

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-69722-5 - George Gascoigne: The Posies
Edited by John W. Cunliffe
Excerpt
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THE POSIES
of George Gascoigne
Esquire.

Corrected, perfected, and augmented
by the Authour. 1575.

Tam Marti quàm Mercurio.

Printed at London for Richard Smith,
and are to be solde at the Northwest
doore of Paules Church.

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¶ To the reverende Divines, unto
whom these Posies shall happen to be pre-
 sented, George Gascoigne Esquire (professing
 armes in the defence of Gods truth) wisheth
 quiet in conscience, and all consolation
 in Christ Jesus.

Right reverend: I have thought it my part (before I wade
 your grave judgements, aswell the cause which presently
 moveth mee to present them, as also the depth and secrets of
 some conceytes, which (being passed in clowdes and figurative
 speeches) might percase both be offensive to your gravitie, and
 perillous to my credite.

It is verie neare two yeares past, since (I beeing in Hollande
 in service with the vertuous Prince of Orenge) the most parte
 of these Posies were imprinted, and now at my returne, I find
 that some of them have not onely bene offensive for sundrie
 wanton speeches and lascivious phrases, but further I heare that
 the same have beene doubtfully construed, and (therefore)
 scandalous.

My reverende and welbeloved: whatsoever my youth hath
 seemed unto the graver sort, I woulde bee verie loth nowe in
 my middle age to deserve reproch: more loth to touch the
 credite of any other, and moste loth to have mine own name
 become unto you odious. For if I shoulde nowe at this age
 seeme as carelesse of reproche, as I was in greene youth readie
 to goe astray, my faultes might quickly growe double, and
 myne estimation shoulde bee woorthie too remayne but single.
 I have learned that although there may bee founde in a Gentle-
 man whereby to be reprehended or rebuked, yet ought he not
 to be woorthie of reproofe or condemnation.

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All this I set downe in preamble, too the ende I maye thereby purchase youre pacience. And as I desyre that you wyll not condemne mee wythoute prooffe, so am I contented, that if heereafter you finde mee guiltie, youre definitive sentence shall then passe publikelye under the Seale of Severitie.

It were not reason (righte reverende) that I shoulde bee ignoraunt howe generally wee are all *magis proni ad malum quàm ad bonum*. Even so is it requisite that I acknowledge a generall reformation of maners more necessarie to bee taught, than anye Whetstone of Vanities is meete (in these dayes) to bee suffered. And therefore as youre gravitie hathe thought requysite that all ydle Bookes or wanton Pamphlettes shoulde bee forbidden, so might it seeme that I were woorthie of greate reprehension, if I shoulde bee the Aucthour of evill wilfully, or a provoker of vyces wittingly. And yet some there are who have not spared too reporte that I receyved greate summes of money for the first printing of these Posies, whereby (if it were true) I mighte seeme not onely a craftie Broker for the utteraunce of garishe toyes, but a corrupte Merchaunte for the sale of deceyptfull wares.

For answeere heereof it is moste true (and I call Heaven and Earth too wnesse) that I never receyved of the Printer, or of anye other, one grote or pennie for the firste Copyes of these Posyes. True it is that I was not unwillinge the same shoulde bee imprinted: And that not of a vaine glorious desyre too bee thought a pleasaunt Poet, neyther yet of a lyghte minde too bee counted a cunning Lover. For though in youth I was often overhardie too put my name in Ballaunce of doubtfull judgements, yet nowe I am become so bashfull that I coulde rather bee content too leese the prayse of my follyes, than too hazarde the misconceyte of the grave and graye headed Judges. But too confesse a truthe untoo you right reverende (with whome I maye not dissemble in cases whiche so generally doe touche all menne) I was the rather contented too see them imprinted for these sundrie considerations.

First, for that I have seene dyverse Authours, (both learned and well learned) which after they have both reformed their lives, and converted their studies, have not yet disdeyned to reade the Poems which they let passe their pennes in youth. For it seemeth untoo mee that in all ages Poetrie hath beene not

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onely permitted, but also it hath beene thought a right good and excellent qualitie.

Next unto this, I have alwayes bene of opinion, that it is not unpossible eyther in Poemes or in Prose too write both compendiously, and perfectly in our Englishe tongue. And therefore although I chalenge not unto my selfe the name of an English Poet, yet may the Reader finde oute in my wrytings, that I have more faulted in keeping the olde English wordes (*quamvis iam obsoleta*) than in borowing of other languages, such Epithetes and Adjectives as smell of the Inkhorne.

Thirdly, as I seeke advauncement by vertue, so was I desirous that there might remaine in publike recorde, some pledge or token of those giftes wherwith it hath pleased the Almightye to endue me: To the ende that thereby the vertuous might bee encouraged to employ my penne in some exercise which might tende both to my preferment, and to the profite of my Countrey. For many a man which may like mine outwarde presence, might yet have doubted whether the qualities of my minde had bene correspondent to the proportion of my bodie.

Fourthly, because I had writtē sundry things which coulde not chuse but content the learned and Godlye Reader, therefore I hoped the same should serve as undoubted prooffe, that I had layde aside vanities, and delighted to exercise my penne in morall discourses, at least the one passing (cheeke by cheek) with the other, muste of necessitie persuade both the learned, and the light minded, that I coulde aswell sowe good graine, as graynes or draffe. And I thought not meete (beeing intermingled as they were) to cast away a whole bushell of good seede, for two or three graynes of Darnell or Cockle.

Lastly, I persuaded my selfe that as in the better sort of the same I shoulde purchase good lyking with the honourable aged: So even in the worst sorte, I might yet serve as a myrrour for unbrydled youth, to avoyde those perilles which I had passed. For little may he do which hath escaped the rock or the sandes, if he cannot waft with his hande to them that come after him.

These considerations (right reverend) did first move me to consent that these Poemes shoulde passe in print. For recapitulation whereof, and to answer unto the objections that may bee given: I say to the first that I neither take example of wanton

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Ovid, doting Nigidius, nor foolish Samocratus. But I delight to thinke that the reverend father Theodore Beza, whose life is worthily become a lanterne to the whole worlde, did not yet disdain to suffer the continued publication of such Poemes as he wrote in youth. And as he termed them at last *Poëmata castrata*, So shal your reverend judgements beholde in this seconde edition, my Poemes gelded from all filthie phrases, corrected in all erroneous places, and beautified with addition of many moral examples.

To the seconde, although I be sometimes constreyned for the cadence of rimes, or *per licentiam Poeticam*, to use an ynkehorne terme, or a straunge word: Yet hope I that it shall be apparant I have rather regarde to make our native language commendable in it selfe, than gay with the feathers of straunge birdes.

To the thirde reason may be objected, that if I were so desirous to have my capacitie knowne, I shoulde have done much better to have travelled in some notorious peece of worke, which might generally have spred my commendation. The which I confesse. But yet is it true that I must take the Foord as I finde it: Sometimes not as I woulde, but as I may. And since the oversight of my youth had brought mee farre behinde hande and indebted unto the world, I thought good in the meane time to pay as much as I had, untill it might please God better to inable me. For commonly the greediest creditor is appeased, if he see his debtor willing to pay whẽ he hath any thing. And therefore being busied in martiall affayres (whereby also I sought some advaancement) I thought good to notifie unto the worlde before my returne, that I coulde as well persuade with Penne, as pearce with launce or weapon: So that yet some noble minde might be encouraged both to exercise me in time of peace, and to emploie mee in time of service in warre.

To the fourth and last considerations, I had alledged of late by a right reverende father, that although in deede out of everie floure the industrious Bee may gather honie, yet by prooffe the Spider thereout also sucks mischeevous poyson. Whereunto I can none otherwise answer, but that he who will throw a stone at everie Dogge which barketh, had neede of a great satchell or pocket. And if the learned judgements

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and honest mindes doe both construe my doings aright, and take therein either councill or commoditie, then care I the lesse what the wicked conceyve of my conceytes. For I esteeme more the prayse of one learned Reader, than I regard the curious carping of ten thousande unlettered tattlers.

To conclude (right reverend) as these considerations did specially move me at first to consent to the imprinting of these posies, so nowe have I yet a further consideration which moveth mee most earnestly to sue for this second edition or publishing of the same. And that is this. I understande that sundrie well disposed mindes have taken offence at certaine wanton wordes and sentences passed in the fable of *Ferdinando Feronimi*, and the Ladie *Elinora de Valasco*, the which in the first edition was termed The adventures of master F. J. And that also therewith some busie conjectures have presumed to thinke that the same was indeed written to the scandalizing of some worthe personages, whom they woulde seeme therby to know. Surely (right reverend) I smile to see the simplicitie of such, who being indeed starke staring blind, would yet seeme to see farre into a milstone. And the rather I scorne their rash judgements, for that in talking with .xx. of them one after another, there have not two agreed in one conjecture. Alas, alas, if I had bene so foolish as to have passed in recitall a thing so done in deede, yet all the world might thinke me verie simple if I woulde call John, John, or Mary, Mary. But for the better satisfying of all men universally, I doe here protest unto you (reverend) even by the hope of my salvation, that there is no living creature touched or to be noted therby. And for the rest you shall find it now in this second imprinting so turquened and turned, so clenched from all unclenly wordes, and so purged from the humor of inhumanitie, as percase you woulde not judge that it was the same tale. For although I have bin heretofore contented to suffer the publication thereof, only to the ende men might see my Methode and maner of writing: yet am I nowe thus desirous to set it forth eftsoones, to the ende all men might see the reformation of my minde: And that all suspitions may be suppressed and throughly satisfied, by this mine unfeined protestation which I make unto you in that behalfe. Finally, were it not that the same is already extant in such sort as hath moved offence, I should rather be

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cōtent to cancel it utterly to oblivion, than thus to returne it in a new patched cote. And for full prooffe of mine earnest zeale in Gods service, I require of you (reverende) most instantly, that if hereby my skill seeme sufficient to wade in matters of greater importance, you will then vouchsafe to employ mee accordingly. Surely you shall finde me no lesse readie to undertake a whole yeares travaile in anie worke which you shall thinke me able to overcome, than I have beene willing heretofore to spende three houres in penning of an amorous Sonnet. Even so being desirous that all men generally (and you especially) should conceive of me as I meane, I have thus farre troubled your lerned eies with this plaine Epistle, written for my purgation, in matters whiche (else) might both have offended you, and given great batterie to the ramparts of my poore credite. The God of peace vouchsafe to governe and product you, and me, and all his, in quiet of conscience, and strength of spirit. Amen. From my poore house at Waltamstow in the Forest, this last day of Januarie. 1574.

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To al yong Gentlemen, and general-
ly to the youth of England, George Gas-
 coigne Esquire by birth, and Souldiour by
 profession, wisheth increase of knowledge in
 all vertuous exercises.

GAllant Gentlemen, and lustie youthes of this my native
 Countrey, I have here (as you see) published in print
 suche Posies and rymes as I used in my youth, the which for
 the barbarousnesse of the stile may seeme worthlesse, and yet
 for the doubtfulnessse of some darke places they have also
 seemed (heretofore) daügerous. So that men may justly both
 condemne me of rashnesse, and wonder at my simplicite in
 suffering or procuring the same to be imprinted.

A yong man well borne, tenderly fostered, and delicately
 accompanied, shall hardly passe over his youth without falling
 into some snares of the Divell, and temptations of the flesh.
 But a man of middle yeares, who hath to his cost experimented
 the vanities of youth, and to his perill passed them: who hath
 bought repentance deare, and yet gone through with the
 bargain: who seeth before his face the tyme past lost, and
 the rest passing away in post: Such a man had more neede to
 be well advised in his doings, and resolute in his determinations.
 For with more ease and greater favour may we answere for
 tenne madde follies committed in grene youth, than one sober
 oversight escaped in yeares of discretion. *Lycurgus*: the good
 princely Philosopher, ordeyned that if an olde man perceiving
 a yong man to commit any dishonestie, did not rebuke but
 suffer him: the aged shoulde be chastised, and the yong man
 should be absolved.

All this rehearsed and considered, you may (as I say) growe

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in some doubt, whether I were worse occupied in first devising, or at last in publishing these toies & pamphlets: and much the rather, for that it is a thing commonly seene, that (nowe adayes) fewe or no things are so well handled, but they shall bee carped at by curious Readers, nor almost any thing so well ment, but may bee muche misconstrued.

And heerewithall I assure my selfe, that I shall bee generally condemned as a man verie lightly bent, and rather desyrous to continue in the freshe remembraunce of my follyes, than content too cancell them in oblivion by discontinuance: especially since in a house where many yong childrē are, it hath bene thought better pollicie quite to quench out the fire, than to leave any loose cole in the imbers, wherewith Babes may play and put the whole edifice in daunger.

But my lustie youthes, and gallant Gentlemen, I had an intent farre contrarie untoo all these supposes, when I fyrst [permitted] the publication heereof. And bycause the greatest offence that hath bene taken thereat, is, least your mindes might heereby become envenomed with vanities, therefore unto you I will addresse my tale, for the better satisfying of common judgements. And unto you I will explane, that which being before mystically covered, and commonly misconstrued, might be no lesse perillous in seducing you, than greevous evidence for to prove mee guiltie of condemnation.

Then to come unto the matter, there are three sortes of men which (beeing wonderfully offended at this booke) have founde therein three maner of matters (say they) verie reprehensible. The men are these: curious Carpers, ignorant Readers, and grave Philosophers. The faults they finde are, *Iudicare* in the Creede: Chalke for Cheese: and the cōmon infection of Love. Of these three sorts of men and matters, I do but very little esteeme the two first. But I deeply regarde the thirde. For of a verie troth, there are one kinde of people nowadayes which will mislyke any thing, being bred (as I thinke) of the spawne of a Crab or Crevish, which in all streames and waters will swimme eyther sideways, or flat backwards: and when they can indeede finde none other fault, will yet thinke *Iudicare* verie untowardlye placed in the Creede. Or (beeing a simple Sowter) will finde fault at the shape of the legge: or if they be not there stopped, they wil not spare to