

SUMMARY: In this section of Francis Meres' *Palladis Tamia*, published in 1598, Oxford is named among those English poets who are 'best for tragedy'.

A COMPARATIVE DISCOURSE OF OUR ENGLISH POETS
WITH THE GREEK, LATIN, AND ITALIAN POETS

As Greece had three poets of great antiquity, Orpheus, Linus and Musaeus, and Italy other three ancient poets, Livius Andronicus, Ennius & Plautus, so hath England three ancient poets, Chaucer, Gower, and Lydgate.

As Homer is reputed the prince of Greek poets, and Petrarch of Italian poets, so Chaucer is accounted the god of English poets.

As Homer was the first that adorned the Greek tongue with true quantity, so Piers Plowman was the first that observed the true quantity of our verse without the curiosity of rime.

Ovid writ a chronicle from the beginning of the world to his own time, that is, to the reign of Augustus the emperor; so hath Hardyng the chronicler (after his manner of old harsh riming) from Adam to his time, that is, to the reign of King Edward the Fourth.

As Sotades Maronites the iambic poet gave himself wholly to write impure and lascivious things, so Skelton (I know not for what great worthiness surnamed the poet laureate) applied his wit to scurrilities and ridiculous matters; such among the Greeks were called *pantomimi*, with us, buffons.

As Consalvo Periz, that excellent learned man and secretary to King Philip of Spain, in translating the Ulysses of Homer out of Greek into Spanish, hath by good judgement avoided the fault of riming, although not fully hit perfect and true versifying, so hath Henry Howard, that true and noble Earl of Surrey, in translating the fourth book of Virgil's Aeneas, whom Michael Drayton in his England's Heroical Epistles hath eternized for an epistle to his fair Geraldine.

As these neoterics Jovianus Pontanus, Politianus, Marullus Tarchaniota, the two Strozae, the father and the son, Palingenius, Mantuanus, Philelphus, Quintianus Stoa and Germanus Brixius have obtained renown and good place among the ancient Latin poets, so also these Englishmen, being Latin poets, Walter Haddon, Nicholas Carr, Gabriel Harvey, Christopher Ocland, Thomas Newton with his Leyland, Thomas Watson, Thomas Campion, Brownsward & Willey, have attained good report and honourable advancement in the Latin empire.

As the Greek tongue is made famous and eloquent by Homer, Hesiod, Euripides, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Pindarus, Phocylides and Aristophanes, and the Latin tongue by Virgil, Ovid, Horace, Silius Italicus, Lucanus, Lucretius, Ausonius and Claudianus, so the English tongue is mightily enriched and gorgeously invested in rare ornaments and resplendent habiliments by Sir Philip Sidney, Spenser, Daniel, Drayton, Warner, Shakespeare, Marlowe and Chapman.

As Xenophon, who did imitate so excellently as to give us *effigiem iusti imperij* the portraiture of a just empire under the name of Cyrus (as Cicero saith of him) made therein an absolute heroical poem, and as Heliodorus writ in prose his sugared invention of that picture of love in Theagenes and Chariclea, and yet both excellent admired poets, so Sir

Philip Sidney writ his immortal poem, The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia, in prose, and yet our rarest poet.

As Sextus Propertius said, *Nescio quid magis nascitur Iliade*, so I say of Spenser's Faerie Queen. I know not what more excellent or exquisite poem may be written.

As Achilles had the advantage of Hector because it was his fortune to be extolled and renowned by the heavenly verse of Homer, so Spenser's Elisa, the Faerie Queen, hath the advantage of all the queens in the world to be eternized by so divine a poet.

As Theocritus is famed for his Idyllia in Greek, and Virgil for his Eclogues in Latin, so Spenser, their imitator in his Shepherds' Calendar, is renowned for the like argument, and honoured for fine poetical invention and most exquisite wit.

As Parthenius Nicaeus excellently sung the praises of his Arete, so Daniel hath divinely sonnetted the matchless beauty of his Delia.

As everyone mourneth when he heareth of the lamentable plangors of Thracian Orpheus for his dearest Eurydice, so everyone passionateth when he readeth the afflicted death of Daniel's distressed Rosamond.

As Lucan hath mournfully depainted the civil wars of Pompey & Caesar, so hath Daniel the civil wars of York and Lancaster, and Drayton the civil wars of Edward the Second and the barons.

As Virgil doth imitate Catullus in the like matter of Ariadne for his story of Queen Dido, so Michael Drayton doth imitate Ovid in his England's Heroical Epistles.

As Sophocles was called a bee for the sweetness of his tongue, so in Charles Fitzgeffrey's Drake, Drayton is termed *golden-mouthed* for the purity and preciousness of his style and phrase.

As Accius, M. Attilius and Milithus were called *tragoediographi* because they writ tragedies, so may we truly term Michael Drayton *tragoediographus* for his passionate penning the downfalls of valiant Robert of Normandy, chaste Matilda, and great Gaveston.

As Ioan. Honterus in Latin verse writ 3 books of cosmography with geographical tables, so Michael Drayton is now in penning in English verse a poem called Polu-olbion Geographical and Hydrographical of all the forests, woods, mountains, fountains, rivers, lakes, floods, baths and springs that be in England.

As Aulus Persius Flaccus is reported among all writers to be of an honest life and upright conversation, so Michael Drayton (*quem toties honoris & amoris causa nomino*) among scholars, soldiers, poets and all sorts of people is held for a man of virtuous disposition, honest conversation, and well-governed carriage, which is almost miraculous among good wits in these declining and corrupt times, when there is nothing but roguery in villainous man, & when cheating and craftiness is counted the cleanest wit and soundest wisdom.

As Decius Ausonius Gallus in *Libris Fastorum* penned the occurrences of the world from the first creation of it to his time, that is, to the reign of the emperor Gratian, so Warner in his absolute Albions England hath most admirably penned the history of his own country from Noah to his time, that is, to the reign of Queen Elizabeth; I have heard him termed, of the best wits of both our universities, our English Homer.

As Euripides is the most sententious among the Greek poets, so is Warner among our English poets.

As the soul of Euphorbus was thought to live in Pythagorus, so the sweet, witty soul of Ovid lives in mellifluous & honey-tongued Shakespeare, witness his Venus and Adonis, his Lucrece, his sugared sonnets among his private friends, etc.

As Plautus and Seneca are accounted the best for comedy and tragedy among the Latins, so Shakespeare among the English is the most excellent in both kinds for the stage; for comedy, witness his Gentlemen of Verona, his Errors, his Love Labours Lost, his Love Labours Won, his Midsummer's Night Dream, & his Merchant of Venice; for tragedy, his Richard the 2, Richard the 3, Henry the 4, King John, Titus Andronicus, and his Romeo and Juliet.

As Epilus Stolo said that the muses would speak with Plautus' tongue if they would speak Latin, so I say that the muses would speak with Shakespeare's fine-filed phrase if they would speak English.

As Musaeus, who wrote the love of Hero and Leander, had two excellent scholars, Thamyras & Hercules, so hath he in England two excellent poets, imitators of him in the same argument and subject, Christopher Marlowe and George Chapman.

As Ovid saith of his work:

*Iamq' opus exegi, quod nec Iouis ira, nec ignis
Nec poterit ferrum, nec edax abolere vetustas.*

And as Horace saith of his:

*Exegi monumentum aere perennius; Regalique situ pyramidum altius; Quod non imber
edax; Non Aquilo impotens, possit diruere; aut innumerabilis annorum series & fuga
temporum:* so say I severally of Sir Philip Sidney's, Spenser's, Daniel's, Drayton's, Shakespeare's, and Warner's works:

*Non Iouis ira: imbres: Mars: ferrum; flamma, senectus,
Hoc opus unda: lues: turbo: venena ruent.
Et quanquam ad plucherrimum hoc opus euertendum tres illi Dij conspirabunt, Cronus,
Vulcanus, & pater ipse gentis;
Non tamen annorum series, non flamma, nec ensis,
Aeternum potuit hoc abolere Decus.*

As Italy had Dante, Boccace, Petrarch, Tasso, Celiano and Ariosto, so England had Matthew Roydon, Thomas Atchelov, Thomas Watson, Thomas Kyd, Robert Greene & George Peele.

As there are eight famous and chief languages, Hebrew, Greek, Latin, Syriac, Arabic, Italian, Spanish and French, so there are eight notable several kinds of poets, heroic, lyric, tragic, comic, satiric, iambic, elegaic & pastoral.

As Homer and Virgil among the Greeks and Latins are the chief heroic poets, so Spenser and Warner be our chief heroical makers.

As Pindarus, Anacreon and Callimachus among the Greeks, and Horace and Catullus among the Latins are the best lyric poets, so in this faculty the best among our poets are Spenser (who excelleth in all kinds), Daniel, Drayton, Shakespeare, Breton.

As these tragic poets flourished in Greece, Aeschylus, Euripides, Sophocles, Alexander Aetolus, Achaeus Erithriaeus, Astydamas Atheniensis, Apollodorus Tarsensis, Nicomachus Phrygius, Thespis Atticus, and Timon Apolloniates, and these among the Latins, Accius, M. Attilius, Pomponius Secundus and Seneca, so these are our best for tragedy, the Lord Buckhurst, Doctor Legge of Cambridge, Doctor Edes of Oxford, Master Edward Ferris, the author of the *Mirror for Magistrates*, Marlowe, Peele, Watson, Kyd, Shakespeare, Drayton, Chapman, Dekker, and Benjamin Johnson.

As M. Anneus Lucanus writ two excellent tragedies, one called *Medea*, the other *De Incendio Troiae cum Priami calamitate*, so Doctor Legge hath penned two famous tragedies, the one of Richard the 3, the other of the destruction of Jerusalem.

The best poets for comedy among the Greeks are these, Menander, Aristophanes, Eupolis Atheniensis, Alexis Terius, Nicostratus, Amipsias Atheniensis, Anaxandrides Rhodius, Aristonymus, Archippus Atheniensis and Callias Atheniensis, and among the Latins, Plautus, Terence, Naevius, Sext. Turpilius, Licinius Imbrex, and Virgilius Romanus, so the best for comedy amongst us be Edward, Earl of Oxford, Doctor Gager of Oxford, Master Rowley, once a rare scholar of learned Pembroke Hall in Cambridge, Master Edwards, one of her Majesty's Chapel, eloquent and witty John Lyly, Lodge, Gascoigne, Greene, Shakespeare, Thomas Nash, Thomas Heywood, Anthony Munday, our best plotter, Chapman, Porter, Wilson, Hathway, and Henry Chettle.

As Horace, Lucilius, Juvenal, Persius & Lucullus are the best for satire among the Latins, so with us in the same faculty these are chief, Piers Plowman, Lodge, Hall of Emmanuel College in Cambridge, the author of *Pygmalion's Image* and *Certain Satires*, the author of *Skialetheia*.

Among the Greeks I will name but two for iambics, Archilochus Parius, and Hipponax Ephesius; so amongst us I name but two iambical poets, Gabriel Harvey and Richard Stanyhurst, because I have seen no mo in this kind.

As these are famous among the Greeks for elegy, Melanthus, Mymnerus Colophonius, Olympius Mysius, Parthenius Nicaeus, Philetas Cous, Theogenes Megarensis, and Pigres Halicarnassaeus, and these among the Latins, Mecaenas, Ovid, Tibullus, Propertius, T. Valgius, Cassius Severus & Clodius Sabinus, so these are the most passionate among us to bewail and bemoan the perplexities of love, Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, Sir Thomas Wyatt the elder, Sir Francis Bryan, Sir Philip Sidney, Sir Walter Raleigh, Sir Edward Dyer, Spenser, Daniel, Drayton, Shakespeare, Whetstone, Gascoigne, Samuel Page, sometimes fellow of Corpus Christi College in Oxford, Churchyard, Breton.

As Theocritus in Greek, Virgil and Mantuan in Latin, Sannazar in Italian, and the author of *Amyntae Gaudia* and *Walsingham's Meliboeus* are the best for pastoral, so amongst us the best in this kind are Sir Philip Sidney, Master Chaloner, Spenser, Stephen Gosson, Abraham Fraunce, and Barnfield.

These and many other epigrammatists the Latin tongue hath, Q. Catullus, Portius Licinius, Quintus Cornificius, Martial, Cn. Getulicus, and witty Sir Thomas More; so in English we have these, Heywood, Drant, Kendal, Bastard, Davies.

As noble Mecaenas that sprung from the Etruscan kings not only graced poets by his bounty but also by being a poet himself, and as James the 6, now king of Scotland, is not only a favourer of poets but a poet, as my friend Master Richard Barnfield hath in this distich passing well recorded:

*The King of Scots now living is a poet,
As his Lepanto and his furies show it,*

So Elizabeth, our dread sovereign and gracious queen, is not only a liberal patron unto poets but an excellent poet herself, whose learned, delicate and noble muse surmounteth, be it in ode, elegy, epigram or in any other kind of poem heroic or lyric.

Octavia, sister unto Augustus the emperor, was exceeding bountiful unto Virgil, who gave him, for making 26 verses, 1137 pounds, to wit, ten sesterces for every verse, which amount to above 43 pounds for every verse; so learned Mary, the honourable Countess of Pembroke, the noble sister of immortal Sir Philip Sidney, is very liberal unto poets; besides she is a most delicate poet, of whom I may say, as Antipater Sidonius writeth of Sappho:

*Dulcia Mnemosyne demirans carmina Sapphus,
Quaesivit decima Pieris unde foret.*

Among others in times past, poets had these favourers, Augustus, Mecaenas, Sophocles, Germanicus, an emperor, a nobleman, a senator, and a captain, so of latter times poets have these patrons, Robert, King of Sicil, the great King Francis of France, King James of Scotland, & Queen Elizabeth of England.

As in former times two great cardinals, Bembus & Biena, did countenance poets, so of late years two great preachers have given them their right hands in fellowship, Beza and Melancthon.

As the learned philosophers Fracastorius and Scaliger have highly prized them, so have the eloquent orators Pontanus and Muretus very gloriously estimated them.

As Georgius Buchananus' Jephthe amongst all modern tragedies is able to abide the touch of Aristotle's precepts and Euripides' examples, so is Bishop Watson's Absolam.

As Terence for his translations out of Apollodorus & Menander, and Aquilius for his translation out of Menander, and C. Germanicus Augustus for his out of Aratus, and Ausonius for his translated Epigrams out of Greek, and Doctor Johnson for his Frog-fight out of Homer, and Watson for his Antigone out of Sophocles, have got good commendations, so these versifiers for their learned translations are of good note among us, Phaer for Virgil's Aeneads, Golding for Ovid's Metamorphosis, Harington for his Orlando Furioso, the translators of Seneca's tragedies, Barnabe Googe for Palingenius, Turberville for Ovid's Epistles and Mantuan, and Chapman for his inchoate Homer.

As the Latins have these emblematisers, Andreas Alciatus, Reusnerus, and Sambucus, so we have these, Geoffrey Whitney, Andrew Willet, and Thomas Combe.

As Nonnus Panoplyta write the gospel of Saint John in Greek hexameters, so Gervase Markham hath written Solomon's canticles in English verse.

As C. Plinius writ the life of Pomponius Secundus, so young Charles Fitzgeffrey, that high towering falcon, hath most gloriously penned the honourable life and death of worthy Sir Francis Drake.

As Hesiod write learnedly of husbandry in Greek, so hath Tusser very wittily and experimentally written of it in English.

As Antipater Sidonius was famous for extemporal verse in Greek, and Ovid for his *Quicquid conabar dicere versus erat*, so was our Tarleton, of whom Doctor Case, that learned physician, thus speaketh in the seventh book & seventeenth chapter of his Politics: *Aristoteles suum Theodoretum laudauit quendam peritum Tragoediarum actorem; Cicero suum Roscium: nos Angli Tarletonum, in cuius voce & vultu omnes iocosi affectus, in cuius cerebroso capite lepidae facetiae habitant.* And so is now our witty Wilson, who, for learning and extemporal wit in this faculty is without compare or compeer, as to his great and eternal commendations he manifested in his challenge at the Swan on the Bankside.

As Achilles tortured the dead body of Hector, and as Antonius and his wife Fulvia tormented the lifeless corps of Cicero, so Gabriel Harvey hath showed the same inhumanity to Greene, that lies full low in his grave.

As Eupolis of Athens used great liberty in taxing the vices of men, so doth Thomas Nashe, witness the brood of the Harveys.

As Actaeon was worried of his own hounds, so is Tom Nashe of his Isle of Dogs. Dogs were the death of Euripides, but be not disconsolate, gallant young Juvenal; Linus, the son of Apollo died the same death. Yet God forbid that so brave a wit should so basely perish; thine are but paper dogs; neither is thy banishment like Ovid's, eternally to converse with the barbarous Getes. Therefore comfort thyself, sweet Tom, with Cicero's glorious return to Rome, & with the counsel Aeneas gives to his sea-beaten soldiers, lib. I. Aeneid:

*Pluck up thine heart, & drive from thence both fear and care away,
To think on this may pleasure be perhaps another day.
Durato, & temet rebus seruato secundis.*

As Anacreon died by the pot, so George Peele by the pox.

As Archesilaus Prytanaeus perished by wine at a drunken feast, as Hermippus testifieth in Diogenes, so Robert Greene died of a surfeit taken at pickled herrings & Rhenish wine, as witnesseth Thomas Nashe, who was at the fatal banquet.

As Jodelle, a French tragical poet, being an epicure and an atheist, made a pitiful end, so our tragical poet Marlowe for his epicurism and atheism had a tragical death; you may read of this Marlowe more at large in the Theatre of God's Judgements, in the 25 chapter entreating of epicures and atheists.

As the poet Lycophron was shot to death by a certain rival of his, so Christopher Marlowe was stabbed to death by a bawdy serving-man, a rival of his in his lewd love.