
GEORGE GASCOIGNE

1539–1578

George Gascoigne was the most important poet of the early Elizabethan period, forming the bridge between the Wyatt-Surrey tradition and that of Sidney and Spenser. Though he was highly gifted and educated at Cambridge and the Inns of Court, Gascoigne's life was filled with more setbacks than successes: he failed as a courtier and was imprisoned for debt in 1570, in large part due to the expenses he incurred trying to legitimate his wife's prior divorce. Accused of being a spy and an atheist, he was barred in 1572 from taking the seat in Parliament he had already held twice. Seeking success on the battlefield, he went off to fight in the Low Country wars, where he discovered instead both inept leadership and his own lack of martial aptitude. After four months as a prisoner of the Spanish, to whom he had ingloriously surrendered, he returned to England, only to find that a book of erotic poetry he had published the year before, *A Hundreth Sundrie Flowers* (1573), had been attacked and censored. He revised the collection slightly, retitled it *The Posies* (1575), and released it again, in the hope of beginning a successful literary career. Instead, the book was once more banned.

Gascoigne's wry sense of his ineptitude and misfortune is brilliantly captured in "Woodmanship," a poem characterized by vigorous, spare diction and a tone that mingles didacticism and rueful humor. Many of Gascoigne's satires, complaints, and autobiographical pieces are written in this "plain style," as it has been called, but in his restless career as a writer he also wrote songs and sonnets that display a more lyrical grace. He was a tireless experimenter and innovator, employing a considerable metrical range that includes poulter's measure, fourteeners, decasyllabic stanzas, and couplets. His play *The Supposes* (from Ariosto) was England's first translation of an Italian prose comedy and his translation of *Jocasta* the first version of a Greek tragedy performed in English, while his *Glass of Government* was the first English original blank-verse drama and his biting satire *The Steel Glass* the first original English poem in blank verse. Gascoigne's *Certain Notes of Instruction* is the first important treatise on English prosody, and his *Adventures of Master F. J.*, a surprisingly daring account of courtly sexual intrigue, is one of the first novel-like prose narratives in English.

Gascoigne's Lullaby

- Sing lullaby, as women do,
 Wherewith they bring their babes to rest,
 And lullaby can I sing too,
 As womanly as can the best.
- 5 With lullaby they still the child,
 And if I be not much beguiled,
 Full many wanton babes have I,
 Which must be stilled with lullaby.
- First, lullaby, my youthful years,
 10 It is now time to go to bed,
 For crooked age and hoary hairs
 Have won the haven within my head.

With lullaby then, youth, be still,
 With lullaby content thy will,
 15 Since courage quails and comes behind,
 Go sleep, and so beguile thy mind.

Next, lullaby, my gazing eyes,
 Which wonted were to glance apace.¹
 For every glass may now suffice
 20 To show the furrows in my face.
 With lullaby then wink² awhile,
 With lullaby your looks beguile.
 Let no fair face nor beauty bright
 Entice you eft³ with vain delight.

And lullaby, my wanton will,
 Let reason's rule now rein thy thought,
 Since all too late I find by skill
 How dear I have thy fancies bought.
 With lullaby now take thine ease,
 30 With lullaby thy doubts appease.
 For trust to this, if thou be still,
 My body shall obey thy will.

Eke lullaby, my loving boy,
 My little Robin, take thy rest.
 35 Since age is cold and nothing coy,⁴
 Keep close thy coin, for so is best.
 With lullaby be thou content,
 With lullaby thy lusts relent.
 Let others pay which hath mo⁵ pence;
 40 Thou art too poor for such expense.

Thus, lullaby, my youth, mine eyes,
 My will, my ware,⁶ and all that was.
 I can no mo delays devise,
 But welcome pain, let pleasure pass.
 45 With lullaby now take your leave,
 With lullaby your dreams deceive,
 And when you rise with waking eye,
 Remember Gascoigne's lullaby.

1. Quickly.
 2. Close the eyes.
 3. Back again.

4. Lascivious.
 5. More.
 6. Sexual organs.

Woodmanship

Gascoigne's woodmanship written to the Lord Grey of Wilton¹ upon this occasion, the said Lord Grey delighting (amongst many other good qualities) in choosing of his winter deer, and killing the same with his bow, did furnish the author with a crossbow *cum pertinenciis*² and vouchsafed to use his company in the said exercise, calling him one of his woodmen. Now the author shooting very often, could never hit any deer, yea and oftentimes he let the herd pass by as though he had not seen them. Whereat when this noble lord took some pastime, and had often put him in remembrance of his good skill in choosing, and readiness in killing, of a winter deer, he thought good thus to excuse it in verse.

My worthy Lord, I pray you wonder not
 To see your woodman shoot so oft awry,
 Nor that he stands amazè^o like a sot,^o *confused / fool*
 And lets the harmless deer unhurt go by.
 5 Or if he strike a doe which is but carren,³
 Laugh not good Lord, but favor such a fault,
 Take will in worth,⁴ he would fain hit the barren,
 But though his heart be good, his hap^o is naught. *luck*
 And therefore now I crave your Lordship's leave,
 10 To tell you plain what is the cause of this.
 First, if it please your honor to perceive
 What makes your woodman shoot so oft amiss,
 Believe me, Lord, the case is nothing strange:
 He shoots awry almost at every mark,
 15 His eyes have been so usèd for to range,
 That now God knows they be both dim and dark.
 For proof he bears the note^o of folly now, *mark*
 Who shot sometimes to hit Philosophy,⁵
 And ask you why? forsooth I make avow,
 20 Because his wanton wits went all awry.
 Next that, he shot to be a man of law,
 And spent some time with learnèd Littleton,⁶
 Yet in the end he provèd but a daw,^o *jackdaw, i.e., fool*
 For law was dark^o and he had quickly done. *obscure*
 25 Then could he wish Fitzherbert such a brain
 As Tully⁷ had, to write the law by art,
 So that with pleasure, or with little pain,
 He might perhaps have caught a truant's part.^o *been able to play truant*
 But all too late, he most misliked the thing
 30 Which most might help to guide his arrow straight;
 He winkèd⁸ wrong, and so let slip the string,

1. Elizabeth's lord deputy for Ireland; Edmund Spenser served as his secretary there. But the hunting party that inspired Gascoigne's poem took place on one of Grey's estates in England.

2. With appurtenances.

3. Carrion—i.e., pregnant and therefore unfit for eating.

4. Accept the good intention.

5. I.e., he formerly studied philosophy and then (lines 21 ff.) law.

6. Author (like Fitzherbert, below) of a standard law text.

7. Marcus Tullius Cicero (whose exemplary prose style Gascoigne wishes Fitzherbert had had the wherewithal to emulate).

8. Aimed (with one eye closed).

	Which cast him wide, for all his quaint conceit. ^o	<i>clever thought</i>
	From thence he shot to catch a courtly grace, ⁹	
	And thought even there to wield the world at will,	
35	But, out alas, he much mistook the place,	
	And shot awry at every rover ^o still.	<i>random mark</i>
	The blazing baits which draw the gazing eye	
	Unfeathered there his first affectiön; ^o	<i>inclination</i>
	No wonder then although ^o he shot awry,	<i>that</i>
40	Wanting ^o the feathers of discretiön.	<i>not having</i>
	Yet more than them, the marks of dignity	
	He much mistook, and shot the wronger way,	
	Thinking the purse of prodigality	
	Had been best mean to purchase such a prey.	
45	He thought the flattering face which fleereth still, ^o	<i>always smiles</i>
	Had been full fraught with all fidelity,	
	And that such words as courtiers use at will	
	Could not have varied from the verity.	
	But when his bonnet buttonèd with gold,	
50	His comely cap beguarded ^o all with gay,	<i>ornamented</i>
	His bombast ^o hose, with linings manifold,	<i>stuffed</i>
	His knit silk stocks ^o and all his quaint array,	<i>stockings</i>
	Had picked his purse of all the Peter-pence, ¹	
	Which might have paid for his promotiön,	
55	Then (all too late) he found that light ^o expense	<i>careless</i>
	Had quite quenched out the court's devotiön.	
	So that since then the taste of misery	
	Hath been always full bitter in his bit, ^o	<i>i.e., in his mouth</i>
	And why? forsooth because he shot awry,	
60	Mistaking still the marks which others hit.	
	But now behold what mark the man doth find:	
	He shoots to be a soldier in his age;	
	Mistrusting all the virtues of the mind,	
	He trusts the power of his personage.	
65	As though long limbs led by a lusty heart	
	Might yet suffice to make him rich again;	
	But Flushing frays ² have taught him such a part	
	That now he thinks the wars yield no such gain.	
	And sure I fear, unless your lordship deign	
70	To train him yet into some better trade,	
	It will be long before he hit the vein	
	Whereby he may a richer man be made.	
	He cannot climb as other catchers ^o can,	<i>huntsmen</i>
	To lead a charge before himself be led.	
75	He cannot spoil ^o the simple sakeless ^o man,	<i>despoil / poor innocent</i>
	Which is content to feed him with his bread.	
	He cannot pinch ^o the painful soldier's pay,	<i>stint</i>
	And shear ^o him out his share in ragged sheets,	<i>dole</i>
	He cannot stoop to take a greedy prey	
80	Upon his fellows groveling in the streets.	
	He cannot pull the spoil from such as pill, ^o	<i>pillage</i>

9. I.e., he next attempted to become a courtier.

1. I.e., money—from "Peter's pence," a tax for-

merly levied by the Roman church.

2. I.e., fighting in the Low Countries.

And seem full angry at such foul offense,
 Although the gain content his greedy will,
 Under the cloak of contrary pretence:
 85 And nowadays, the man that shoots not so,
 May shoot amiss, even as your woodman doth:
 But then you marvel why I let them go,
 And never shoot, but say farewell forsooth:
 Alas, my Lord, while I do muse hereon,
 90 And call to mind my youthful years misspent,
 They give me such a bone to gnaw upon,
 That all my senses are in silence pent.
 My mind is rapt in contemplatiön,
 Wherein my dazzled eyes only behold
 95 The black hour of my constellatiön³
 Which framèd me so luckless on the mold.° *on earth*
 Yet therewithal I cannot but confess,
 That vain presumption makes my heart to swell,
 For thus I think, not all the world (I guess)
 100 Shoots bet than I, nay some shoots not so well.
 In Aristotle somewhat did I learn,
 To guide my manners° all by comeliness,° *behavior / decency*
 And Tully taught me somewhat to discern
 Between sweet speech and barbarous rudeness.
 105 Old Parkins, Rastell, and Dan Bracton's° books *authors of law books*
 Did lend me somewhat of the lawless law;
 The crafty courtiers with their guileful looks
 Must needs put some experience in my maw:° *stomach*
 Yet cannot these with many mast'ries moe° *many more skills*
 110 Make me shoot straight at any gainful prick,° *bull's-eye*
 Where some that never handled such a bow
 Can hit the white or touch it near the quick,
 Who can nor speak nor write in pleasant wise,
 Nor lead their life by Aristotle's rule,⁴
 115 Nor argue well on questions that arise,
 Nor plead a case more than my lord mayor's mule,
 Yet can they hit the marks that I do miss,
 And win the mean° which may the man maintain. *means*
 Now when my mind doth mumble upon this,
 120 No wonder then although I pine for pain:
 And whiles mine eyes behold this mirror thus,
 The herd goeth by, and farewell gentle does:
 So that your lordship quickly may discuss° *declare*
 What blinds mine eyes so oft (as I suppose).
 125 But since my Muse can to my Lord rehearse° *relate*
 What makes me miss, and why I do not shoot,
 Let me imagine in this worthless verse,
 If right before me, at my standing's° foot *hunter's station*
 There stood a doe, and I should strike her dead,
 130 And then she prove a carrion carcass too,
 What figure might I find within my head,

3. The unlucky alignment of planets at my birth.

4. I.e., the rule of moderation. Aristotle regarded each virtue as the mean between two extremes.

To scuse the rage which ruled me so to do?
 Some might interpret with plain paraphrase,
 That lack of skill or fortune led the chance,
 135 But I must otherwise expound the case;
 I say Jehovah did this doe advance,
 And made her bold to stand before me so,
 Till I had thrust mine arrow to her heart,
 That by the sudden^o of her overthrow suddenness
 140 I might endeavor to amend my part
 And turn mine eyes that they no more behold
 Such guileful marks as seem more than they be:
 And though they glister^o outwardly like gold, glisten
 Are inwardly like brass, as men may see:
 145 And when I see the milk hang in her teat,
 Methinks it saith, old babe, now learn to suck,
 Who in thy youth couldst never learn the feat
 To hit the whites which live with all good luck.
 Thus have I told my Lord (God grant in season)
 150 A tedious tale in rhyme, but little reason.
*Haud ictus sapio.*⁵

1573

Farewell with a Mischief

written by a lover being disdainfully abjected¹ by a dame of high calling, who had chosen (in his place) a playfellow of baser condition: & therefore he determined to step aside, and before his departure giveth her this farewell in verse

Thy birth, thy beauty, nor thy brave attire,
 (Disdainful Dame, which doest me double wrong)
 Thy high estate, which sets thy heart on fire,
 Or new found choice, which cannot serve thee long
 5 Shall make me dread, with pen for to rehearse,
 Thy skittish deeds, in this my parting verse.

For why² thou knowest, and I myself can tell,
 By many vows, how thou to me wert bound:
 And how for joy, thy heart did seem to swell,
 10 And in delight how thy desires were drowned.
 When of thy will the walls I did assail,
 Wherein fond fancy fought for mine avail.

And though my mind have small delight to vaunt,³
 Yet must I vow my heart to thee was true:
 15 My hand was always able for to daunt
 Thy slanderous foes and keep their tongues in mew.⁴

5. "Even though struck down, I have not learned wisdom."

1. Rejected.

2. Because.

3. Boast.

4. Cooped up.

My head (though dull) was yet of such device,
As might have kept thy name always in price.⁵

And for the rest my body was not brave,
20 But able yet, of substance to allay
Thy raging lust, wherein thy limbs did rave,
And quench the coals which kindled thee to play.
Such one I was, and such always will be,
For worthy Dames, but then I mean not thee.

25 For thou hast caught a proper paragon,
A thief, a coward, and a Peacock fool:
An Ass, a milksop, and a minion,⁶
Which hath no oil thy furious flames to cool;
Such one he is, a fere⁷ for thee most fit,
30 A wand'ring guest, to please thy wavering wit.

A thief I count him for he robs us both,
Thee of thy name, and me of my delight:
A coward is he noted where he goeth,
Since every child is match to him in might.
35 And for his pride no more, but mark his plumes,
The which to prink⁸ he days and nights consumes.

The rest thyself in secret sort can judge,
He rides not me, thou knowest his saddle best:
And though these tricks of thine mought⁹ make me grudge,
40 And kindle wrath in my revenging breast,
Yet of myself, and not to please thy mind,
I stand content my rage in rule to bind.

And far from thee now must I take my flight,
Where tongues may tell (and I not see) thy fall:
45 Where I may drink these drugs of thy despite,
To purge my Melancholic mind withall.
In secret so, my stomach will I sterve,¹
Wishing thee better than thou dost deserve.

*Spraeta tamen vivunt*²

1573

5. Prized, esteemed highly.

6. A favorite who is also a servile dependent.

7. Companion.

8. Primp.

9. Might.

1. Starve.

2. Things that are scorned still live.