The Arte of English Poesie
A colei

Che se stessa rassomiglia
& non altrui.

Facsimile of the woodcut portrait of Queen Elizabeth which, from its original position (facing the opening of Book I), seems to have constituted Puttenham's dedication to the Arte.
THE ARTE
OF ENGLISH
POESIE.

Contrived into three Bookes: The first of Poets
and Poesie, the second of Proportion,
the third of Ornament.

AT LONDON
Printed by Richard Field, dwelling in the
black-Friers, nere Ludgate.

1589.
TO THE RIGHT HONORABLE SIR WILLIAM CECILL KNIGHT, LORD OF BURGHLEY, LORD HIGH TREASURER OF ENGLAND,
R. F. Printer with health and prosperitie, with the commandement and yfe of his continuall servuice.

This Booke (right Honorable) comming to my handes, with his bare title without any Authours name or any other ordinarie addresse, I doubted how well it might become me to make you a present thereof, seeming by many expresse passages in the same at large, that it was by the Authour intended to our Soueraigne Lady the Queene, and for her recreation and servuice chiefly devised, in which case to make any other person his highnes partener in the honour of his guift it could not fiad with my dutie, nor be without some prejudice to her Maiesties interest and his merrite. Perceyuing besides the title to purport so slender a subiect, as nothing almoast could be more discrepant from the grauitie of your yeere and Honorable function, whose contemplations are every houre more seriously employed upon the publicke administration and services: I thought it no condigne gratification, nor scarce any good satisfacion for such a person as you. Yet when I considered, that beflowyng upon your Lordship the first viewe of this mine impression (a feat of mine owne simple facultie) it could not seypher her Maiesties honour or prerogative in the guift, nor yet the Authour of his thanks: and seeing the thing it selue to be a deuice of some noueltie (which commonly giueth every good thing a special grace) and a noueltie so highly tending to the most worthy praves of her Maiesties most excellent name (deerer to you I dare conceive then any worldly thing besides) mee thought I could not devise to have presented your Lordship any gift more agreeable to your appetite, or fitter for my vocation and abilitie to bestow, your Lordship byeing learned and a louver of learning, my present a Booke and my selfe a printer alwaies ready and defrous to be at your Honourable commandement. And thus I humbly take my leaue from the Black-friers,
this xxvij. of May. 1589.

Your Honours most humble
at commandement,

R. F.
THE FIRST BOOKE,

Of Poets and Poesie.

CHAP. I.

What a Poet and Poesie is, and who may be worthily sayd the most excellent Poet of our time.

A Poet is as much to say as a maker. And our English name well conformes with the Greeke word: for of ποιητης to make, they call a maker Poeta. Such as (by way of resemblance and rueently) we may say of God: who without any trauell to his diuine imagination, made all the world of nought, nor alfo by any paterne or mould as the Platonicks with their Idees do phantaftically suppoze. Euê fo the very Poet makes and contriueth out of his owne braine, both the verfe and matter of his poeme, and not by any forecine copie or example, as doth the translatore, who therefore may well be sayd a versifier, but not a Poet. The premisses considered, it giueth to the name and profeccion no smal dignitie and preheminence, aboue all other artificers, Scientifike or Mechanicall. And neuerthelesse without any repugnancie at all, a Poet may in some sort be saide a follower or imitator, because he can expresse the true and liuely of every thing is set before him, and which he taketh in hand to describethe and so in that respect is both a maker and a counterfaiṭor: and Poesie an art not only of making, but also of imitation. And this science in his perfection, can not grow, but by some diuine intinct, the Platonicks call it furor: or by excellencie of nature and complexion: or by great subtiltie of the spirts & wit, or by much experience and obseruation of the world, and courfe of kinde, or peraduenture by all or most part of them.
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Otherwise how was it possible that Homer being but a poore priuate man, and as some say, in his later age blind, shoulde so exactly set foorth and describe, as if he had bene a most excellent Captaine or Generall, the order and array of battels, the conduct of whole armies, the sieges and assaults of cities and townes? or as some great Princes maiordome and perfect Surueyour in Court, the order, sumptuouusnesse and magnificence of royal bankeis, feastts, weddings, and enteruweis? or as a Polititian very prudent, and much inured with the priuat and publique affaires, so gruely examine the lawes and ordinances Cuill, or so profondly discouer in matters of estate, and forms of all politique regimen? Finally how could he so naturally paint out the speeches, countenance and maners of Princely personis and priuate, to wit, the wrath of Achilles, the magnanimitie of Agamemnon, the prudence of Menelaus, the prowess of Hector, the maiesttie of king Priamus, the grauitie of Nefor, the pollicies and eloquence of Ulysses, the calamities of the distresseid Queenes, and valiancie of all the Captaines and adventorous knights in those lamentable warres of Troy? It is therefore of Poets thus to be conceiued, that if they be able to deuise and make all these things of them selues, without any subiect of veriteit, that they be (by maner of speech) as creating gods. If they do it by instinct divine or naturall, then surely much favourd from aboue. If by their experience, then no doubt very wise men. If by any presidant or paterne layd before them, then truly the most excellent imitators & counterfaits of all others. But you (Madame) my most Honored and Gracious: if I should seeme to offer you this my devise for a discipline and not a delight, I might well be reputed, of all others the most arrogant and injurious: your selfe being alreadie, of any that I know in our time, the most excellent Poet. Forsooth by your Princely purse fauours and countenance, making in maner what ye lift, the poore man
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rich, the lewd well learned, the coward courageous, and vile both noble and valiant. Then for imitation no leffe, your perfon as a moft cunning counterfator liuely representing Venus in countenance, in life Diana, Pallas for gouernement, and Juno in all honour and regall magnificence./

CHAP. II.

That there may be an Art of our English Poesie, aswell as there is of the Latine and Greeke.

Then as there was no art in the world till by experience found out: so if Poesie be now an Art, & of al antiquitie hath bene among the Greeks and Latines, & yet were none, vntill by studious perfons fashioned and reduced into a method of rules & precepts, then no doubt may there be the like with vs. And if th’art of Poesie be but a skill appertaining to vterance, why may not the fame be with vs aswel as with them, our language being no leffe copious pithie and significatiue then theirs, our conceipts the fame, and our wits no leffe apt to deuise and imitate then theirs were? If againe Art be but a certaine order of rules prescribed by reaon, and gathered by experience, why shoul not Poesie be a vulgar Art with vs aswel as with the Greeks and Latines, our language admitting no fewer rules and nice diuersities then theirs? but peraduenture moe by a peculiar, which our speech hath in many things differing from theirs: and yet in the generall points of that Art, allowed to go in common with them: so as if one point per chance which is their feete whereupon their meaures fland, and in deede is all the beautie of their Poesie, and which feete we haue not, nor as yet neuer went about to frame (the nature of our language and wordes not permitting it) we haue in stead thereof twentie other curious points in that skill more then they euer had, by reaon of our rime and tunable concords or simphonie, which they

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neuer obserued. Poesie therefore may be an Art in our vulgar, and that verie methodicall and commendable.

CHAP. III.

How Poets were the first priests, the first prophets, the first Legislators and polititians in the world.

The profession and vfe of Poesie is most ancient from the beginning, and not as manie erroneously suppose, after, but before any ciuil society was among men. For it is written, that Poesie was th’originall caufe and occasion of their first assemblies, when before the people remained in the woods and mountains, vagrant and dispersed like the wild beasts, lawlesse and naked, or verie ill/clad, and of all good and necessarie provision for harbour or sustention utterly vnfurnished: so as they little differed for their maner of life, from the very brute beasts of the field. Whereupon it is fayned that Amphion and Orpheus, two Poets of the first ages, one of them, to wit Amphion, builded vp cities, and reared walles with the stones that came in heapes to the sound of his harpe, figuring thereby the mollifying of hard and ftonie hearts by his sweete and eloquent perfwasion. And Orpheus assembled the wilde beastes to come in heards to harken to his muficke, and by that meanes made them tame, implying thereby, how by his discretee and wholesome leffons vttered in harmonie and with melodious inframes, he brought the rude and sauage people to a more ciuill and orderly life, nothing, as it seemeth, more preuailing or fit to redresse and edifie the cruell and sturdie courage of man then it. And as these two Poets and Linus before them, and Muses alfo and Hesiodus in Greece and Archadia: so by all likelihood had mo Poets done in other places, and in other ages before them, though there be no remembrance left of them, by reafon of the Recordes by some accident of time perished and failing. Poets
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therefore are of great antiquitie. Then forasmuch as they were the first that entended to the obseruation of nature and her works, and specially of the Celestiall course, by reaon of the continuall motion of the heauens, searching after the first mouver, and from thence by degrees comming to know and consider of the substantes separate & abstract, which we call the divine intelligences or good Angels (Demones) they were the first that instituted sacrifices of placation, with inocuations and worship to them, as to Gods: and inuented and stabilishd all the rest of the obseruances and ceremonies of religion, and so were the first Priestts and ministres of the holy misteries. And because for the better execution of that high charge and function, it behoued them to liue chaft, and in all holines of life, and in continuall studie and contemplation: they came by instinct divine, and by deepe meditacion, and much abstinement (the same assibilting and refining their spirits) to be made apt to receaue visions, both waking and sleepeing, which made them vter prophecies, and foretell things to come. So alfo were they the first Prophetts or sears, Videntes, for so the Scripture teammeth them in Latine after the Hebrue word, and all the oracles and answers of the gods were giuen in meeter or verfe, and publifhed to the people by their direction. And for that they were aged and graue men, and of much wisedome and experience in th'affaires of the world, they were the first lawmakers to the people, and the first polititians, devising all expeditious meanes for th'establishment of Common wealth, to hold and containe the people in order and duety by force and vertue of good and wholesome lawes, made for the prefervation of the publique peace and tranquillitie. The same peraduenture not purposely intended, but greatly furthered by the aw of their gods, and such scruple of conscience, as the terrors of their late inuented religion had led them into.
VTTERANCE also and language is giuen by nature to man for perfwacion of others, and aide of them felues, I meane the first abilité to speake. For speeche it selfe is artificiall and made by man, and the more pleasing it is, the more it prevaulleth to such purpose as it is intended for: but speeche by meeter is a kind of vtterance, more cleanly couched and more delicate to the eare then profe is, because it is more currant and slipper vpon the tonge, and withal tunable and melodious, as a kind of Musicke, and therefore may be tearmed a muscall speeche or vtterance, which cannot but please the hearer very well. Another caufe is, for that it is briefer & more com-pendious, and easier to beare away and be retained in memorie, then that which is contained in multitude of words and full of tedious ambage and long periods. It is befide a maner of vtterance more eloquent and rethorical then the ordinarie profe, which we vfe in our daily talke: because it is decked and set out with all maner of fresh colours and figures, which maketh that it sooner inuigleth the judgment of man, and carieth his opinion this way and that, whither soever the heart by impression of the eare shalbe most affectionatly bent and directed. The vtterance in profe is not of so great efficacie, because not only it is dayly vfed, and by that occasion the eare is ouerglutted with it, but is also not so volub/e and slipper vpon the tonge, being wide and lose, and nothing numerous, nor contrived into meafures, and founded with so gallant and harmonical accents, nor in fine allowed that figuratiue conueyance, nor so great licence in chiose of words and phraeses as meeter is. So as the Poets were also from the beginning the beft perfwaders and their eloquence the first Rethoricke of the world.