

SUMMARY: In chapter 31 of *The Art of English Poesy* published in 1589 and attributed to George Puttenham, Oxford is named among court poets who have written 'excellently well', and is said to deserve 'the highest prize' for comedy and interlude. In chapter 19 an example of Oxford's use of the rhetorical figure *antiphora* or 'response' is quoted. In chapter 22 an example of his verse is quoted without attribution to illustrate the rhetorical figure *soraismus*.

CHAPTER XXXI

Who in any age have been the most commended writers in our English poesy, and the author's censure given upon them

IT APPEARETH by sundry records of books both printed & written that many of our countrymen have painfully travailed in this part, of whose works some appear to be but bare translations, other some, matters of their own invention and very commendable, whereof some recital 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 thankful studies so much beautified our English tongue as at this day it will be found our nation is in nothing inferior to the French or Italian for copy of language, subtilty of device, good method and proportion in any form of poem, but that they may compare with the most, and perchance pass 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 metre because before their times by reason of the late Norman conquest which had brought into this realm much alteration both of our language and laws and therewithal a certain martial barbarousness whereby the study of all good learning was so much decayed as long time after no man, or very few, intended to write in any laudable science, so as beyond that time there is little or nothing worth commendation to be found written in this art. And those of the first age were Chaucer and Gower, both of them, as I suppose, knights. After whom followed John Lydgate, the monk of Bury, & that nameless who wrote the satire called *Piers Plowman*; next him followed Hardyng the chronicler; then, in King Henry th' Eighth's times, Skelton (I wot not for what great worthiness) surnamed the poet laureate. In the latter end of the same king's reign sprung up a new company of courtly makers of whom Sir Thomas Wyatt th' elder & Henry, Earl of Surrey, were the two chieftains, who having travelled into Italy and there tasted the sweet and stately measures and style of the Italian poesy, as novices newly crept out of the schools of Dante, Ariosto, and Petrarch they greatly polished our rude & homely manner of vulgar poesy from that it had been before, and for that cause may justly be said the first reformers of our English metre and style. In the same time or not long after was the Lord Nicholas Vaux, a man of much facility in vulgar makings. Afterward in King Edward the Sixth's time came to be in reputation for the same faculty Thomas Sternhold, who first translated into English certain psalms of David, and John Heywood, the epigrammatist, who for the mirth and quickness of his conceits more than for any good learning was in him came to be well benefited by the king. But the principal man in this profession at the same time was Master Edward [sic?] Ferrers, a man of no less mirth & felicity that way but of much more skill & magnificence in his metre, and therefore wrate for the most part to the stage in tragedy and sometimes in comedy or interlude, wherein he gave the king so much good recreation as he had thereby many good rewards. In Queen's Mary's time flourished above any other Doctor Phaer, one that was well learned & excellently well translated into English verse heroical certain books of Virgil's *Aeneidos*. Since him followed Master Arthur Golding, who with no less commendation turned into English metre the *Metamorphosis* of Ovid, and that other doctor who made the supplement

to those books of Virgil's Aeneidos which Master Phaer left undone. And in her Majesty's time that now is are sprung up another crew of courtly makers, noblemen and gentlemen of her Majesty's own servants who have written excellently well, as it would appear if their doings could be found out and made public with the rest, of which number is first that noble gentleman Edward, Earl of Oxford. Thomas, Lord of Buckhurst, when he was young, Henry, Lord Paget, Sir Philip Sidney, Sir Walter Raleigh, Master Edward Dyer, Master Fulke Greville, Gascoigne, Bretton, Turberville, and a great many other learned gentlemen whose names I do not omit for envy but to avoid tediousness, and who have deserved no little commendation. But of them all particularly this is mine opinion, that Chaucer, with Gower, Lydgate, and Hardyng, for their antiquity 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 books be but bare translations out of the Latin & French, yet are they well handled, as his books of Troilus and Cressid and the Romaunt of the Rose whereof he translated but one half (the device was John de Mehune's, a French poet); the Canterbury Tales were Chaucer's own invention, as I suppose, and where he showeth more the natural of his pleasant wit than in any other of his works; his similitudes, comparisons, and all other descriptions are such as cannot be amended. His metre heroical of Troilus and Cressid is very grave and stately, keeping the staff of seven and the verse of ten; his other verses of The Canterbury Tales be but riding rime, nevertheless very well becoming the matter of that pleasant pilgrimage, in which every man's part is played 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 words strained much deal out of French writers, his rime wrested, and in his inventions small subtilty; the applications of his moralities are the best in him, and yet those many times very grossly bestowed, neither doth the substance of his works sufficiently answer the subtilty of his titles. Lydgate a translator only, and no deviser of that which he wrate, but one that wrate in good verse. Hardyng, a poet epic or historical, handled himself well according to the time and manner of his subject. He that wrote the satire of Piers Plowman seemed to have been a malcontent of that time, and therefore bent himself wholly to tax the disorders of that age, and specially the pride of the Roman clergy of whose fall he seemeth to be a very true prophet; his verse is but loose metre and his terms hard and obscure, so as in them is little pleasure to be taken. Skelton a sharp satirist but with more railing and scoffery than became a poet laureate; such among the Greeks were called *pantomimi*, with us, buffoons, altogether applying their wits to scurrilities & other ridiculous matters. Henry, Earl of Surrey, and Sir Thomas Wyatt, between whom I find very little difference, I repute them (as before) for the two chief lanterns of light to all others that have since employed their pens upon English poesy; their conceits were lofty, their styles stately, their conveyance cleanly, their terms proper, their metre sweet and well-proportioned, in all imitating very naturally and studiously their master, Francis Petrarca. The Lord Vaux his commendation lieth chiefly in the facility of his metre and the aptness of his descriptions such as he taketh upon him to make, namely in sundry of his songs, wherein he showeth the counterfeit action very lively & pleasantly. Of the later sort I think thus. That for tragedy the Lord of Buckhurst & Master Edward [sic?] Ferrers, for such doings as I have seen of theirs do deserve the highest prize, th' Earl of Oxford and Master Edwards of her Majesty's Chapel for comedy and interlude. For eclogue and pastoral poesy, Sir Philip Sidney and Master Chaloner, and that other gentleman who wrate the late Shepherd's Calendar. For ditty and amorous ode I find Sir Walter Raleigh's vein most lofty, insolent, and passionate. Master Edward Dyer for elegy most sweet, solemn, and of high conceit. Gascoigne for a good metre and for a plentiful vein. Phaer and Golding for a learned and well-corrected verse, specially in translation clear and very faithfully answering their author's intent. Others have also written with much facility, but more commendably perchance if they had not written so much nor so popularly. But last in recital and first in degree is the Queen, our Sovereign Lady, whose learned, delicate, noble muse easily surmounteth all the rest that have written before her time or since for sense, sweetness, and subtilty, be it in ode, elegy, epigram, or any other kind of

poem heroic or lyric wherein it shall please her Majesty to employ her pen, even by as much odds as her own excellent estate and degree exceedeth all the rest of her most humble vassals.

CHAPTER XIX

EDWARD, EARL OF OXFORD, a most noble & learned gentleman made in this figure of response an emblem of desire otherwise called Cupid, which for his excellency and wit I set down some part of the verses for example:

When wert thou born, desire?
In pomp and prime of May,
By whom, sweet boy, wert thou begot?
By good conceit, men say.
Tell me, who was thy nurse?
Fresh youth in sugared joy.
What was thy meat and daily food?
Sad sighs, with great annoy.
What hadst thou then to drink?
Unfeigned lover's tears.
What cradle wert thou rocked in?
In hope devoid of fears.

CHAPTER XXXI

ANOTHER OF YOUR intolerable vices is that which the Greeks call *soraismus*, & we may call the mingle mangle, as when we make our speech or writings of sundry languages, using some Italian word, or French, or Spanish, or Dutch, or Scottish, not for the nonce or for any purpose (which were in part excusable), but ignorantly and affectedly, as one that said using this French word *Roy* to make rime with another verse thus:

O mighty lord of love, dame Venus' only joy,
Whose princely power exceeds each other heavenly roy.