

**MINOR POEMS OF  
MICHAEL DRAYTON**

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Minor poems of Michael Drayton by Cyril Brett

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**CYRIL BRETT**

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CHOSEN AND EDITED BY

CYRIL BRETT

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## CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE OF DRAYTON'S LIFE AND WORKS

- 1563 Drayton born at Hartshill, Warwickshire.
- 1572? Drayton a page in the house of Sir Henry Goodere, at Polesworth.
- c. 1574 Anne Goodere born?
- Feb. 1591 Drayton in London. *Harmony of Church.*
- 1593 *Idea, the Shepherd's Garland. Legend of Peirs Gaveston.*
- 1594 *Idea's Mirror. Matilda.* Lucy Harrington becomes Countess of Bedford.
- 1595 Sir Henry Goodere the elder dies. *Eudimous and Phoebe*, dedicated to Lucy Bedford.
- 1595-6 Anne Goodere married to Sir Henry Rainsford.
- 1596 *Mortimeriadas. Legends of Robert, Matilda, and Gaveston.*
- 1597 *England's Heroical Epistles.*
- 1598 Drayton already at work on the *Polyolbion.*
- 1599 *Epistles and Idea* sonnets, new edition. (Date of Portrait of Drayton in National Portrait Gallery.)
- 1600 *Sir John Oldcastle.*
- 1602 New edition of *Epistles* and *Idea.*
- 1603 Drayton made an Esquire of the Bath, to Sir Walter Aston. *To the Maestic of King James. Barons' Wars.*
- 1604 *The Owle. A Pease Triumphall. Moses in a Map of his Miracles.*
- 1605 First collected edition of *Poems.* Another edition of *Idea* and *Epistles.*
- 1606 *Poemes Lyrick and Pastorall. Odes. Egloges. The Man in the Moone.*
- 1607 *Legend of Great Cromwell.*
- 1608 Reprint of Collected *Poems.*
- 1609 Another edition of *Cromwell.*
- 1610 Reprint of Collected *Poems.*
- 1613 Reprint of Collected *Poems.* First Part of *Polyolbion.*
- 1618 Two *Elegies* in FitzGeoffrey's *Satires and Epigrames.*
- 1619 Collected Folio edition of *Poems.*
- 1620 Second edition of *Elegies*, and reprint of 1619 *Poems.*
- 1622 *Polyolbion* complete.
- 1627 *Battle of Agincourt, Nymphidia, &c.*
- 1630 *Muses Elizian. Noah's Flood. Notes his Birth and Miracles. David and Goliath.*
- 1631 Second edition of 1627 folio. Drayton dies towards the end of the year.
- 1636 Posthumous poem appeared in *Amalia Dubrenia.*
- 1637 *Poems.*

## INTRODUCTION

MICHAEL DRAYTON was born in 1563, at Hartshill, near Atherstone, in Warwickshire, where a cottage, said to have been his, is still shown. He early became a page to Sir Henry Goodere, at Polesworth Hall: his own words give the best picture of his early years here.<sup>1</sup> His education would seem to have been good, but ordinary; and it is very doubtful if he ever went to a university.<sup>2</sup> Besides the authors mentioned in the Epistle to Henry Reynolds, he was certainly familiar with Ovid and Horace, and possibly with Catullus: while there seems no reason to doubt that he read Greek, though it is quite true that his references to Greek authors do not prove any first-hand acquaintance. He understood French, and read Rabelais and the French sonneteers, and he seems to have been acquainted with Italian.<sup>3</sup> His knowledge of English literature was wide, and his judgement good: but his chief bent lay towards the history, legendary and otherwise, of his native country, and his vast stores of learning on this subject bore fruit in the *Polyolbion*.

While still at Polesworth, Drayton fell in love with his patron's younger daughter, Anne; <sup>4</sup> and, though she married, in 1596, Sir Henry Rainsford of Clifford, Drayton continued his devotion to her for many years, and also became an intimate friend of her husband's, writing a sincere elegy on his death.<sup>5</sup> About February,

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Elegy viij, *To Henry Reynolds, Esquire*, p. 108.

<sup>2</sup> Sir Aston Gokayne, in 1658, says that he went to Oxford, while Fleay asserts, without authority, that his university was probably Cambridge.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. the motto of *Ideas Mirror*, the allusions to *Ariosto* in the *Nymphidia*, p. 129; and above all, the *Heroical Epistles*; Dedic. of *Ep. of D. of Suffolk to Q. Margaret*: 'Sweet is the French Tongue, more sweet the Italian, but most sweet are they both, if spoken by your admired self.' Cf. *Surrey to Geraldine*, ll. 5 sqq., with Drayton's note.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Sonnet xij (ed. 1602), p. 42, 'Tis nine years now since first I lost my wit.' (This sonnet may, of course, occur in the supposed 1600 ed., which would fix an earlier date for Drayton's beginning of love.)

<sup>5</sup> Elegy ix, p. 113.



1591, Drayton paid a visit to London, and published his first work, the *Harmony of the Church*, a series of paraphrases from the Old Testament, in fourteen-syllabled verse of no particular vigour or grace. This book was immediately suppressed by order of Archbishop Whitgift, possibly because it was supposed to savour of Puritanism.<sup>1</sup> The author, however, published another edition in 1610; indeed, he seems to have had a fondness for this style of work; for in 1604 he published a dull poem, *Moses in a Map of his Miracles*, re-issued in 1630 as *Moses his Birth and Miracles*. Accompanying this piece, in 1630, were two other 'Divine poems': *Noah's Flood*, and *David and Goliath*. *Noah's Flood* is, in part, one of Drayton's happiest attempts at the catalogue style of bestiary; and Mr. Elton finds in it some foreshadowing of the manner of *Paradise Lost*. But, as a whole, Drayton's attempts in this direction deserve the oblivion into which they, in common with the similar productions of other authors, have fallen. In the dedication and preface to the *Harmony of the Church* are some of the few traces of Euphuism shown in Drayton's work; passages in the *Heroical Epistles* also occur to the mind.<sup>2</sup> He was always averse to affectation, literary or otherwise, and in *Elegy viij* deliberately condemns Lyly's fantastic style.

Probably before Drayton went up to London, Sir Henry Goodere saw that he would stand in need of a patron more powerful than the master of Polesworth, and introduced him to the Earl and Countess of Bedford. Those who believe<sup>3</sup> Drayton to have been a Pope in petty spite, identify the 'Idea' of his earlier poems with Lucy, Countess of Bedford; though they are forced to acknowledge as self-evident that the 'Idea' of his later work is Anne, Lady Rainsford. They then proceed to say that Drayton, after consistently honouring the Countess in his verse for twelve years, abruptly

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Morley's ed. of *Barons' Wars*, &c. (1887), p. 6.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *E. H. Ep.* 'Mat. to K. J.', 100 sqq., &c.

<sup>3</sup> Professor Courthope and others. There was some excuse for blunders before the publication of Professor Elton's book; and they have been made easier by an unfortunate misprint. Professor Courthope twice misprints the first line of the *Love-Parting Sonnet*, as 'Since there's no help, come let us rise and part', and, so printed, the line supports better the theory that the poem refers to a patroness and not to a mistress. Cf. Courthope, *Hist. Eng. Poetry*, iii. pp. 40 and 43.

transferred his allegiance, not forgetting to heap foul abuse on his former patroness, out of pique at some temporary withdrawal of favour. Not only is this directly contrary to all we know and can infer of Drayton's character, but Mr. Elton has decisively disproved it by a summary of bibliographical and other evidence. Into the question it is here unnecessary to enter, and it has been mentioned only because it alone, of the many Drayton-controversies, has cast any slur on the poet's reputation.

In 1593, Drayton published *Idea, the Shepherds Garland*, in nine Eclogues; in 1606 he added a tenth, the best of all, to the new edition, and rearranged the order, so that the new eclogue became the ninth. In these Pastorals, while following the *Shepherds Calendar* in many ways, he already displays something of the sturdy independence which characterized him through life. He abandons Spenser's quasi-rustic dialect, and, while keeping to most of the pastoral conventions, such as the singing-match and threnody, he contrives to introduce something of a more natural and homely strain. He keeps the political allusions, notably in the Eclogue containing the song in praise of *Beta*, who is, of course, Queen Elizabeth. But an over-bold remark in the last line of that song was struck out in 1606; and the new eclogue has no political reference. He is not ashamed to allude directly to Spenser; and indeed his direct debts are limited to a few scattered phrases, as in the *Ballad of Dowsabel*. Almost to the end of his literary career, Drayton mentions Spenser with reverence and praise.<sup>1</sup>

It is in the songs interspersed in the Eclogues that Drayton's best work at this time is to be found: already his metrical versatility is discernible; for though he doubtless remembered the many varieties of metre employed by Spenser in the *Calendar*, his verses already bear a stamp of their own. The long but impetuous lines, such as 'Trim up her golden tresses with Apollo's sacred tree', afford a striking contrast to the archaic romance-metre, derived from *Sir Thopas* and its fellows, which appears in *Dowsabel*, and it again to the melancholy, murmuring cadences of the lament for Elphin. It

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *E. and Phoebe*, sub fin.; *Shep. Sir.* 145-8; *Ep. Hy. Reyn.* 79 sqq.

must, however, be confessed that certain of the songs in the 1593 edition were full of recondite conceits and laboured antitheses, and were rightly struck out, to be replaced by lovelier poems, in the edition of 1606. The song to Beta was printed in *Englands Helicon*, 1600; here, for the first time, appeared the song of *Dead Love*, and for the only time, *Rowlands Madrigal*. In these songs, Drayton offends least in grammar, always a weak point with him; in the body of the Eclogues, in the earlier Sonnets, in the Odes, occur the most extraordinary and perplexing inversions. Quite the most striking feature of the Eclogues, especially in their later form, is their bold attempt at greater realism, at a breaking-away from the conventional images and scenery.

Having paid his tribute to one poetic fashion, Drayton in 1594 fell in with the prevailing craze for sonneteering, and published *Ideas Amour*, a series of fifty-one 'amours' or sonnets, with two prefatory poems, one by Drayton and one by an unknown, signing himself *Gorbo il fidele*. The title of these poems Drayton possibly borrowed from the French sonneteer, de Pontoux: in their style much recollection of Sidney, Constable, and Daniel is traceable. They are ostensibly addressed to his mistress, and some of them are genuine in feeling; but many are merely imitative exercises in conceit; some, apparently, trials in metre. These amours were again printed, with the title of 'sonnets', in 1599,<sup>1</sup> 1600, 1602, 1603, 1605, 1608, 1610, 1613, 1619, and 1631, during the poet's lifetime. It is needless here to discuss whether Drayton were the 'rival poet' to Shakespeare, whether these sonnets were really addressed to a man, or merely to the ideal Platonic beauty; for those who are interested in these points, I subjoin references to the sonnets which touch upon them.<sup>2</sup> From the prentice-work evident in many of the *Amours*, it would seem that certain of them are among Drayton's earliest poems; but others show a craftsman not meanly advanced in his art. Nevertheless, with few exceptions, this first 'bundle of sonnets' consists rather of trials of skill, bubbles of the mind; most of his sonnets which

<sup>1</sup> Those reprints which were really new editions are in italics.

<sup>2</sup> 1594 ed., Pref. Son. and nos. 12, 18, 28; 1599 ed., nos. 3, 31, 46; 1602 ed., 12, 27, 31; and 1605 ed., 47.