

Mulcaster and Du Bellay

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MISCELLANEOUS NOTES.

MULCASTER AND DU BELLAY.

The problem of diction and some part at least of its solution were almost certainly brought to the notice of Spenser early in life by his schoolmaster, Richard Mulcaster, whose alert mind, original methods, and literary interests must have left their impression on Spenser as they did on Lancelot Andrewes. *The First Part of the Elementarie* was published only in 1582, but we may take it that Mulcaster, like every schoolmaster, was drawing on his long experience—in his Dedication to the Earl of Leicester he says ‘I haue trauelled in this point of our English writing, somewhat more then ordinary’—and that he was teaching on these principles before Spenser left the Merchant Taylors’ School in 1569. It is typical of the discursive habit of the time that a treatise on spelling should be the vehicle of the first educative force in the life of the first master and maker of modern English poetic art: the problem of orthography, however, weighed on many poets, French and English, and for artists in sound the relation of eye and ear was more pertinent to literature than it might seem. Mulcaster’s orthographical theories are not to the present purpose, but it may be noted in passing that he agrees with Ronsard’s early views on the treatment of foreign words: ‘The English rule for writing, must be the right thereof¹’; ‘C’est vne regle generale d’appropriier sur la terminaizon françoise tous les mots tirés des Italiens, Latins, et des Grecs, pour l’ornement et perfection de nostre langue².’

Like Ascham, and indeed like the defenders of the vernacular in all countries, Mulcaster was inspired by a patriotic motive. ‘All which I do, concerneth my cuntrie youth and tung, it entertaineth her profit, and enuieth not her pleasur, and desireth to se hir enriched so in euerie kinde of argument, and honored so with euerie ornament of eloquence, as she maie vy with the foren, if I maie work it with wishing³.’ His own share in the improvement of the mother tongue was the normalising of English spelling, but there is abundant evidence of keen interest in the

¹ Cap. xxii.

² *Odes*, ed. Vaganay, p. 112; see also *Art Poétique*, pp. 234–235.

³ Peroration.

larger problems, and careful study. His general position is utterly divorced from that of Ascham and the Cambridge purists—so different that the terms of licence of his *Positions*, providing that it should contain nothing contrary to the teaching of Ascham, might be interpreted as evidence of the notoriety of Mulcaster's revolutionary tendencies, as much as of Ascham's credit with authority. The present interest of his views on language is that, so far as they are expressed, they are precisely those of Du Bellay's *Deffence et Illustration*. The mother tongue is insufficient, but not to be despaired of: 'It is verie manifest, that the tung itself hath matter enough in itself, to furnish out an art, and that the same mean, which hath been vsed in the reducing of other tongs to their right, will serue this of ours, both for generalitie of precept, and certainty of ground¹.' To suggest a contrary opinion was an aspersion on a great nation: 'Quand à la pieté, religion, intégrité de moeurs, magnanimité de couraiges, et toutes ces vertuz rares et antiques (qui est la vraye et solide louange), la France a tousiours obtenu sans controuuerse le premier lieu²'; 'The English nation hath allwaie bene of good credit, and great estimation, euer since credit and estimation by historie came on this side the Alps³.' In any case—and this was the foundation of the whole theory—all languages were equal in innate possibilities: their varying powers and beauties were the result of cultivation, not the gift of nature. 'The finest tung, was once in filth, the verie course of nature proceeding from weaknesse, to strength, from imperfection, to perfittnesse, from a mean degree, to a main dignitie⁴'; 'No one tung is more fine then other naturallie, but by industry of the speaker, which...endeuoreth himself to garnish it with eloquence, and to enrich it with learning⁵.' 'Les langues ne sont nées d'elles mesmes en façon d'Herbes, Racines, et Arbres: les vnes infirmes, et debiles en leurs especes: les autres saines, et robustes, et plus aptes à porter le faiz des conceptions humaines: mais toute leur vertu est née au monde du vouloir, et arbitre des mortels...Il est vray que par succession de tens les vnes, pour auoir été plus curieusement reiglées, sont deuenues plus riches, que les autres: mais cela ne se doit attribuer à la felicité desdites langues, ains au seul artifice, et industrie des hommes⁶.' 'Qui voudroit dire que la Greque, et Romaine eussent tousiours été en l'excellence qu'on les a vues du tens d'Homere, et de Demosthene, de Virgile, et de Ciceron? Et si ces auteurs eussent iugé que iamais, pour quelque

¹ Pp. 79–80.

² *Deffence et Illustration*, p. 156.

³ P. 80. ⁴ P. 62. ⁵ P. 253.

⁶ *Deffence et Illustration*, p. 50.

diligence, et culture qu'on y eust peu faire, elles n'eussent sceu produyre plus grand fruit, se feussent ilz tant eforcez de les mettre au point, ou nous les voyons maintenant¹?" 'The diligent labor of learned countrymen did so enrich these tungs and not the tungs themselves, tho theie proued verie pliable, as our tung will proue, I dare assure it of knowledge, if our learned cuntriemen will put to their labor².' Mulcaster had the same faith and the same sense of duty: 'Our English is our own, our Sparta must be spunged, by the inhabitants that haue it, as well as those tungs were by the industrie of their people, which be braued with the most, and brag as the best³.' 'Our tung is capable, if our peple wold be painfull⁴.'

The attitude to the classics is the same. 'Which two considerations being fullie answered, that we seke them from *profit* and kepe them for that conference, whatsoever else maie be don in our tung, either to serue priuat uses, or the beawtifying of our speche, I do not se, but it maie well be admitted, euen tho in the end it displaced the *Latin*, as the *Latin* did others, and furnished itself by the *Latin* learning...For is it not in dede a maruellous bondage, to becom seruents to one tung for learning sake, the most of our time, with losse of most time, whereas we maie haue the verie same treasur in our own tung, with the gain of most time...I loue *Rome*, but *London* better, I fauor *Italie*, but *England* more, I honor the *Latin*, but I worship the *English*. I wish all were in ours, which theie had from others...It is no obiection to saie, well ye rob those tungs of their honor, which haue honored you? or which if theie had not bene to make you learned, you had not bene to strip them of from learning? For I honor them still, and that so much as who doth most, euen in wishing mine own tung partaker of their honor...I confess their furniture and wish it were in ours⁵.' 'Yet are we not ignorant of the mean thereof to turn to our vse all the great treasur, of either foren soil, or foren language. And why maie not the English wits, if they will bend their wills, either for matter or for method in their own tung be in time as well sought to, by foren students for increase of their knowledge, as our soil is sought to at this same time, by foren merchants, for increase of their welth? as the soil is fertile, bycause it is applied, so the wits be not barren if theie list to brede⁶.' 'Et certes songeant beaucoup de foys, d'ou prouient que les Hommes de se Siecle generalement sont moins scauans en toutes Sciences, et de moindre prix

¹ *Ibid.* pp. 56–57, also p. 158.

³ *Ibid.* p. 256.

⁵ P. 255.

² *Elementarie*, p. 255.

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 258.

⁶ P. 256.

que les Anciens, entre beaucoup de raysons ie treuve cete cy, que i'oseroy dire la principale : c'est l'Etude des Langues Greque, et Latine. Car si le Tens, que nous consumons à apprendre les dites Langues, estoit employé à l'étude des Sciences, la Nature sertes n'est point deuenue si Brehaigne, qu'elle n'enfantast de nostre Tens, des Platons et des Aristotes...Faut il donques laisser l'étude des Langues? non : d'autant que les Ars, et Sciences sont pour le present entre les mains des Grecz, et Latins. Mais il se deuroit faire à l'auenir qu'on peust parler de toute chose, par tout le monde, et en toute Langue¹. 'Our *English* wits be verie well able, thanks be to God, if their wils were as good, to make those vncouth and vnknown learnings verie familiar to our peple, euen in our own tung, and that both by president and protection of those same writers, whom we esteme so much of, who doing that for others, which I do wish for ours, in the like case must needs allow of vs, onelesse theie wil auouch that which theie cannot auow, that the praise of that labor to conueie cunning from a foren tung into a man's own, did dy with them, not to reuiue in vs². 'For the tungs which we study, were not the first getters, tho by learned trauell the(ie) proue good keepers'. Wisdom travelled from Egypt and Chaldaea to Greece, from Greece to Rome, now it is time for the modern tongues to enter into the inheritance: it is the same doctrine that Du Bellay taught⁴.

'Voyla quand aux Disciplines': in the question of diction—the *Illustration* of the mother tongue after its *Deffence*—the main point on which Mulcaster touches is that which most troubled English criticism, the expediency of borrowing. On this question, as one might expect after the heresies just quoted, he ran counter to the humanist purists. 'For mine own words and the terms, that I vse, theie be generallie *English*. And if anie be either an incorporate stranger, or otherwise translated, or quite coined a new, I haue shaped it as fit for the place, where I vse it, as my cunning will giue me. And to be bold that waie for either enfranchising the foren, or translating our own, without to manifest insolence, and to wanton affection, or else to inuent new upon euident note, which will bear witness, that it fitteth well, where it is to be vsed...till oft vsing do make it well known, we ar sufficiently warranted both by president and precept of them, that can iudge best⁵. Nor was Mulcaster bound to the adoption of new terms by necessity alone; English was 'to furnish out an art,' and fine as well as useful terms were welcome to him.

¹ *Deffence et Illustration*, pp. 83–85.

³ *Ibid.* p. 254.

⁵ *Elementarie*, p. 269.

² *Elementarie*, p. 255.

⁴ Liure I, Chaps. ix, x et *passim*.

In his discussion of this point he displayed something of that fine insolence—the pride of the humanist transferred to the vulgar—which claims from the reader something more than a casual and condescending attention. This was no Ascham writing in simple wise for the benefit of his unlettered countrymen, but a scholar treating in a well-studied style a matter which demanded serious consideration. For him, as for Du Bellay and Ronsard, vernacular literature was worthy of the pains commonly bestowed only on the classics. Reacting from the unambitious simplicity of Marot, the Pléiade declared that the best poetry is not necessarily the easiest; they appealed to a cultivated audience—

Les François qui ces vers liron,
S'ils ne sont et Grecs et Romains,
En lieu de mon liure ils n'auront
Qu'un pesant faix entre les mains¹—

and refused consistently to consider the opinions of 'le vulgaire,' which category included all, princes and pedants alike, who were uninstructed or who were uninterested in the Pléiade cause of intellectual progress. Mulcaster also recognised the restriction of appeal: 'In the force of words...there are to be considered *commonesse* for euery man, *beawtie* for the learned, *brauerie* to rauish, *borowing* to enlarge our natural speche, and readiest deliuerie².' Beauty is for such as can appreciate it, and it is the duty of the reader to take pains to understand. 'And therefor if anie reader find falt with anie word, which is not sutable to his ear, bycause it is not he, for whom that word serues, let him mark his own, which he knoweth, and make much of the other, which is worthie his knowing. Know you not som words? Why? no maruell. It is a metaphor, a learned translation, remoued from where it is proper, into som such place where it is more properly vsed, and most significant to, if it be well vnderstood: take pains to know it, you haue of whom to learn... Is it a stranger? but no Turk. And tho it were an enemies word, yet good is worth the getting, tho it be from your fo, as well by speche of writers, as by spoill of soldiers...He hath skill in language, whether learned and old, or liked and new, will not wonder at words which he knoweth whence theie ar, neither maruell at a conceit quickly deliuered, the like whereof he meteth oft abroad³.' 'He must take acquaintance and make the thing familiar if it seme to be strange. For all strange things seme great nouelties, and hard of entertainment at their first arriuall, till theie be acquainted: but after acquaintance they be verie familiar, and easie to entreat. And words likewise, which either conueie

¹ Prefixed to *La Franciade*.

² *Elementarie*, p. 268.

³ *Ibid.* pp. 268–269.

strange matters, or be strangers themselves, either in name or in vse, be no wilde beasts, tho theie be vnwont, neither is a term a *Tiger* to proue untractable. Familiaritie and acquaintance will cause facilitie, both in matter and in words¹. Here Mulcaster lays a duty on the reader, on all 'which know the *Latin* tung better then our own, bycause we pore vpon it, and neuer mark our own²': and to the writer he counsels freedom and boldness, claiming that it is for him to lead. Like Ronsard, Mulcaster knew the weakness of his mother tongue, and the difficulties to which its poverty led: 'For when the mind is fraught with matter to deliuer, it is still in pain vntill it haue deliuered, and therefore to haue the deliuerie such, as maie discharge the thing well, and content all parties... it seketh both home helps, where theie be sufficient, and significant, and where the own home yeildeth nothing at all, or not pithie enough, it craueth help of that tung, from whence it receiued the matter of deliuerie.' Like Du Bellay, he acclaims 'the conquering mind, such as he must haue, which either seketh himself, or is desirous to se his cuntrie tung enlarged, and the same made the instrument of all his knowledge, as it is of his needs'—the mind that will aid the English tongue by the invention and usage of 'the latest terms which it boroweth dailie from foren tungs, either of pure necessitie in new matters, or of mere brauerie, to garnish itself withal.'

Spenser, then, was educated under a principal master who held views on the nature of language and on the necessity for labour, freedom, and boldness in the improvement of the mother tongue which were in sharp conflict with those of the most famous English educationists of his day, and which were those identified with the *Pléiade*, and especially with the *Deffence et Illustration* of Du Bellay. It was under this tutelage that he translated the *Songe ou Vision* from Du Bellay's *Antiquitez de Rome*, published in van der Noodt's *Theatre* and afterwards acknowledged. The inference that thus early he became acquainted with the prose as well as with the poetical work of Du Bellay is at least possible.

W. L. RENWICK.

NEWCASTLE-UPON-TYNE.

SPENSER AND THE PLÉIADE.

I am indebted to Professor John W. Draper of Bryn Mawr for the reference to an article by J. B. Fletcher on 'Areopagus and *Pléiade*' in the *American Journal of Germanic Philology*, Vol. II (1898). In this

¹ P. 263.

² P. 265. Cf. E. K. in Gregory Smith, Vol. I, p. 130, l. 17.