

THOMAS WARTON

A HISTORY OF ENGLISH
POETRY: AN
UNPUBLISHED
CONTINUATION

Thomas Warton

**A History of English Poetry:
an Unpublished Continuation**

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INTRODUCTION

Among the unpublished papers of Thomas and Joseph Warton at Winchester College the most interesting and important item is undoubtedly a continuation of Thomas Warton's *History of English Poetry*. This continuation completes briefly the analysis of Elizabethan satire and discusses the Elizabethan sonnet. The discussion offers material of interest particularly for the bibliographer and the literary historian. The bibliographer, for example, will be intrigued by a statement of Thomas Warton that he had examined a copy of the *Sonnets* published in 1599—a decade before the accepted date of the first edition. The literary historian will be interested in, inter alia, unpublished information concerning the university career of Samuel Daniel and in the theory that Shakespeare's sonnets should be interpreted as if addressed by a woman to her lover.

Critically appraised, Warton's treatment of the Elizabethan sonnet seems skimpy. To dismiss the sonnet in one third the amount of space devoted to Joseph Hall's *Virgidemiarum* seems to betray a want of proportion. Perhaps even more damaging may seem the fact that Warton failed to mention more sonnet collections than he discussed. About twenty years later, in 1802, Joseph Ritson listed in his *Bibliographia Poetica* the sonnet collections of Barnaby Barnes, Thomas Lodge, William Percy, and John Soowthern—all evidently unknown to Warton. But Warton was not particularly slipshod in his researches. In his immediately preceding section, on Elizabethan satire, he had stopped at 1600; and in the continuation he deliberately omitted the sonnet collections published after that date. Thus, though he had earlier in the *History* (III, 264, n.) promised a discussion of Drayton, he omitted him here because his sonnets were continually being augmented until 1619. Two sixteenth century collections which Warton had mentioned earlier in the *History* (III, 402, n.) he failed to discuss here, William Smith's *Chloris* (1596) and Henry Lock's *Sundry Christian Passions, contayned in two hundred Sonnets* (1593). Concerning Lock he had quoted significantly (IV, 8-9) from *The Return from Parnassus*: "Locke and Hudson, sleep you quiet shavers among the shavings of the press, and let your books lie in some old nook amongst old boots and shoes, so you may avoid my censure." A collection which certainly did not need to avoid censure was Sir Philip Sidney's *Astrophel and Stella*; and for Warton's total neglect of Sidney's sonnets it seems difficult to account, for in this section on the sonnet Sidney as a poet would have been most aptly discussed. The *Astrophel and Stella* was easily available in eighteenth-century editions of Sidney's works, and Warton admired the author. Both Thomas and Joseph Warton, however, venerated Sidney mainly for his *Arcadia* and his *Apology for Poetry*. For Joseph Warton, Sidney was the prime English exhibit of great writers who have not, he thought, "been able to express themselves with beauty and propriety in the fetters of verse."¹ And Thomas Warton quoted evidently only once from Sidney's verse,² and then only by way of *England's Helicon*.³ The omission of Sidney, then, is the glaring defect; of the dozen or so other Elizabethan sonnet collections which escaped Warton, most were absolutely or practically unknown, and none seem to have been available to him in the Bodleian or the British Museum.

¹ Joseph Warton, *An Essay on the Writings and Genius of Pope* (London, 1756-1782), I, 270-271.

² Joseph Warton, *An Essay on the Writings and Genius of Pope* (London, 1756-1782), I, 270-271.

³ John Milton, *Poems upon Several Occasions* (London, 1785), ed. Thomas Warton, p. 331, n.

At the time of his death, on 21 May 1790, there were in print only eleven sheets,⁴ or eighty-eight pages, of the fourth and final volume, which was scheduled to bring the history of English poetry down to the close of the seventeenth century. For four years after the publication of the third volume in 1781 Warton repeatedly promised to complete the work,⁵ and a notice at the end of his edition of Milton's *Minor Poems* advertised in 1785 the "speedy publication" of the fourth volume. But to his printer Warton evidently sent nothing beyond Section XLVIII. The present continuation was probably written during or shortly after 1782: it contains no reference to any publication after William Hayley's *Essay on Epic Poetry*, which appeared in 1782; and according to Thomas Caldecott, Warton for the last seven years of his life discontinued work upon the *History*.⁶

The notes which Thomas Warton had made for the completion of the *History* were upon his death commandeered by his brother, Joseph, at that time headmaster of Winchester College. Joseph Warton made some halfhearted efforts to get on with the volume,⁷ but neither Winchester nor Wickham, whither he retired in 1793, was a proper place in which to carry on the necessary research. Moreover he was much more interested in editing Pope and Dryden; and securing advantageous contracts to edit these poets whom he knew well, he let the *History* slide.

Joseph Warton appears, however, to have touched up the present continuation, for a few expansions seem to be in his script rather than in his brother's. It is difficult to be positive in the discrimination of hands here, as Thomas Warton's hand in this manuscript is quite irregular. Pens of varying thicknesses were used; black ink was used for the text and red ink for footnotes, and one note (16) was pencilled. Moreover, certain passages appear to have been written during periods of marked infirmity or haste and are legible only with difficulty if at all. In any case, those additions which were presumably made by Joseph Warton merely expand the original version; they do not alter or modify any of Thomas Warton's statements.

In the text of the present edition the expansions which appear to be in Joseph Warton's hand are placed within parentheses, which were not used for punctuation in the text of the manuscript itself. Because of the difficulties of reproduction, all small capitals have been translated into lower case italics.

This continuation, discovered by the editor among the Warton papers in the Moberly Library at Winchester College, is here published with the kind permission of the Right Honorable Harold T. Baker and Sir George Henry Gates, retired and present Wardens of Winchester College, and of the Fellows of the College. The editor is indebted also to the Reverend Mr. J. d'E. Firth, Assistant Master and Chaplain; and Mr. C. E. R. Claribut and Mr. J. M. G. Blakiston, past and present Assistant Fellows' Librarians. The Richmond Area University Center contributed a generous grant-in-aid.

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⁴ Nineteenth-century editions of the *History* give the false impression that the eight sheets were prepared from manuscript material left at Thomas Warton's death, but these sheets were certainly printed before Thomas died, and probably in the early 1780's. See John Nichols, *Literary Anecdotes of the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1812-1816), III, 702-703. They contain no reference postdating that to Isaac Reed's revised edition of Robert Dodsley's *Collection of Old Plays*, published in 1780.

⁵ Thomas Warton to Richard Price, 13 October 1781, in Thomas Warton, *Poetical Works*, ed. Richard Mant (Oxford, 1802), I, lxxviii; Daniel Prince to Richard Gough, 4 August 1783, in Nichols, *Literary Anecdotes*, III, 702.

⁶ Thomas Caldecott to Bishop Percy, 21 March 1803, in Nichols, *Illustrations of the Literary History of the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1817-1858), VIII, 372.

⁷ Joseph Warton to William Hayley, 12 March 1792, in John Wooll, *Biographical Memoirs of the late Revd. Joseph Warton* (London, 1806), p. 404.

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(In enumerating so many of these petty Epigrammatists, I may have been perhaps too prolix, —but I did it to shew the taste & turn of writing at this time; & now proceed to observe, that, in the year, 1614,)⁸ the vogue which satire had acquired from Hall and Marston, probably encouraged Barten Holiday of Christ-Church in Oxford, to translate Persius, when he was scarcely twenty years of age. The first edition is dated 1616. This version had four editions from its publication to the year 1673 inclusive, notwithstanding the versification is uncommonly scabrous. The success of his Persius induced Holiday to translate Juvenal, a clearer & more translatable satirist. But both versions, as Dryden has justly observed,⁹ were written for scholars, and not for the world: and by treading on the heels of his originals, he seems to have hurt them by too near an approach. He seized the meaning but not the spirit of his authors. Holiday, however, who was afterwards graduated in divinity and promoted to an archdeaconry, wrote a comedy called the *Marriage of the Arts*, acted before the court at Woodstock-palace, which was even too grave and scholastic for king James the first.

I close my prolix review of these pieces by remarking, that as our old plays have been assembled and exhibited to the public in one uniform view,¹⁰ so a collection of our old satires and epigrams would be a curious and useful publication. Even the dull and inelegant productions, of a remote period which have real Life for their theme, become valuable and important by preserving authentic pictures of antient popular manners: by delineating the gradations of vice and folly, they furnish new speculation to the moral historian, and at least contribute to the illustration of writers of greater consequence.

Sect. XLIX

The *Sonnet*, together with the *Ottava Rima*, seems to have been the invention of the Provincial bards, but to have been reduced to its present rhythmical prosody by some of the earliest Italian poets. It is a short monody, or Ode of one stanza containing fourteen lines, with uncommonly frequent returns of rhymes more or less combined. But the disposition of the rhymes has been sometimes varied according to the caprice or the convenience of the writer. There is a sonnet of the regular construction in the Provincial dialect, written by Guglielmo de gli Amalricchi, on Robert king of Naples who died in 1321.¹¹ But the Italian language affords earlier examples. (The multitude of identical cadences renders it a more easy and proper metre to use in Italian than in English verse.)

No species of verse appears to have been more eagerly and universally cultivated by the Italian poets, from the fourteenth century to the present times. Even the gravest of their epic and tragic writers have occasionally sported in these lighter bays. (A long list of them is given in the beginning of the fourth Volume of Quadrios History of Italian Poetry.) But perhaps the most elegant Italian sonnets are yet to be found in Dante. Petrarch's sonnets are too learned (metaphysical) and refined. Of Dante's compositions in this style I cannot give a better idea, than in (the ingenious) Mr. Hayley's

⁸ [Thomas Warton's original version began "The temporary vogue which ..." The final version, here parenthesized in the text, represents, it seems fairly certain, Joseph Warton's expansion. Although this deprecatory comment seems rather abrupt coming after five sections devoted to the Elizabethan satirists, Joseph Warton is not disparaging where his brother praised. Thomas Warton had already (IV, 69) belittled the "innumerable crop of *satirists*, and of a set of writers differing but little more than in name, and now properly belonging to the same species, *Epigrammatists*."]

⁹ [Warton here combined several remarks in Dryden's essay "The Original and Progress of Satire." See John Dryden, *Essays*, ed. W. P. Ker (Oxford, 1900), II, 111-112. There were six, not four editions of Holiday's *Persius*.]

¹⁰ [Warton refers presumably to Isaac Reed's *Collection of Old Plays* (London, 1780).]

¹¹ [Jehan de] Nostredam [e]. [*Les Vies des [...] Poet[es] Provens[aux]*]. [Lyon, 1575] n. 59. pag. 199.

happy translation of Dante's beautiful sonnet to his friend Guido Calvacanti [sic], written in his youth, and probably before the year 1300.

Henry! I wish that you, and Charles, and I,
By some sweet spell within a bark were plac'd,
A gallant bark with magic virtue grac'd,
Swift at our will with every wind to fly:

So that no changes of the shifting sky
No stormy terrors of the watery waste,
Might bar our course, but heighten still our taste
Of sprightly joy, and of our social tie:

Then, that my Lucy, Lucy fair and free,
With those soft nymphs on whom your souls are bent,
The kind magician might to us convey,

To talk of love throughout the livelong day:
And that each fair might be as well content
As I in truth believe our hearts would be.¹²

We have before seen, that the *Sonnet* was imported from Italy into English poetry, by lord Surrey and Wyatt, about the middle of the sixteenth century. But it does not seem to have flourished in its legitimate form, till towards the close of the reign of queen Elisabeth. What I call the legitimate form, in which it now appeared, was not always free from licentious innovations in the rythmical arrangement.

To omit Googe, Tuberville [sic], Gascoigne, and some other petty writers who have interspersed their miscellanies with a few sonnets, and who will be considered under another class, our first professed author in this mode of composition, after Surrey and Wyatt, is Samuel Daniel. His *Sonnets*

¹² [William Hayley. *An Ess[ay] on Epic Poetry*. [London, 1782] *Notes, Ess.* iii. v. 81. p. 171.

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