The Prologue

1

To sing of wars, of captains, and of kings,
Of cities founded, commonwealths begun,
For my mean\textsuperscript{1} pen are too superior things:
Or how they all, or each their dates have run
Let poets and historians set these forth,
My obscure lines shall not so dim their worth.

But when my wond’ring eyes and envious heart
Great Bartas\textsuperscript{2} sugared lines do but read o’er,
Fool I do grudge the Muses\textsuperscript{3} did not part
’Twixt him and me that overfluent store;
A Bartas can do what a Bartas will
But simple I according to my skill.

3

From schoolboy’s tongue no rhet’ric we expect,
Nor yet a sweet consort\textsuperscript{4} from broken strings,
Nor perfect beauty where’s a main defect:
My foolish, broken, blemished Muse so sings,
And this to mend, alas, no art is able,
’Cause nature made it so irreparable.

Nor can I, like that fluent sweet tongued Greek,
Who lisped at first, in future times speak plain.\textsuperscript{5}
By art he gladly found what he did seek,
A full requital of his striving pain.
Art can do much, but this maxim’s most sure:
A weak or wounded brain admits no cure.

1. Humble.
2. Guillaume de Salluste Du Bartas (1544–1590), a French Protestant writer much admired by the Puritans. He was most famous as the author of The Divine Weeks, an epic poem recounting great moments in Christian history.
3. In Greek mythology, the nine goddesses of the arts and sciences. “Fool”: i.e., like a fool.
4. Accord, harmony of sound.
5. The ancient Greek orator Demosthenes conquered a speech defect.
5
I am obnoxious to each carping tongue
Who says my hand a needle better fits,
A poet's pen all scorn I should thus wrong,
For such despite they cast on female wits:
If what I do prove well, it won't advance,
They'll say it's stol'n, or else it was by chance.

6
But sure the antique Greeks were far more mild
Else of our sex, why feigned they those nine
And poesy made Calliope's own child;
So 'mongst the rest they placed the arts divine:
But this weak knot they will full soon untie.
The Greeks did nought, but play the fools and lie.

7
Let Greeks be Greeks, and women what they are;
Men have precedence and still excel,
It is but vain unjustly to wage war;
Men can do best, and women know it well
Preeminence in all and each is yours;
Yet grant some small acknowledgment of ours.

8
And oh ye high flown quills that soar the skies,
And ever with your prey still catch your praise,
If e'er you deign these lowly lines your eyes
Give thyme or parsley wreath, I ask no bays;
This mean and unrefined ore of mine
Will make your glist'ring gold but more to shine.

In Honor of That High and Mighty Princess
Queen Elizabeth of Happy Memory

The Proem

Although, great Queen, thou now in silence lie,
Yet thy loud herald Fame doth to the sky

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6. The muse of epic poetry.
7. Pens.
8. Garlands of laurel, used to crown a poet.
1. Elizabeth I (1533–1603), queen of England, ascended to the throne in 1558.
2. Prelude.