

Linguistics and poetry

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Tempus adest plausus, aurea pompa venit, so ends the scene of idiots, and enter Astrophel in pomp.

Gentlemen, that have seen a thousand lines of folly drawn forth ex uno puncto impudentiae, & two famous mountains to go to the conception of one mouse, that have had your ears deafened with the echo of Fame's brazen towers, when only they have been touched with a leaden pen, that have seen Pan sitting in his bower of delights, & a number of Midases to admire his miserable hornpipes, let not your surfeited sight, new come from such puppet play, think scorn to turn aside into this theatre of pleasure, for here you shall find a paper stage strewed with pearl, an artificial heaven to overshadow the fair frame, & crystal walls to encounter your curious eyes, whiles the tragi-comedy of love is performed by starlight. The chief actor here is Melpomene, whose dusky robes, dipped in the ink of tears, as yet seem to drop when I view them near. The argument, cruel chastity; the prologue, hope; the epilogue, despair; Videte, queso, et linguis animisque fauete.

And here, peradventure, my witless youth may be taxed with a margent note of presumption for offering to put up any motion of applause in the behalf of so excellent a poet (the least syllable of whose name, sounded in the ears of judgement, is able to give the meanest line he writes a dowry of immortality), yet those that observe how jewels oftentimes come to their hands that know not their value, & that the coxcombs of our days, like Aesop's cock, had rather have a barley-kernel wrapped up in a ballad than they will dig for the wealth of wit in any ground that they know not, I hope will also hold me excused, though I open the gate to his glory, & invite idle

ears to the admiration of his melancholy. Quid petitur sacris nisi tantum fama poetis?

Which although it be oftentimes imprisoned in ladies' casks & the precedent books of such as cannot see without another man's spectacles, yet at length it breaks forth in spite of his keepers, and useth some private pen (instead of a picklock) to procure his violent enlargement. The sun for a time may mask his golden head in a cloud, yet in the end the thick veil doth vanish, and his embellished blandishment appears. Long hath Astrophel (England's sun) withheld the beams of his spirit from the common view of our dark sense, and night hath hovered over the gardens of the nine sisters, while ignis fatuus and gross fatty flames (such as commonly arise out of dunghills) have took occasion, in the midst eclipse of his shining perfections, to wander abroad with a wisp of paper at their tails like hobgoblins, and lead men up and down in a circle of absurdity a whole week, and never know where they are.

But now that cloud of sorrow is dissolved which fiery love exhaled from his dewy hair, and affection hath unburdened the labouring streams of her womb in the low cistern of his grave; the night hath resigned her jetty throne unto Lucifer, and clear daylight possesseth the sky that was dimmed; wherefore break off your dance, you fairies and elves, and from the fields with the torn carcasses of your timbrels, for your kingdom is expired. Put out your rush candles, you poets and rimers, and bequeath your crazed quartorzains to the chandlers, for lo, here he cometh that hath broken your legs. Apollo hath resigned his ivory harp unto Astrophel, & he, like Mercury, must lull you.

Dear Astrophel, that in the ashes of thy love livest again like the phoenix; O, might thy body (as thy name) live again likewise here amongst us, but the earth, the mother of mortality, hath snatched thee too soon into her chilled cold arms, and will not let thee by any means be drawn from her deadly embrace, and thy divine soul, carried on an angel's wings to heaven, is installed in Hermes' place, sole prolocutor to the gods. Therefore mayest though never return from the Elysian fields like Orpheus; therefore must we ever mourn for our Orpheus. Fain would a second spring of passion here spend itself on his sweet remembrance, but religion, that rebuketh profane lamentation, drinks in the rivers of those despairful tears which langorous ruth hath outwelled, & bids me look back to the house of honour where, from one & the selfsame root of renown, I shall find many goodly branches derived, & such as, with the spreading increase of their virtues, may somewhat overshadow the grief of his loss. Amongst the which, fair sister of Phoebus eloquent secretary to the Muses, most rare Countess of Pembroke, thou art not to be omitted, whom arts do adore as a second Minerva, and our poets extol as the patroness of their invention, for in thee the Lesbian Sappho with her lyric harp is disgraced, & the laurel garland which thy brother so bravely advanced on his lance is still kept green in the temple of Pallas. Thou only sacrificest thy soul to contemplation, thou only entertainest empty-handed Homer, & keepest the springs of Castalia from being dried up. Learning, wisdom, beauty, and all other ornaments of nobility whatsoever, seek to approve themselves in thy sight, and get a further seal of felicity from the smiles of thy favour: O loue digna viro ni loue nata fores.

I fear I shall be counted a mercenary flatterer for mixing my thoughts with such figurative admiration, but general report, that surpasseth my praise, condemneth my rhetoric of dullness for so cold a commendation. Indeed, to say the truth, my style is somewhat heavy-gaited, and cannot dance trip and go so lively with Oh, my love, ah, my love, all my love's gone as other shepherds that have been fools in the morris time out of mind, nor hath my prose any skill to imitate the Almain leap verse, or sit taboring five years together nothing but to be, to be, on a paper drum. Only I can keep pace with Gravesend barge, and care not if I have water enough to land my ship of fools with the term (the tide, I should say).

Now every man is not of that mind, for some, to go the lighter away, will take in their fraught of pyled feathers, golden pebbles, straw, reeds, bulrushes, or anything, and then they bear out their sails as proudly as if they were ballasted with bull-beef. Others are so hardly bested for loading that they are fallen to retail the cinders of Troy and the shivers of broken truncheons to fill up their boat, that else should go empty, and if they have but a pound-weight of good merchandise, it shall be placed at the poop, or plucked in a thousand pieces to credit their carriage. For my part, every man as he likes, *Mens cuiusque is est quisque*. 'Tis as good to go in cutfingered pumps as cork-shoes, if one wear Cornish diamonds on his toes.

To explain it by a more familiar example, an ass is no great state man in the beasts' commonwealth, though he wear his ears upsevant muff, after the Muscovy fashion, & hang the lip like a cap-case half open, or look as demurely as a sixpenny brown loaf, for he hath some imperfections that do keep him from the common council, yet of many he is deemed a very

virtuous member, and one of the honestest sort of men that are, so that our opinion (as Sextus Empiricus affirmeth) gives the name of good or ill to everything. Out of whose works (lately translated into English for the benefit of unlearned writers) a man might collect a whole book of this argument, which no doubt would prove a worthy commonwealth matter, and far better than wit's wax kernel: Much good worship have the author.

Such is this golden age wherein we live, and so replenished with golden asses of all sorts that, if learning had lost itself in a grove of genealogies, we need do no more but set an old goose over half a dozen pottle-pots (which are, as it were, the eggs of invention), and we shall have such a breed of books within a little while after as will fill all the world with the wild-fowl of good wits; I can tell you this is a harder thing than making gold of quicksilver, and will trouble you more than the moral of Aesop's glow-worm hath troubled our English apes, who, striving to warm themselves with the flame of the philosophers' stone, have spent all their wealth in buying bellows to blow this false fire. Gentlemen, I fear I have too much presumed on your idle leisure, and been too bold, to stand talking all this while in another man's door, but now I will leave you to survey the pleasures of Paphos, and offer your smiles on the altars of Venus. Yours in all desire to please, Tho: Nashe.