

**A DISCOURSE OF
ENGLISH
POETRIE, 1586**

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A Discourse of English Poetrie, 1586 by William Webbe

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WILLIAM WEBBE

**A DISCOURSE OF
ENGLISH
POETRIE, 1586**

English Reprints.

WILLIAM WEBBE, GRADUATE.

A DISCOURSE
OF
ENGLISH POETRY.

1586.

CAREFULLY EDITED BY

EDWARD ARBER,
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NOTES
of
WILLIAM WEBBE.

* Probable or approximate dates.

Very little is known of the Author of this work. The suggestion that he was the William Webbe, M.A., one of the joint Authors of a topographical book *The Vale Royal*, 1648, fol., is quite anachronistic.

Messrs. Cooper, in *Athena Cantabrigiense*, ii. ca. Ed. 1861, state that our Author "was a graduate of this University, but we have no means of determining his college. One of this name, who was of St. John's College, was B.A. 1572-3 (the same year as Spenser), as was another who was of Catharine Hall in 1581-2. His place of residence is unknown, although it may perhaps be inferred that it was in or near the county of Suffolk. We have no information as to his position in life, or the time or place of his death. He was evidently a man of superior intellect and no mean attainments." (Our Author apparently witnessed *Tamcred and Gismund* in 1568, and being evidently acquainted with Gabriel Harvey and Spenser (who left Cambridge in 1578), must be the earlier graduate of the above two Webbes.)

1568. *Tamcred and Gismund*, written by five members of the Inner Temple, the first letters of whose names are attached to the several acts, viz., Rod. Staflf; Hen. Notwell; G. All; Ch. Hacton; and R. W[il]mot; is 'curiously acted in view of her Majesty, by whom it was then princely accepted.'

Webbe appears to have been present at the representation; see 1581. Mr. J. P. Collier in his edition of 'Doddley's *Old Plays*', i. 123, prints from a MS. what is apparently a portion of this Tragedy as it was then acted, written in alternate rhymes. He also states in his *Hist. of Dram. Poet.* that it 'is the earliest English play extant, the plot of which is known to be derived from an Italian novel.' *ibid.* 23. Ed. 1831.

*1572-3. Our Author takes his B.A. at Cambridge.

1582. Nov. 28. Gabriel Fynes presented Robert Wilnow, clerk to the Rectory of North Okendon, Essex; 18 miles from London. *Newcourt Refertorium*, ii. 447. Ed. 1710.

Flemynge is a large manor house in Essex in the parish of Rynwell, in the hundred of Chelmsford; from which town it is ten miles distant, and about twenty-nine miles from London. This house commands extensive views of some parts of the county and of Kent, including more than thirty parish churches.

Edward Sulyard succeeded, on the death of his father Eustace in 1546, to Flemynge and other possessions. He had two sons, Edward and Thomas, and a daughter named Elizabeth. He was knighted on 23 July 1562 at Whitehall by James I. before his coronation; and died in June 1620. Of his two sons, Edward died without issue; Thomas, b. 1573, was knighted, and d. March 1634; leaving a son Edward, who d. 7 Nov. 1699 without issue, 'the last of the house and family.' See *W. Berry, County Gen. Essex*, 64. T. Wright, *Hist. of Essex*, s. 142, 143. Ed. 1831. J. [Hilipot] *Kent. Batek. made by James I.*, 1660.

*1582 or 3. Webbe appears to have been at this time private tutor to Mr. Sulyard's two sons, for he presented his MS. translation (now lost) of the *Georgics* to Mr. Sulyard: see pp. 82 and 16.

1588. Dec. 8. The Dean and Chapter of St. Paul's appoint Robert Wilnow, M.A., to the Vicarage of Hurdene on the Hill, twenty-four miles from London, and a few miles from Flemynge, where his friend Webbe was a private tutor. *Newcourt, idem*, ii. 343.

1586. Of 'the pregnant yopes of right excellent hope,' Thomas Sulyard was about thirteen years old, and his brother Edward was older than him.
- W. Webbe writes the present work in the summer evenings.
- SEPT. 4. It is thus registered for publication.
"Robt. Waller
John Charlewood, Rd. of them, for printinge A Discourse of english poetry
F. P. Collier, *Extr. of Stat. Co's Regrs. ii., 215. Ed. 1849.*
Margaret, the mother of Mr. Sulyard died. She is buried at Rutwell.
1587. FEB. 5. Warton quotes "a small black-lettered tract entitled *The Touch-stone of Wittes*, chiefly compiled, with some slender additions, from William Webbe's *Discourse of English Poetrie*, written by Edward Hake, and printed at London by Edmund Bollifant." p. 82. Ed. 1870.
1588. Our Author—his pupile growing to manhood then appears to have gone, possibly also in the same capacity of private tutor into the family of Henry Grey, Esquire (created Baron Grey of Groby, 21 July 1603; d. 1614) at Pingo, in the parish of Havering atte Bower, Essex; fifteen miles from London. Dugdale states that the first husband of one of the daughters of this Henry Grey, Esquire, was a *William Sulyard, Esquire. Baron. i. 224. Ed. 1675.* From this old Palace of the Queens of England Webbe wrote the following letter to Wilmott, which is reprinted in the revised edition of *Tamcrad and Gismund* published in 1591: of which there are copies in the Bodleian, and at Dredgewizer House, and an imperfect one in the British Museum (C. 34. o. 44).

1591. AUG. 8. *To his friend R. W. Master R. W. looke not now for the tearnes of an intreator, I wil beg no longer, and for your promise, I wil refuse them as bad payment; neither can I be satisfied with any thing, but a presumptorie performance of an old intencion of yours, the publishing I meane of those wast papers (as it pleaseth you to cal them, her as I esteem them, a most exquisite invention) of *Gismunds* Tragedie. Thinke not to shift me off with longer delays, nor alledge more excuses to get further respite, leas I direct you with my *actiaw est*, and commence such a Sute of vnikendence against you, as when the case shall be scand before the Iudges of courtesie, the court will crye out of your immoderat modestie. And thus much I tel you before, you shal not be able to wage against me in the charges growing upon this action, especially, if the worshipful company of the Inner temple gentlemen patronize my cause, as vnkoubtedly they wil, yea, and rather plead partially for me then let my cause miscary, because themselves are parties. The tragedie was by them most pitifully framed, and no lesse curiously acted in view of her Maisties, by whom it was then as princely accepted, as of the whole honorable audiencc notably applauded: yea, and of al men generally desired, as a work, either in statelines of shew, depth of conceit, or true ornaments of poetical arte, inferior to some of the best in that kinde: no, were the Roman *Catoes* the censurer. The braue youths that then (to their high praises) so feelingly performed the same in action, did shortly after lay vp the booke vnregarded, or perhaps let it run aboute (as many parents doe their children most poore dandling) not respecting so much what hard fortune might befall it being out of their fingers, as how their heroical wits might againe be quickly conceiued with new inventions of like worthines, wherof they haue been euer since wonderfull fertile. But this orphan of theirs (for he wandreth as it were fatherlesse,) hath notwithstanding, by the rare and bewtiful perfections appearing in him, hether to neuer wanted great*

favourers, and loving preservers. Among whom I cannot sufficiently commend your more then charitable zeale, and scholarly compassion towards him, that haue not only rescued and defended him from the detouring lawes of oblivion, but vouchsafed also to apparel him in a new suite at your own charges, wherein he may again more boldly come abroad, and by your permission retaine to his olde parents, clothed perhaps not in richer or more costly furniture than it went from them, but in handsonnes and fashion more answerable to these times, whereof fashions are so often altered. Let one word suffice for your encouragement herin: namely, your commendable paines in disrobing him of his antique curiositie, and adorning him with the approved guise of our stateliest English verse (not diminishing, but augmenting his artificiall colours of absolute poeie, derived from his first parents) cannot but bee grateful to most mens appetites, who vpon our experience we know highly to esteeme such lofty measures of sentimentiously composed Tragedies.

How much you shal make me, and the rest of your private friends beholding vsu you, I list not to discouise: and therefore grounding vpon these alledged reasons, that the suppressing of this Tragedie, so worthy for ye presse, were no other thing then willfully to defraud your selfe of an vniuersall thank, your friends of their expectations, and sweete C. of a famous sterilitie. I will cease to doubt of any other pretence to cloake your bashfulness, hoping to read it in print (which lately lay neglected amongst your papers) at our next appointed meeting.

I bid you heartely farewell. From Pyrgo in Essex, August the eighth, 1591. *Tuus salu et acerbatus.* W. WEBBE.

It may also be noted that Wilmott dedicated this revised tragedy to two Essex Ladies: one of whom was Lady Anne Grey, the daughter of Lord Windsor, and the wife of the above-mentioned Henry Grey, Esquire of Pyrgo.

That the above R. Wilmott, Clergyman, is the same as the Rurist of the play appears from the following passage in his Preface.

"Hereupon I have indured some conflicts betweene reason and judgement, whether it were convenient for the commonwealth, and the *imbecillitate* of my calling (as some thinke it) that the memory of *Tancred's* Tragedy should be again by my means revised, which the olmer I read over, and the more I considered thereon, the sooner I was won to consent therunto: calling to mind that neither the thrice reverent and learned father, M. Bera, was ashamed in his younger years to seend abroad, in his own name, his Tragedy of *Abraham*, nor that rare Scot (the scholar of our age) *Buchanans*, his most pathetical *Leifthke*." *Dowley's Old Plays*, ii. 165. Ed. by J. P. Collier, 1825.

If the identity may be considered as established, Wilmott the Poet lived on till 1619; when he was succeeded on his death by W. Jackson, in the Rectory of North Okendon. *Newcourt, idem*, ii. 447.

No later information concerning W. Webbe than the above letter, has yet been recovered.

CONTEMPORARY ENGLISH AUTHORS

REFERRED TO IN THE FOLLOWING *Discourse*.

R. ASCHAM.	<i>The Scholemaster</i> .	31, 57
G. B.	? <i>The Shippe of Safeguarde</i> , 1569	35
F. C.	?	35
T. CHURCHYARD.	<i>Churchyard's 'Chippie'</i> , 1575; <i>Churchyard's 'Chance'</i> , 1580; <i>Churchyard's 'Change'</i> , 1580; &c.	33
M. D.	[Master Dyer, i.e., Sir Edward Dyer]	33
? DARRELL	?	35

R. EDWARDS. <i>Par. of Dainty Devises</i> , 1576; <i>Comedies</i>	33
Sir T. ELYOT. <i>The Governour</i> , 1538	42, 43
G. GASCOIGNE. <i>Poetes</i> , 1572; <i>The Steele Glas</i> , &c., 1576	33
B. GOOGE. <i>Epylogi, Epytaphes, and Sonettes</i> , 1563; translation of Palingenius' <i>Zodiac of Life</i> , 1560, 1565	34
Sir J. GRANGE. <i>The Golden Aphroditus</i> , 1577	35
G. HARVEY	35
HEYWOOD [either JOHN HEYWOOD or JASPER HRYWOOD]	33
W. HUNNIS. <i>Paradise of Dainty Devises</i> , 1576, 1578	33
? HULL	33
E. K. [i.e. EDWARD KIRKE]	33, 53
F. K. [Fr. Kindlemarsh] <i>Par. of Dainty Devises</i> , 1576, 1578	35
J. LVLV. <i>Euphuus</i> , 1579-80; <i>Plays</i>	46
A. MUNDAY. <i>The Mirrour of Mutabilitie</i> , 1579; <i>The Paine of Pleasure</i> , 1580	35
T. NORTON. Joint Author of <i>Ferrex and Furrex</i> , 1561	33
C. OCKLANDE. <i>Anglorum Prælia</i> , 1580, 1582	30
[? DR. E.] SAND[YS]. <i>Par. of Dainty Devises</i> , 1576, &c.	33
E. SPENSER. <i>Shepheards Calender</i> , 1579, 1581, 1586	35, 52, 81
HENRY, Earl of SURREY. <i>Sonnets, &c.</i> , in Tottel's <i>Misc.</i> , 1557	33
T. TUSSEK. <i>Five hundred points of Good Husbandrie</i> , 1557-80	33
THOMAS, Lord VAUX. <i>Sonnets, &c.</i> , in Tottel's <i>Misc.</i> , 1557; and <i>Par. of Dainty Devises</i> , 1576	33
E. VERE, Earl of OXFORD. Unpublished <i>Sonnets</i>	33
G. WHETSTONE. <i>The Rocks of Rogard</i> , 1576	35
R. WILMOTT. <i>Tuncral and Gismund</i> , 1568	35
S. Y. [P. M. YLON, i.e. M. POOLY in <i>Par. of Dainty Devises</i>]	35

THE TRANSLATORS.

SENECA.

J. HEYWOOD. <i>Trout</i> , 1559; <i>Thyestes</i> , 1560; <i>Hercules Furens</i> , 1561	34
A. NEVILL. <i>Œdipus</i> , 1563	34
J. STUDLEY. <i>Medea</i> , 1566; <i>Agamemnon</i> , 1566	34

OVID.

G. TURNERVILLE. <i>Heroical Epistles</i> , 1567	34
A. GOLDING. <i>Metamorphoses</i> , 1565	34, 51
T. CHURCHYARD. <i>Tristia</i> , 1578	34
T. DRANT. <i>Satires</i> , 1566; <i>Art of Poetrie</i> , 1567	34

VIRGIL.

HENRY, Earl of SURREY. <i>Two Books of the 'Æneid'</i> , 1557	33
T. PHAER, M.D. <i>9th Book of the 'Æneid'</i> , 1558-1562	33, 46, 51
T. TWYNE. <i>The remaining 2d Book</i> , 1573	34
A. FLEMING. <i>Bucolicks</i> , 1575, in rhyme. His <i>Georgics</i> referred to at p. 55 appeared in 1589	34, 55

A Discourse of English Poetrie

INTRODUCTION.

T Part from the excessive rarity of this work, two copies of it only being known; it deserves permanent republication as a good example of the best form of Essay Writing of its time; and as one of the series of Poetical Criticisms before the advent of Shakespeare as a writer, the study of which is so essential to a right understanding of our best Verse.

Although Poetry is the most ethereal part of Thought and Expression; though Poets must be born and cannot be made; yet is there an art of Poesy; set forth long ago by Horace but varying with differing languages and countries, and even with different ages in the life of the same country. In our tongue—Milton only excepted—there is nothing approaching, either in the average merit of the Journeymen or the superlative excellence of the few Master-Craftsmen, the Poesy of the Elizabethan age. Hence the value of these early Poetical Criticisms. Their discussion of principles is most helpful to all readers in the discernment of the subtle beauties of the numberless poems of that era; while for those who can, and who will; they will be found singularly suggestive in the training of their own Power of Song, for the instruction and delight of this and future generations.

A Cambridge graduate; the private tutor, for some two or three years past, to Edward and Thomas Sul-