be more judicial in matters of conceit than our quadrant crepundios, that spit *ergo* in the mouth of everyone they meet; yet those and these are so affectionate to dogged detracting, as the most poisonous pasquil any dirty-mouthed Martin or Momus ever composed is gathered up with greediness before it fall to the ground, and bought at the dearest, though they smell of the fripler's lavender half a year after, for, I know not how, the mind of the meanest is fed with this folly, that they impute singularity to him that slanders privily, and count it a great piece of art in an ink-horn man, in any tapsterly terms whatsoever, to expose his superiors to envy. I will not deny but in scholarlike matters of controversy a quicker style may pass as commendable, and that a quip to an ass is as good as a goad to an ox, but when the irregular idiot that was up to the ears in divinity before ever he met with *probabile* in the university shall leave *pro & contra* before he can scarcely pronounce it, and come to correct commonweals that never heard of the name of magistrate before he came to Cambridge, it is no marvel if every ale-house vaunt the table of the world turned upside down, since the child beateth his father and the ass whippeth his master. But lest I might seem, with these night-crows, *Nimis curiosus in aliena republica*, I will turn back to my first text of studies of delight, and talk a little in friendship with a few of our trivial translators. It is a common practice now-a-days amongst a sort of shifting companions, that run through every art and thrive by none, to leave the trade of noverint whereto they were born and busy themselves with the endeavours of art, that could scarcely Latinize their neck-verse if they should have need; yet English Seneca read by candlelight yields many good sentences, as *Blood is a beggar*, and so forth, and if you entreat him fair in a frosty morning, he will afford you whole *Hamlets*, I should say handfuls, of tragical speeches. But O grief! *Tempus edax rerum*, what's that will last always? The sea exhaled by drops will in continuance be dry, and Seneca, let blood line by line and page by page, at length must needs die to our stage, which makes his famished followers to imitate the kid in *Aesop*, who, enamoured with the fox's newfangles, forsook all hopes of life to leap into a new occupation, and these men, renouncing all possibilities of credit or estimation, to intermeddle with Italian translations, wherein how poorly they have plodded (as those that are neither Provencal men, nor are able to distinguish of articles), let all indifferent gentlemen that have travailed in that tongue discern by their twopenny pamphlets. And no

marvel though their home-born mediocrity be such in this matter, for what can be hoped of those that thrust Elysium into hell, and have not learned the just measure of the horizon with an hexameter? Sufficeth them to bodge up a blank verse with *ifs* and *ands*, and otherwhile, for recreation after their candle-stuff, having starched their beards most curiously, to make a peripatetical path into the inner parts of the City, and spend two or three hours in turning over French dowdy, where they attract more infection in one minute than they can do eloquence all days of their life by conversing with any authors of like argument. But lest in this declamatory vein I should condemn all and commend none, I will propound to your learned imitation those men of import that have laboured with credit in this laudable kind of translation, in the forefront of whom I cannot but place that aged father Erasmus, that invested most of our Greek writers in the robes of the ancient Romans, in whose traces Philip Melancthon, Sadolet, Plantine, and many other reverent Germans insisting, have re-edified the ruins of our decayed libraries, and marvellously enriched the Latin tongue with the expense of their toil. Not long after, their emulation being transported into England, every private scholar, William Turner and who not, began to vent their smattering of Latin in English impressions. But amongst others in that age, Sir Thomas Elyot's elegance did sever itself from all equals, although Sir Thomas More with his comical wit at that instant was not altogether idle; yet was not knowledge fully confirmed in her monarchy amongst us till that most famous and fortunate nurse of all learning, Saint John's in Cambridge, that at that time was as an university within itself, shining so far above all other houses, halls and hospitals whatsoever, that no college in the town was able to compare with the tithe of her students, having (as I have heard grave men of credit report) more candles light in it every winter morning before four of the clock than the four of the clock bell gave strokes; till she (I say) as a pitying mother put to her helping hand and sent from her fruitful womb sufficient scholars both to support her own weal, as also to supply all other inferior foundations' defects, and namely that royal erection of Trinity College, which the university orator, in an epistle to the Duke of Somerset, aptly termed *Colonia deducta* from the suburbs of Saint John's. In which extraordinary conception, *uno partu in rempublicam prodiere*, the exchequer of eloquence, Sir John Cheke, a man of men, supernaturally traded in all tongues, Sir John Mason, Doctor Watson, Redman, Ascham, Grindal, Lever, Pilkington, all which have, either by their private readings or public works, repurged the errors of art expelled from their purity, and set before our eyes a more perfect method of study.

But how ill their precepts have prospered with our idle age, that leave the fountains of sciences to follow the rivers of knowledge, their overfraught studies with trifling compendiaries may testify, for I know not how it cometh to pass by the dotting practice of our divinity dunces, that strive to make their pupils pulpit-men before they are reconciled to Priscian, but those years which should be employed in Aristotle are expired in epitomies, and well too they may have so much catechism vacation to rake up a little refuse philosophy.

And here I could enter into a large field of invective against our abject abbreviations of arts, were it not grown to a new fashion among our nation to vaunt the pride of contraction in every manuary action, insomuch that the *paternoster*, which was wont to fill a sheet of paper, is written in the compass of a penny, whereupon one merrily affirmed that proverb to be derived, *No penny, no paternoster*. Which their nice curtailing putteth me in mind of the custom of the Scythians, who, if they had been at any time distressed with famine, took in their girdles shorter and swaddled themselves straighter to the intent, no vacuum being left in their entrails, hunger should not so much tyrannize over their stomachs; even so these men, oppressed with a greater penury of art, do pound their capacity in barren compendiums, and bound their base humours in the beggarly straits of a hungry *Analysis*, lest, longing after that *infinitum* which the poverty of their conceit cannot compass, they sooner yield up their youth to destiny than their heart to understanding.

How is it then such bungling practitioners in principles should ever profit the commonwealth by their negligent pains, who have no more cunning in logic or dialogue Latin than appertains to the literal construction of either? Nevertheless, it is daily apparent to our domestical eyes that there is none so forward to publish their imperfections, either in the trade of gloze or translations, as those that are more unlearned than ignorance, and less conceiving than infants. Yet dare I not impute absurdity to all of that society, although some of them have set their names to their simplicity. Whoever my private opinion condemneth as faulty, Master Gascoigne is not to be abridged of his deserved estimation, who first beat the path to that departure, whereto he did ascend by comparing the Italian with the English, as Tully did *Graeca cum Latinis*. Neither was Master Turberville the worst of his time, though in translating he attributed too much to the necessity of rime. And in this page of praise I cannot omit aged Arthur Golding for his industrious toil in Englishing Ovid's *Metamorphosis*, besides many other exquisite editions of divinity turned by him out of the French tongue into our own. M. Phaer likewise is not to be forgot in regard of his famous Virgil, whose heavenly verse, had it not been blemished by his haughty thoughts, England might have long insulted in his wit, and *corrigit qui potest* have been subscribed to his works. But Fortune, the mistress of change, with a pitying compassion respecting Master Stanyhurst's praise, would that Phaer should fall that he might rise, whose heroical poetry, en-fired, I should say inspired, with an hexameter fury, recalled to life whatever hissed barbarism hath been buried this C. year, and revived by his ragged quill such carterly variety as no hodge plowman in a country but would have held as the extremity of clownery, a pattern whereof I will propound to your judgements, as near as I can, being part of one of his descriptions of a tempest, which is thus:

*Then did he make heaven's vault to rebound with rounce robble hobble
Of ruff-raff roaring with thwick-thwack thurlery bouncing.*

Which strange language of the firmament, never subject before to our common phrase, makes us that are not used to terminate heaven's moving in the accents of any voice, esteem of their triobolar interpreter as of some thrasonical huff-snuff, for so terrible was his style to all mild ears as would have affrighted our peaceable poets from intermeddling hereafter with that quarrelling kind of verse, had not sweet Master Fraunce, by his excellent translation of Master Thomas Watson's sugared *Amintas*, animated their dulled spirits to such high-witted endeavours. But, I know not how, their over-timorous cowardice hath stood in awe of envy, that no man since him durst imitate any of the worst of these Roman wonders in English, which makes me think that either the lovers of mediocrity are very many, or that the number of good poets are very small, and, in truth (Master Watson except, whom I mentioned before), I know not almost any of late days that hath showed himself singular in any special Latin poem, whose *Amyntas*, and translated *Antigone*, may march in equipage of honour with any of our ancient poets. I will not say but we had a Haddon, whose pen would have challenged the laurel from Homer, together with Carr, that came as near him as Virgil to Theocritus. But Thomas Newton with his *Leland*, and Gabriel Harvey, with two or three other, is almost all the store that is left us at this hour. Epitaphers and position poets we have more than a good many, that swarm like crows to a dead carcass, but fly, like swallows in the winter, from any continue subject of wit.

The efficient whereof I imagine to issue from the upstart discipline of our reformatory churchmen, who account wit vanity, and poetry impiety, whose error, although the necessity of philosophy might confute, which lies couched most closely under dark fables' profundity, yet I had rather refer it as a disputative plea to divines than set it down as a determinate position in my unexperienced opinion. But however their dissentious judgements should decree in their afternoon sessions of *an sit*, the private truth of my discovered creed in this controversy is this, that as that beast was thought scarce worthy to be sacrificed to the Egyptian Epaphus who had not some or other black spot on his skin, so I deem him far

unworthy the name of a scholar, and so, consequently, to sacrifice his endeavours to art, that is not a poet either in whole or in part.

And here, peradventure, some desperate quipper will canvass my proposed comparison *Plus ultra*, reconciling the allusion of the black spot to the black-pot which maketh our poets' undermeal muses so mutinous, as every stanza they pen after dinner is full-pointed with a stab. Which their dagger drunkenness, although it might be excused with *Tam Marti, quam Mercurio*, yet will I cover it as well as I may with that proverbial *foecundi calices*, that might well have been door-keeper to the can of Silenus, when, nodding on his ass trapped with ivy, he made his moist nose-cloth the pausing *intermedium* twixt every nap. Let frugal scholars and fine-fingered novices take their drink by the ounce and their wine by the halfpennyworths, but it is for a poet to examine the pottle-pots, and gauge the bottom of whole gallons, *Qui bene vult poiein, debet anti pinein*. A pot of blue-burning ale with a fiery-flaming toast is as good as Pallas with the nine muses on Parnassus' top, without the which, in vain they may cry, *O thou, my muse, inspire me with some pen*, when they want certain liquid sacrifice to rouse her forth her den.

Pardon me (gentlemen) though somewhat merrily I glance at their immoderate folly who affirm that no man writes with conceit except he take counsel of the cup, nor would I have you think that *Theonino dente*, I arm my style against all, since I do know the moderation of many gentlemen of that study to be so far from infamy as their verse from equality, whose sufficiency, were it as well seen into by those of higher place as it wanders abroad unrewarded in the mouths of ungrateful monsters, no doubt but the remembrance of Maecenas' liberality extended to Maro and men of like quality would have left no memory to that proverb of poverty, *Si nihil attuleris, ibis Homere foras*. Tush, say our English Italians, the finest wits our climate sends forth are but dry-brained dolts in comparison of other countries, whom, if you interrupt with *redde rationem*, they will tell you of Petrarch, Tasso, Celiano, with an infinite number of others, to whom, if I should oppose Chaucer, Lydgate, Gower, with suchlike that lived under the tyranny of ignorance, I do think their best lovers would be much discontented with the collation of contraries, if I should write over all their heads, *Hail fellow well met*. One thing I am sure of, that these three have vaunted their metres with as much admiration in English as ever the proudest Ariosto did his verse in Italian.

What should I come to our court, where the otherwhile vacations of our graver nobility are prodigal of more pompous wit and choice of words than ever tragic Tasso could attain to? But as for pastoral poems, I will not make the comparison, lest our countrymen's credit should be discountenanced by the contention, who, although they cannot fare with such inferior facility, yet I know would carry the bucklers full easily from all foreign bravers if their *subiectum circa quod* should savour of anything haughty. And should the challenge of deep conceit be intruded by any foreigner to bring our English wits to the touchstone of art, I would prefer divine Master Spenser, the miracle of wit, to bandy line by line for my life in the honour of England against Spain, France, Italy and all the world. Neither is he the only swallow of our summer (although Apollo, if his tripos were up again, would pronounce him his Socrates), but he being forborne, there are extant about London many most able men to revive poetry, though it were executed ten thousand times, as in Plato's, so in Puritans', commonwealth, as, namely, for example, Matthew Roydon, Thomas Achlow, and George Peele, the first of whom, as he hath showed himself singular in the immortal epitaph of his beloved Astrophel, besides many other most absolute comic inventions (made more public by every man's praise than they can be by my speech), so the second hath more than once or twice manifested his deep-witted scholarship in places of credit, and for the last, though not the least of them all, I dare commend him unto all that know him as the chief supporter of pleasance now living, the Atlas of poetry, and *primus verborum artifex*, whose first increase, *The Arraignment of Paris*, might plead to your opinions his pregnant

dexterity of wit and manifold variety of invention, wherein (*me iudice*) he goeth a step beyond all that writ. Sundry other sweet gentlemen I do know that have vaunted their pens in private devices, and tricked up a company of taffety fools with their feathers whose beauty, if our poets had not pieced with the supply of their periwigs, they might have anticked it until this time up and down the country with the King of Fairies, and dined every day at the pease-porridge ordinary with Delphrigus.

But Tolosa hath forgotten that it was sometime sacked, and beggars that ever they carried their fardels on footback, and in truth no marvel, whenas the deserved reputation of one Roscius is of force to enrich a rabble of counterfeits. Yet let subjects for all their insolence dedicate a *De profundis* every morning to the preservation of their Caesar, lest their increasing indignities return them ere long to their juggling and mediocrity, and they bewail in weeping blanks the wane of their monarchy.

As poetry hath been honoured in those her forenamed professors, so it hath not been any whit disparaged by William Warner's absolute *Albions*. And here authority hath made a full point, in which reverence insisting, I cease to expose to your sport the picture of those pamphleters and poets that make a patrimony of *In speech*, and more than a younger brother's inheritance of their Absey. Read favourably to encourage me in the firstlings of my folly, and persuade yourselves I will persecute those idiots and their heirs unto the third generation, that have made art bankrupt of her ornaments, and sent poetry a-begging up and down the country. It may be, my *Anatomy of Absurdities* may acquaint you ere long with my skill in surgery, wherein the diseases of art more merrily discovered may make our maimed poets put together their blanks unto the building of an hospital.

If you chance to meet it in Paul's, shaped in a new suit of similitudes, as if, like the eloquent apprentice of Plutarch, it were propped at seven years' end in double apparel, think his master hath fulfilled covenants, and only cancelled the indentures of duty. If I please, I will think my ignorance indebted unto you that applaud it; if not, what rests, but that I be excluded from your courtesy, like apocrypha from your Bibles?

However, yours ever, Thomas Nashe.