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### **The History Of English Poetry**

From The Close of the Eleventh To The Commencement of the Eighteenth  
Century

**Warton, Thomas**

**London, 1781**

Section XXII. The second writer of blank-verse in English. Specimens of  
early blank verse.

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## S E C T. XXII.

**T**O these SONGES and SONNETTES of UNCERTAIN AUCTOURS, in Tottell's edition are annexed SONGES WRITTEN BY N. G. <sup>a</sup> By the initials N. G. we are to understand Nicholas Grimoald, a name which never appeared yet in the poetical biography of England. But I have before mentioned him incidentally <sup>b</sup>. He was a native of Huntingdonshire, and received the first part of his academical institution at Christ's college in Cambridge. Removing to Oxford in the year 1542, he was elected fellow of Merton College: but, about 1547, having opened a rhetorical lecture in the refectory of Christ-church, then newly founded, he was transplanted to that society, which gave the greatest encouragement to such students as were distinguished for their proficiency in criticism and philology. The same year, he wrote a Latin tragedy, which probably was acted in the college, entitled, ARCHIPROPHETA, *sive* JOHANNES BAPTISTA, TRAGÆDIA, That is, *The Arch-prophet, or Saint John Baptist*, a tragedy, and dedicated to the dean Richard Cox <sup>c</sup>. In the year 1548 <sup>d</sup>, he explained all the four books of Virgil's Georgics in a regular prose Latin paraphrase, in the public hall of his college <sup>e</sup>. He wrote also explanatory commentaries or lectures on the Andria of Terence, the Epistles of Horace, and many pieces of Cicero, perhaps for the same auditory. He translated Tully's Offices into English. This translation, which is dedicated to the learned Thirlby bishop of Ely, was printed at London,

<sup>a</sup> They begin with fol. 113.

<sup>b</sup> See vol. ii. 342.

<sup>c</sup> Printed, Colon. 1548. 8vo. [See *supr.*

vol. ii. 379.]

<sup>d</sup> ii Edw. vi.

<sup>e</sup> Printed at London in 1591. 8vo.



1553<sup>f</sup>. He also familiarised some of the purest Greek classics by English versions, which I believe were never printed. Among others was the *CYROPÆDIA*. Bale the biographer and bishop of Osfory, says, that he turned Chaucer's *TROILUS* into a play: but whether this piece was in Latin or English, we are still to seek: and the word *Comedia*, which Bale uses on this occasion, is without precision or distinction. The same may be said of what Bale calls his *FAME*, a *comedy*. Bale also recites his *System of Rhetoric* for the use of Englishmen<sup>g</sup>, which seems to be the course of the rhetorical lectures I have mentioned. It is to be wished, that Bale, who appears to have been his friend<sup>h</sup>, and therefore possessed the opportunities of information, had given us a more exact and full detail, at least of such of Grimoald's works as are now lost, or, if remaining, are unprinted<sup>i</sup>. Undoubtedly this is the same person, called by Strype *one Grimbald*, who was chaplain to bishop Ridley, and who was employed by that prelate, while in prison, to translate into English, Laurentio Valla's book against the fiction of Constantine's *DONATION*, with some other popular Latin pieces against the papists<sup>k</sup>. In the ecclesiastical history of Mary's reign, he appears to have been imprisoned for heresy, and to have saved his life, if not his credit, by a recantation. But theology does not seem to have been his talent, nor the glories of martyrdom to have made any part of his ambition. One of his plans, but which never took effect, was to print a new edition of Josephus Iscanus's poem on the *TROJAN WAR*, with emendations from the most correct manuscripts<sup>l</sup>.

I have taken more pains to introduce this Nicholas Grimoald to the reader's acquaintance, because he is the second English poet after lord Surrey, who wrote in blank-verse. Nor is it his

<sup>f</sup> In octavo. Again, 1574.—1596.

<sup>g</sup> *Rhetorica in usum Britannorum*.

<sup>h</sup> Bale cites his comment, or paraphrase on the first Eclogue of Virgil, addressed *ad Amicum Joannem Baleum*, viii. 99.

<sup>i</sup> Titles of many others of his pieces may be seen in Bale, *ubi supr.*

<sup>k</sup> See Strype's *CRANMER*, B. iii. c. 11. p. 343. And *GRINDAL*, 8. FOX, edit. i. 1047. And Wood, *ATH. OXON.* i. 178.

<sup>l</sup> Bale, *ubi supr.*

only



only praise, that he was the first who followed in this new path of verification. To the style of blank-verse exhibited by Surrey, he added new strength, elegance, and modulation. In the disposition and conduct of his cadencies, he often approaches to the legitimate structure of the improved blank-verse: but we cannot suppose, that he is entirely free from those dissonancies and asperities, which still adhered to the general character and state of our diction.

In his poem on the DEATH OF MARCUS TULLIUS CICERO are these lines. The assassins of Cicero are said to relent,

— When

They his bare neck behelde, and his hore heares,  
 Scant could they hold the teares that forth gan burst,  
 And almost fell from bloody handes the swoordes.  
 Onely the sterne Herennius, with grym looke,  
 Dastardes, why stande ye still? he saith: and straight  
 Swapt off the head with his presumptuous yrone.  
 Ne with the slaughter yet is he not filled:  
 Fowle shame on shame to hepe, is his delite.  
 Wherefore the handes also he doth off-smyte,  
 Which durst Antonius' life so lively paint.  
 Him, yelding strained ghoſte<sup>m</sup>, from welkin hie  
 With lothly chere lord Phebus gan beholde;  
 And in black clowde, they say, long hid his hed.  
 The Latine Muses, and the Grayes<sup>n</sup>, they wept,  
 And for his fall eternally shall wepe.  
 And lo! hart-perſing ΠΙΤΗΟ<sup>o</sup>, strange to tell,  
 Who had suffisde to him both fence and wordes,  
 When so he spake, and drest with nectar foote  
 That flowyng tounge, when his windpipe discloſde,  
 Fled with her fleeing friend<sup>p</sup>; and, out, alas!  
 Hath left the earth, ne will no more returne.

<sup>m</sup> His constrained spirit.  
<sup>n</sup> Graie. Greck.

<sup>o</sup> Peitho, the goddess of persuasion.  
<sup>p</sup> Fol. 117.

Nor



Nor is this passage unsupported by a warmth of imagination, and the spirit of pathetic poetry. The general cast of the whole poem shews, that our author was not ill qualified for dramatic composition.

Another of Grimoald's blank-verse poems, is on the death of Zoroas an Egyptian astronomer, who was killed in Alexander's first battle with the Persians. It is opened with this nervous and animated exordium.

Now clattering armes, now ragyng broyls of warre,  
 Gan passe the noyes of dredfull trumpets clang<sup>a</sup>;  
 Shrowded with shafts the heaven, with clowd of darts  
 Covered the ayre. Against full-fatted bulls  
 As forceth kindled yre the Lyons keene,  
 Whose greedy gutts the gnawing honger pricks,  
 So Macedonians 'gainst the Persians fare<sup>b</sup>.

In the midst of the tumult and hurry of the battle, appears the sage philosopher Zoroas: a classical and elegant description of whose skill in natural science, forms a pleasing contrast amidst images of death and destruction; and is inserted with great propriety, as it is necessary to introduce the history of his catastrophe.

Shakyng her bloody hands Bellone, among  
 The Peres, fowth all kynde of cruel deth.—  
 Him smites the club; him wounds far-strikyng bow;  
 And him the flyng, and him the shining sward.—  
 Right over stood, in snow-white armour brave,<sup>c</sup>  
 The Memphite Zoroas, a cunning clarke,  
 To whom the heaven lay open as his boke:

<sup>a</sup> The reader must recollect Shakespeare's,

Loud larums, neighing steeds, and TRUMPETS CLANG.

<sup>b</sup> Fol. 115.

<sup>c</sup> Brave, is richly decked.



And in celestiaall bodies he could tell  
 The moving, meting, light, aspect, eclips,  
 And influence, and constellacions all.  
 What earthly chances would betide: what yere  
 Of plenty<sup>t</sup> stord: what signe forwarned derth:  
 How winter gendreth snow: what temperature  
 In the prime tide<sup>u</sup> doth season well the soyl.  
 Why fommer burnes: why autumnne hath ripe grapes:  
 Whether the circle quadrate may become:  
 Whether our tunes heavens harmony can yeld<sup>v</sup>:—  
 What star doth let<sup>x</sup> the hurtfull fire<sup>y</sup> to rage,  
 Or him more milde what opposition makes:  
 What fire doth qualify Mavorfes<sup>z</sup> fire, &c<sup>a</sup>.

Our astronomer, finding by the stars that he is destined to die speedily, chuses to be killed by the hand of Alexander, whom he endeavours to irritate to an attack, first by throwing darts, and then by reproachful speeches.

— — — Shameful stain

Of mothers bed! Why lovest thou thy strokes  
 Cowards among? Turne thee to me, in case  
 Manhode there be so much left in thy hart:  
 Come, fight with me, that on my helmet weare  
 Apolloes laurel, both for learnings laude,  
 And eke for martial praise: that in my shielde  
 The sevenfold sophie of Minerve contain.  
 A match more mete, fir king, than any here.

Alexander is for a while unwilling to revenge this insult on a man eminent for wisdom.

<sup>t</sup> With plenty.  
<sup>u</sup> Spring. *Printemps*.  
<sup>v</sup> Whether any music made by man can  
 resemble that of the Spheres.

<sup>x</sup> Hinder.  
<sup>y</sup> Saturn.  
<sup>z</sup> Of Mavors, or the planet Mars.  
<sup>a</sup> Fol. 115.



The noble prince amoved takes ruche upon  
 The wilful wight; and with soft wordes, ayen:  
 O monstros man, quoth he, What so thou art!  
 I pray thee live, ne do not with thy death  
 This lodge of lore<sup>b</sup>, the Muses mansion mar,  
 That treasure-house this hand shall never spoyle.  
 My sword shall never bruse that skilfull braine,  
 Long-gathered heapes of Science sone to spill.  
 O how faire frutes may you to mortal man  
 From WISDOM'S garden give! How many may,  
 By you, the wiser and the better prove!  
 What error, what mad moode, what frensy, thee  
 Perswades, to be downe sent to depe Averne,  
 Where no arts flourish, nor no knowledge 'vails  
 For all these sawes<sup>c</sup>? When thus the soveraign sayd,  
 Alighted Zoroas, &c<sup>d</sup>. — — —

I have a suspicion, that these two pieces in blank-verse, if not fragments of larger works, were finished in their present state, as prolusions, or illustrative practical specimens, for our author's course of lectures in rhetoric. In that case, they were written so early as the year 1547. There is positive proof, that they appeared not later than 1557, when they were first printed by Tottell.

I have already mentioned lord Surrey's Virgil: and for the sake of juxtaposition, will here produce a third specimen of early blank-verse, little known. In the year 1590, William Vallans published a blank-verse poem, entitled, A TALE OF TWO SWANNES, which, under a poetic fiction, describes the situation and antiquities of several towns in Hertfordshire. The author, a native or inhabitant of Hertfordshire, seems to have been con-

<sup>b</sup> His head.<sup>c</sup> Lessons of wisdom.<sup>d</sup> Fol. 115. 116.



nected with Camden and other ingenious antiquaries of his age. I cite the exordium.

When Nature, nurse of every living thing,  
Had clad her charge in brave and new array;  
The hills rejoit to see themselves so fine:  
The fields and woods grew proud thereof also:  
The meadows with their partie-colour'd coates,  
Like to the rainebow in the azurd skie,  
Gave just occasion to the cheerfull birdes  
With sweetest note to singe their nurse's praise.  
Among the which, the merrie nightingale  
With swete and swete, her breast against a thorne,  
Ringes out all night, &c<sup>o</sup>.

Vallans is probably the author of a piece much better known, a history, by many held to be a romance, but which proves the writer a diligent searcher into antient records, entitled, "The  
" HONOURABLE PRENTICE, Shewed in the Life and Death  
" of Sir JOHN HAWKEWOOD sometime Prentice of London,  
" interlaced with the famous History of the noble FITZ-  
" WALTER Lord of Woodham in Essex<sup>e</sup>, and of the poisoning  
" of his faire daughter. Also of the merry Customes of DUN-  
" MOWE, &c. Whereunto is annexed the most lamentable  
" murther of Robert Hall at the High Altar in Westminster  
" Abbey<sup>e</sup>."

The reader will observe, that what has been here said about early specimens of blank-verse, is to be restrained to poems not

<sup>o</sup> London, Printed by Roger Ward for Robert Sheldrake, MDC. 4to. 3. Sheets. He mentions most of the Seats in Hertfordshire then existing, belonging to the queen and the nobility. See Hearne's LEL. ITIK. V. Pr. p. iv. seq. ed. 2.

<sup>1</sup> The founder of Dunmowe Priory, af-

terwards mentioned, in the reign of Henry the third.

<sup>2</sup> There are two old editions, at London, in 1615, and 1616, both for Henry Goffon, in 5 sh. 4to. They have only the author's initials W. V. See Hearne, ut modo supr. iii. p. v. ii. p. xvi.

written



written for the stage. Long before Vallans's *TWO SWANNES*, many theatrical pieces in blank-verse had appeared; the first of which is, *THE TRAGEDY OF GORDOBUCKE*, written in 1561. The second is George Gascoigne's *JOCASTA*, a tragedy, acted at Grays-inn, in 1566. George Peele had also published his tragedy in blank-verse of *DAVID and BETHSABE*, about the year 1579<sup>n</sup>. *HIERONYMO*, a tragedy also without rhyme, was acted before 1590. But this point, which is here only transiently mentioned, will be more fully considered hereafter, in its proper place. We will now return to our author Grimoald.

Grimoald, as a writer of verses in rhyme, yields to none of his cotemporaries, for a masterly choice of chaste expression, and the concise elegancies of didactic versification. Some of the couplets, in his poem *IN PRAISE OF MODERATION*, have all the smartness which marks the modern style of sententious poetry, and would have done honour to Pope's ethic epistles.

The auncient Time commended not for nought  
 The Mean. What better thing can there be sought?  
 In meane is virtue placed: on either side,  
 Both right and left, amisse a man may slide.  
 Icar, with fire<sup>l</sup> hadst thou the midway flown,  
 Icarian beak<sup>\*</sup> by name no man known.  
 If middle path kept had proud Phaeton,  
 No burning brande this earth had false upon.  
 Ne cruel power, ne none too soft can raig:  
 That kepes<sup>l</sup> a meane, the same shal stil remain.  
 Thee, Julie<sup>m</sup>, once did too much mercy spill:  
 Thee, Nero sterne, rigor extreme did kill.  
 How could August<sup>n</sup> so many yeres wel passe?  
 Nor overmeke, nor overfierce, he was.

<sup>n</sup> Shakespeare did not begin writing for the stage till 1591. Jonson, about 1598.

<sup>l</sup> Icarus, with thy father.

<sup>\*</sup> Strait. Sea.

<sup>l</sup> That which.

<sup>m</sup> Julius Cesar.

<sup>n</sup> Augustus Cesar.

Worship



Worship not Jove with curious fancies vain,  
 Nor him despise : hold right atween these twain.  
 No wastefull wight, no greedy groom is praizd :  
 Stands Largeffe just in equal ballance paizd \*.  
 So Catoes meat furmounes Antonius chere,  
 And better fame his sober fare hath here.  
 Too slender building bad, as bad too grosse † ;  
 One an eye fore, the other falls to losse.  
 As medicines help in measure, so, god wot,  
 By overmuch the sick their bane have got.  
 Unmete, mesemes, to utter this mo waies ;  
 Measure forbids unmeasurable praise ‡.

The maxim is enforced with great quickness and variety of illustration: nor is the collision of opposite thoughts, which the subject so naturally affords, extravagantly pursued, or indulged beyond the bounds of good sense and propriety. The following stanzas on the NINE MUSES are more poetical, and not less correct †.

Imps\* of king JOVE and queen REMEMBRANCE, lo,  
 The sisters nyne, the poets pleasant feres †,  
 Calliope doth stately stile below,  
 And worthy praises paintes of princely peres.  
 Clion in solem songes reneweth all day,  
 With present yeres conjoining age bypast.  
 Delighteful talke loues comicall Thaley ;  
 In fresh grene youth who doth like lawrell last.  
 With voyces tragicall foundes Melpomen,  
 And, as with cheins, thallured eare she bindes.  
 Her stringes when Terpschor doth touche, euen then  
 She toucheth hartes, and raigneth in mens mindes.

\* Poised.  
 † Thick. Maffy.  
 ‡ Fol. 113.

† Fol. 113.  
 † Daughters.  
 † Companions.

Fine



Fine Erato, whose looke a liuely chere  
 Presents, in dauncing keepes a comely grace.  
 With femely gesture doth Polymnie stere,  
 Whose wordes whole routes of rankes do rule in place.

Uranie, her globes to view all bent,  
 The ninefold heauen obserues with fixed face.  
 The blastes Euterpe tunes of instrument,  
 With solace sweete, hence heauie dumps to chafe.

Lord Phebus in the mids, (whose heauenly sprite  
 These ladies doth inspire) embraceth all.  
 The Graces in the Muses weed, delite  
 To lead them forth, that men in maze they fall.

It would be unpardonable to dismiss this valuable miscellany, without acknowledging our obligations to its original editor Richard Tottell: who deserves highly of English literature, for having collected at a critical period, and preserved in a printed volume, so many admirable specimens of antient genius, which would have mouldered in manuscript, or perhaps from their detached and fugitive state of existence, their want of length, the capriciousness of taste, the general depredations of time, inattention, and other accidents, would never have reached the present age. It seems to have given birth to two favorite and celebrated collections of the same kind, *THE PARADISE OF DAINTY DEUISES*, and *ENGLAND'S HELICON*, which appeared in the reign of queen Elifabeth.

\* The reader will observe, that I have followed the paging and arrangement of Tottell's second edition in 1565. 12mo. In his edition of 1557, there is much confusion. A poem is there given to Grimoald, on the death of lady Margaret Lee, in 1555. Also among Grimoald's is a poem on Sir James Wilford, mentioned above, who appears to have fought under Henry the eighth in the the wars of France and Scotland. This edition, of 1557, is

not in quarto, as I have called it by an oversight, but in small duodecimo, and only with signatures. It is not mentioned by Ames, and I have seen it only among Tanner's printed books at Oxford. It has this colophon. "Imprinted at London in  
 "Flete firete within Temple barre, at the  
 "sygne of the hand and starre by Richard  
 "Tottel, the fitte day of June. An. 1557.  
 "Cum privilegio ad imprimendum solum."

S E C T.