"TAM MARTI QVAM MERCVRIO"

George Gascoigne

From the only contemporary portrait, printed at the back of the title in the first edition of The Steele Glas (1576).

The Arquebus with pouches for powder and shot on one side, and the books with pen and ink on the other, illustrate Gascoigne's martial and literary exploits, which are also recalled in the motto.

William E. Sheidley

George Gascoigne and *The Spoyle of Antwerpe* (1576)

On Sunday, November 4, 1576, some 6,000 mutinous Spanish soldiers, angry over lack of pay and pillage, poured down from their citadel and burst through the defenses of the wealthy and beautiful Dutch city of Antwerp. Over a period of several days they rampaged through the town, stealing or extorting its portable riches, raping and murdering its inhabitants, burning many of its houses and public buildings, and turning the Bourse or mercantile exchange into a gambling hall. On hand to witness these atrocities, which shocked all Europe and remained notorious for decades, was the English poet George Gascoigne, himself a veteran of the Lowlands wars, having served a few years earlier with a company of English volunteers sent to aid the Protestant cause and subsequently as an independent officer under Prince William of Orange. Gascoigne's account of the so-called "Spanish Fury" was written just days after the event as a report to the Privy Council and published in pamphlet form within the month. *The Spoyle of Antwerpe*, "Faithfully reported, by a true Englishman, who was present at the same," provides what is for its time a uniquely vivid and disturbing treatment of a subject the author found difficult to fit into his culture's accepted categories of understanding. His struggle to make sense of what he saw temporarily renewed him as a writer, yielding a narrative which, like the best of his early writings and unlike the conventional moral tracts of his later years, retains power and interest for the reader of today.

Gascoigne himself (1539-1577) fits the stereotype of the versatile "Renaissance man." He was a courtier, farmer, student of the law, member of parliament, linguist, love poet, critic, dramatist, satirist, proto-novelist, moralist, soldier, and government agent. It was his custom to sign his writings with a Latin motto, most often after he went to war "Tam Marti quam Mercurio"—as much a

soldier as a scholar. By his own report, however, and contrary to the stereotype, Gascoigne did not succeed in his manifold endeavors with the easy *sprezzatura* characteristic of someone like his younger contemporary Sir Philip Sidney. In the best of several rueful autobiographical poems, "Gascoignes Woodmanship" (*Flowres*, 181-84; *Works* 1: 348-52), he analyzes his life as a sequence of missed shots by an archer who "shootes awrie at almost every marke" (*Works* 1: 348) and could "never learne the feate / To hitte the whytes [bullseyes] whiche live with all good lucke" (*Works* 1: 352). As the poem develops, however, Gascoigne concludes that the targets of worldly success at which he has been shooting are truly of no value: "they glister outwardely like golde," but "Are inwardly but brasse. . ." (*Works* 1: 351), and he turns from them in disgust and self-loathing. Perhaps most disappointing and repellent for Gascoigne of his attempted careers was his stint as a volunteer in the Dutch wars (1572-74). Hoping that "long limmes led by a lusty hart, / Might yet suffice to make him rich againe" (*Works* 1: 347-48), he discovered that "the warres yeeld no such gaine" (*Works* 1: 350). Although here he claims he failed because he was unwilling to participate in the graft and exploitation that could have filled his pockets as an officer, the facts as reported elsewhere were more complex: he quarreled with his colleagues, fell under suspicion of being a spy because of a letter sent him by a woman in the Hague with whom he had an affair, and was imprisoned for a number of months after his unit basely surrendered to the Spanish before Leyden (Prouty 72-76).

Gascoigne enlarged upon his military experiences in a long poem entitled *"The Fruites of Warre, Written uppon this Theame, Dulce Bellum Inexpertis"* (*Works* 1: 139-84). The theme, borrowed from the *Adages* of Erasmus, was translated by Richard Taverner in 1569 as "Batell is a swete thinge, to them that never assayed it" (63r). Gascoigne's poem combines a bookish and abstract development of this thesis characteristic of common Renaissance school assignments, which seems in fact to have been written earlier as just such an exercise, with a bitter, satiric account of the author's participation in a series of ineptly managed and very unheroic battles in the Netherlands. This part of the poem has been justly praised as "an extraordinarily vital narrative" that

asserts "the value of the individual judgment" (Prouty 234); for Gascoigne, although he professes himself ready to follow the drum again if need be (*Works* 1: 183), the fruits of his war experience boiled down to the conclusion that war is best avoided.

The modulation in this poem from book-learned formulas in the first half to a tonally complex rendering of decidedly unexemplary but convincingly realistic personal experience and finally to a seemingly disingenuous expression of conventional sentiments recapitulates a striking and often observed evolution or disjunction in Gascoigne's writings over his career. His richest and most exciting works for the modern reader are mostly those included in his first collection, *A Hundreth Sundrie Flowres* (1573). It contains unmoralized explorations of his amatory and other experiences, including a prose narrative, *The Adventures of Master F.J.*, that has a strong claim to the title of the first English romantic novel.[1] In these works, Gascoigne laughs at his own foibles, takes credit for his successes, and strives to develop an understanding of his life, fictionally projected, by reference to values intrinsic to the experiences he presents, while at the same time, through the complexity and brilliance of his rhetoric, to demonstrate his fitness for preferment at court.[2] Far from impressing the authorities, however, Gascoigne shocked them. His book was banned and he fell into serious disfavor. He hastily prepared a new edition, *The Posies*, which offered most of the same contents behind a moralizing facade. When this effort likewise failed to please and was banned, Gascoigne learned a lesson, and, with the partial exception of *The Spoyle of Antwerpe*, the numerous works he produced in the few years of life that remained to him mainly advance conventional wisdom in an unequivocal manner not likely to raise objections from the severest guardians of the morals of the young.[3]

His immediate reward was a job his patrons procured for Gascoigne that sent him back to Holland (Prouty 93), where he became caught up in the disaster at Antwerp. When he arrived in mid-October, 1576, via Paris, on assignment for Lords Burghley and Walsingham (Prouty 93-97), he found that the wealthy town had caught the attention of mutinous Spanish troops and their German mercenary allies, who had suffered without pay and

adequate provision for a number of years and who now, in the absence of effective leadership resulting from the recent death of the Governor-General Don Luis de Requesens, had resolved to take matters into their own hands (Gelderen 44-47; Parker, 203). Gascoigne's vivid and realistic pamphlet reporting what then transpired, although he struggles to present it by reference to the kinds of preformulated wisdom he had recently been purveying, marks a return to his earlier literary mode, in which a complex and morally indeterminate experience animates an equally complex and indeterminate narration. It constitutes Gascoigne's most penetrating contemplation of warfare.

His efforts to frame the narration reveal the difficulty Gascoigne faced in trying to moralize what he had seen. In the opening paragraph, he mentions several thematic angles he might adopt. He could "write maliciously against the vanquishers," or he could "undertake to moove a generall compassion, by blazynge abroade the miseries and callamities of the vanquished . . ." (*Works* 2: 590). The body of his report does in fact accomplish both these ends, but he disavows them. It was Queen Elizabeth's policy to seek a negotiated settlement in the Netherlands (Black 335-41), so Gascoigne could not simply demonize the Spanish invaders. In his introductory remarks "To the Reader" he is at pains to exempt the Spanish leadership from blame, stressing that very few Spanish "of name" were involved in the rampage (*Works* 2: 589). And he goes on politely to express the wish that the Spanish king will take appropriate measures to compensate certain English merchants who were robbed and injured so that "the amytye betweene our moste gracious Soveraigne and him, shal remain also firme & inviolate . . ." (*Works* 2: 589). In claiming to eschew using rhetorical heightening to stir a slanted emotional response, Gascoigne sets his narrative in opposition to other reports of the battle already in circulation, which he calls "manyfolde light tales whiche have been engendred by feareful or affectionate rehersals" (*Works* 2: 590). "But as I sayd before," he insists, "mine onely entent is to set downe a plaine truthe . . ." (*Works* 2: 590). As Gascoigne's earlier works reveal, however, experiential truth is likely to be obscure and complex, however plain and simple conventional moral teachings might be. His effort "to set downe a

plaine truthe" about what happened in Antwerp undermined his effort to fit it into an acceptable didactic framework.

Standard Renaissance ideas of historiography provided Gascoigne with three possible approaches to the little stretch of history he had just lived through. In the traditional Christian view, history traces the unfolding of God's Providence, so that specific events must be understood in an eternal perspective (Rivers 58). According to the classical view imbibed by Renaissance writers from antique models such as Plutarch, history could serve as a compendium of profitable examples to guide future conduct (Rivers 57). In the British development of these ideas favored by Tudor historians, there was a "moral concatenation" to historical events, so that good or evil outcomes could be traced to previous virtuous or immoral deeds (Tillyard 42). Gascoigne entertains all these ways of making meaning, but with unsatisfactory results, as he sometimes acknowledges. From the Christian historical viewpoint, the remarkable victory of the Spanish and the unimaginable suffering of the citizens of Antwerp must have been the result of "Gods just wrath powred upon the inhabitants for their iniquitie" (*Works* 2: 599), but "if the wickednesse used in the sayde towne, doo seeme unto the wel disposed Reader, a sufficient cause of Gods so just a scorge and Plague" (*Works* 2: 590), Gascoigne never specifies what wickedness that was and how it merited "the furie of the vanquishers," which seemed "more barbarous and cruell, then may become a good christian conqueror . . ." (*Works* 2: 599). Unless their wealth itself constitutes a sin, the only evidence of iniquity on the part of the citizens Gascoigne can offer is the fact that they were punished. In any event, Gascoigne submits, the spoil of Antwerp provides "a profitable example" (*Works* 2: 590) from which we can learn several things: "to detest & avoyde those [unspecified] synnes, and prowde enormyties, which caused the wrath of God to be so furiouslye kindled and bent against the Town of Antwerpe," "to detest the horrible cruelties of the Spanyeardes," and, in practical terms, "to looke better about us for good order & direction" in our own defenses (*Works* 2: 599). Because, like his recent moralistic works, his pamphlet teaches such lessons Gascoigne can claim that it fulfills the purpose for which "all stories and Chronicles are

written" (*Works* 2: 590), but though he pronounces them at the beginning and the end of his narration, labeling them fire gathered from the flint and honey gathered from the thistle (*Works* 2: 590), the lessons are uncomfortably imposed upon rather than derived from the intense experiences they pretend to account for.[4]

To even the battle-tempered Gascoigne, the "sackyng and spoyle of *Antwerpe*" remained at root "so pitteous a spectakle" that it simply had to be reported (*Works* 2: 590). Like the Renaissance travel narratives about the wonders of previously undiscovered worlds studied by Stephen Greenblatt in his book *Miraculous Possessions*, Gascoigne's account of the Spanish Fury is less "interesting at the level of sustained narrative and teleological design" than it is "gripping at the level of the anecdote" (Greenblatt 2). In Greenblatt's terms, "anecdotes are registers of the contingent," recorded on the supposition that they will be "significant in terms of a larger progress or pattern" that is "perennially deferred" (3). Gascoigne, as we have seen, does not hesitate to assert a larger pattern derived from ideas mostly extrinsic to the experiences he narrates, but his anecdotes, like those of Greenblatt's voyagers, repeatedly register his wonder in face of contingencies he has difficulty understanding. "It was a straunge thing," he says, to see all the citizens of Antwerp throwing up their ill-fated trenches (*Works* 2: 592). When the Spanish troops, who had "marched all day and night the day before," made good on their vow not "to eat nor drinke untill they mighte eate and drinke at liberty and pleasure in *ANTWERP*," it was "contrary to all mans reason and expectation" (*Works* 2: 593). Most uncanny of all was the ease with which the Spanish won the trenches:

> I must needs confesse, that it was the greatest victory, and the roundlyest executed, that hath bene seene, red, or heard of, in our age: and that it was a thyng myraculous, to consider, how Trenches of such a height should be entred, passed over, and won both by Footemen, and Horsemen. (*Works* 2: 595)

The whole battle, in fact, seems to Gascoigne in his conclusion "miraculous and past mans capacitie, to comprehend how it should be possible . . ." (*Works* 2: 599). How could 5,000 mutineers

have overcome "trenches made againste them of suche height as seemed invincible," have defeated "fifeteene or sixteene thousand able fighting men well armed" in three hours, and have "sacked or raunsomed" every house in the city "at the uttermost vallew" in under six hours (*Works* 2: 599)? Gascoigne punctuates most of these expressions of wonder with formulary suppositions that God's hand was at work scourging the sinful Dutch, but as Greenblatt and Tzvetan Todorov point out, the expression of wonder in face of what seems unprecedented may mark not surprise at the alien but recognition of the familiar, as the narrator encounters in his new experience the accustomed norms, categories, and values that he himself projects upon the scene (Greenblatt 22-23, 86-88, 134-35).

For Gascoigne, and for Elizabethan culture generally, a value more cherished even than the religion that was used to support it was *order*, here appearing in the form of military discipline, which Gascoigne calls "good order & direction" (*Works* 2: 599), a concept that includes having a well-conceived plan of action and the courage to stick to it. While his esteem for good order and direction may have been based on established doctrine, Gascoigne had seen it confirmed in his own previous military campaigns. In "The Fruites of Warre" he heaps scorn on the disorderly behavior of Dutch units he accompanied in a series of ignoble encounters and reports that he finally became so outraged that he resigned his office:

> I could not seeme to serve,
> In regiment where no good rules remayne,
> Where officers and such as well deserve,
> Shall be abusde by every page and swayne,
> Where discipline shall be but deemed vayne,
> Where blockes are stridde by stumblers at a strawe,
> And where selfe will must stand for martiall lawe.
>
> (*Works* 1: 163)

Self-will and insubordination characterize the Spanish mutineers, but in *The Spoyle of Antwerpe* Gascoigne finds reason to blame both sides for lack of discipline. The defenders of the town were guilty of "carelessenesse and lack of foresyght"; they did not have

"sufficient Generals & directors"; and some came to the battle drunk (*Works* 2: 594). His sympathy for the victims of the Spanish rampage tempers his scorn for their disorderly behavior, but Gascoigne's ambivalence about the Spanish themselves is much greater. As virtually leaderless mutineers, these troops epitomized the breakdown of military order, but in fact they carried out their operation in an exemplary manner: "the Spanyerds were to be honored for the good order and direction which they kepte" (*Works* 2: 594). One example among many is that during the attack the cannon in the citadel, "upon a signall geven, ceased to shoote any more, for feare to hurt their owne men" when the Spanish broke through the town's defenses, "wherin I noted their good order which wanted no direction, in their greatest furye" (*Works* 2: 593).

The paradoxical yoking of order and fury marks Gascoigne's presentation of subsequent events. It troubles him that so disciplined an army in battle can have been guilty of such disorderly conduct in the captured city, a phenomenon that tends to problematize military discipline as a value itself: is it always a manifestation of the ideal of order, or can it be, as with the mutineers, merely a pragmatic expression of desperation, brutality, and greed? "[W]hen the blood is cold," Gascoigne complains, "and the fury [of battle] over, me thinkes that a true christian hearte should stand content with victory, and refrayne to provoke Gods wrath by sheadding of innocent blood" (*Works* 2: 596).

Confronted by circumstances that challenge not only such *a priori* principles as divine justice and a "moral concatenation" in historical events but also the value, learned from experience, of military discipline itself, Gascoigne resorts to some of the tonal and rhetorical complexities that distinguish his earlier works. He reasserts his belief in "good order and direction" in the style and structure of his narration, using in addition to paradox techniques such as rhetorical patterning, irony, sarcasm, and grim humor to surround and control the disturbing implications of his subject matter—without, however, ignoring or denying them, as he tends to do in his moralistic works written to please the authorities. Here, for example, a simple reverse parallel antithesis negates the

horror by encapsulating it in a pat summation: "And surely, as their vallyaunce was to be much commended, so yet I can much discommende their barbarous cruelty . . ." (*Works* 2: 596).

The horror is encapsulated, but nonetheless dispensed for the reader to consume. The following remarks about irony by J. Hillis Miller apply as well to all Gascoigne's stylistic techniques for coping with the violence he describes:

> Irony is truth-telling or a means of truth-telling, of unveiling. At the same time it is a defense against the truth. This doubleness makes it, though it seems so coolly reasonable, another mode of unreason, the unreason of a fundamental undecidability. If irony is a defense, it is also inadvertently a means of participation. (222)

Gascoigne's account of an event preliminary to the battle reflects this doubleness. Less than two weeks earlier, the Spanish-occupied citadel had shelled the town for what Gascoigne sees as no good reason: ostensibly because the town had not fired on some ships that were bringing it much needed "Grayne and victualles" (*Works* 2: 591). This first Spanish irrationality Gascoigne controls with a proverb: "But alas," he observes, "it is easy to finde a staffe, when a man woulde beate a dogge" (*Works* 2: 591). The unreason of the Spanish is, in fact, the lamentable human norm.

After the Spanish had swarmed over the trenches and into the city streets, Gascoigne finds their tactics admirable: "In their chase, as faste as they gained any crosse streate, they flanked the same with their Musquets, untill they saw no longer resistance of any power: and then proceeded in chase, executing all such as they overtooke" (*Works* 2: 594). But the bitter irony established by anaphora in the following passage evinces Gascoigne's difficulty attributing "good order" to the perpetrators of what soon became a most disorderly riot: "In this good order they charged and entred: in this good order they proceded: and in as good order their lackeyes and Pages followed with Firebrands, and wyldfyre, setting the houses on fyre, in every place where their maysters had entred" (*Works* 2: 594).

Turning to his own part in the battle, Gascoigne masters what must have been a harrowing confrontation with chaos and danger by resorting to a version of the self-ironic and ambivalent stance that marks *The Adventures of Master F. J.* and many of his best poems, such as "Woodmanship" or "Dan Bartholmew of Bath." He portrays himself as a kind of Chaplinesque victim in a slapstick comedy routine, a man of conventional expectations who has stumbled into a seemingly insane environment. The chaos erupted while he was calmly taking his midday meal with some "Marchauntmen of my Countrey" (*Works* 2: 594) in his chamber at the English house. Observing several fires inside the trench lines, he grabbed his cloak and sword and hurried toward the Bourse. On the way he met a multitude of soldiers fleeing the Spanish advance and marveled to see "the townsemen stand every man before his doore with such weapons as they had" (*Works* 2: 594). When a young Walloon trumpeter on horseback rallied a few troops with a call to defend the honor of their country, Gascoigne followed them. "But alas," he continues, "this comforte indured but a while" (*Works* 2: 594), for soon he encountered the main body of the city's defenders in full flight, "with their heads as close togeather, as a skoule of yong frye, or a flock of Sheepe" (*Works* 2: 594-95). This grotesque stampede "bare me over backwardes, and ran over my belly and my face" (*Works* 2: 595), which caused him, after he had finally regained his feet, to wonder what he was doing in Antwerp anyway. "And whilest I stoode thus musing, another flocke of flyers came so fast that they bare me on my nose, and ran as many over my backe, as erst had marched over my guttes" (*Works* 2: 595). Deciding, "like a tall [courageous] fellow" (*Works* 2: 595), as he ironically puts it, to join the retreat, Gascoigne returned to the English house, darting across a street raked by Spanish crossfire on the way. Self-deprecation distances this close brush with death, transforming the intense fear for his life Gascoigne must have felt to a more comfortable but still unsettling wry laughter at his own folly.

The same pattern recurs when Gascoigne, just locking the gate of the English house, confronted a group of Spanish soldiers demanding entry. They fired "fyve or sixe Musquette shotte at the grate where I aunswered them, whereof one came very neare my

nose . . ." (*Works* 2: 595). The Spanish were too intent on slaughter to come in for the moment, and when he tells of their return to extort what they could from the English, Gascoigne drops his humorous tone. His outrage is barely restrained as he reports that the Spanish slew four Englishmen, confiscated the wealth and goods of all, and left those whose lives they spared in desperate straits in the ruined city.

In several passages where he attempts to convey an overall impression of the mutineers' rampage, Gascoigne's rhetoric struggles hardest to control his emotions of shock and dismay, and thus conveys what troubled him most forcefully. Here, for example, he tries a series of parallel phrases to fence in his feelings: "they neither spared age, nor sexe: time nor place: person nor countrey: profession nor religion: yong nor olde: rich nor poore: strong nor feeble. . ." (*Works* 2: 596). But these generalized terms prove too bland, so he goes on to flesh out the list of topics he has set forth:

> For age and sex, yong and old, they slew great numbers of yong children, but many more women more then fowerscore yeares of age: For time and place, their furye was as great ten dayes after the victory, as at the tyme of their entry: and as great respect they had to the church and churchyeard, (for all their hipocriticall boasting of the catholique religion) as the Butcher hath to his shambles or slaughter house. . . . (*Works* 2: 596)

The tension between outrage and restraint reaches a culmination in Gascoigne's liberal exploitation of the figure *occupatio* or *paralipsis*, where one pretends to refuse to say what one is thinking, thus asserting the illusion of control over one's subject matter, while in effect saying it anyway, thus revealing the power of the unspeakable images over one's mind. In these passages Gascoigne presents unusually vivid accounts of the atrocities, almost too vivid, according to one critic (Prouty 94). "I refrayne," he begins, "to rehearce the heapes of deade Carcases which laye at every Trench . . . : the thicknesse whereof, did in many places exceede the height of a man" (*Works* 2: 596). The

scene, which Gascoigne says he will forbear from describing, outdid Michelangelo's "tables of Doomes day":

> I list not to recken the infinite nombers of poore Almains [these Germans employed by the Dutch], who lay burned in their armour: som thentrailes skorched out, & all the rest of the body free, some their head and shoulders burnt of[f]: so that you might looke down into the bulk & brest and there take an Anatomy of the secrets of nature. Some standing uppon their wa[i]ste, being burnte of[f] by the thighes: & some no more but the very toppe of the brain taken of[f] with fyre, whiles the rest of the body dyd abide unspeakable tormentes. (*Works* 2: 596)

Likewise, he will not tell us about the "ougly & filthy polluting of every streete with gore and carcases" (*Works* 2: 596) that lay unburied, but he "may not passe over with sylence" (*Works* 2: 597) the destruction of the town hall with its monuments and records nor the rapes of "sundry honest Dames & Virgins" (*Works* 2: 597). "It is a thing too horrible to rehearse," he claims as he rehearses it, "that the Father and Mother were forced to fetche their yong daughter out of a cloyster (who had thether fled as unto Sanctuary, to keepe her body undefyled) & to bestowe her in bed betweene two Spaniards, to worke their wicked and detestable wil with her" (*Works* 2: 597).

The same stylistic techniques Gascoigne uses to control his emotions of outrage also enable him to recount events that directly challenge his esteem for good order and direction while reasserting those assumptions in the process of narration. In their chaotic fury, the Spanish obliterated rational distinctions: "they spared neither friende nor foe: Portingal nor Turke . . . . The ryche was spoyled because he had: & the poore were hanged because they had nothing. . ." (*Works* 2: 596). As a writer, Gascoigne naturally relishes these ironies, as in this summary glimpse of what the city has been reduced to:

> . . . within three daies Antwarpe, which was one of the rychest Townes in *Europe*, had now no money nor treasure to be found theirin, but onely in the hands of

> murderers and strompets: for every *Dom Diego* must walk jetting up & downe the streets with his harlotte by him in her cheine and bracelettes of golde. And the notable Bowrce which was wont to be a safe assemblie for Marchaunts, and men of all honest trades, had nowe none other marchaundize therein, but as many dycing tables as might be placed round about it al the day long. (*Works* 2: 597)

No simple formula of praise or blame, no pious effusion about divine justice would be sufficient to account for the shocking revelations about human nature and institutions implied by the transformation of the Antwerp exchange into something so unlike yet very like its former self.

In another anecdote, Gascoigne shows what happened to one man who tried to deal with the Spanish in an orderly and reasonable way. The servant of an English merchant produced 300 crowns to ransom his master's goods, but the Spanish hanged him "untyl he were halfe dead" because he was 200 crowns short. When he recovered he begged leave to "trye his creditte" in town. "At his returne because he sped not (as indeed no money was then to bee had) they hong him again outright: and afterwards (of exceeding curtesie) procured the Friars *Minors* to bury him" (*Works* 2: 597).

Just as the sarcastic parenthesis "(of exceeding curtesie)" at the end of this anecdote screens from view the recognition that the Englishman was a fool to keep his word and return empty-handed, so does Gascoigne's sarcasm in his concluding appraisal of the Spanish divert attention from the unsettling implications of the truth it expresses:

> And this must I needs say for them, that as theyr continual training in service doth make them expert in all warrelyke strategeme: so their daily trade in spoiling hath made them the cunningest ransackers of houses, and the best able to bring a spoyle unto a quicke market, of any Souldiors, or Mastertheeves that ever I heard of. (*Works* 2: 599)

For his part, Gascoigne would like to reject the Spanish version of military order without abandoning the ideal of order itself: "Men wyll boast of the Spanierds that they are the best & most orderlye Souldiours in the world: but sure, if this be their order, I had rather be coumpted a *Besoigner* [a lowly, raw recruit], then a brave souldiour in such a bande. . ." (*Works* 2: 597).

The patterned alliterations of *s* and *b* suggest that something has been resolved, but of course that is not the case. Gascoigne and his readers are still left with the undigestible anomalous contingency of a Spanish victory won by the combined order and fury of mutinous, undisciplined troops. In quest of closure, Gascoigne returns to the same moralizations of history with which he started and which, as we have seen, the facts just narrated call into serious question. God will punish the Spanish "when hee thinketh good and convenient," Gascoigne promises (*Works* 2: 599); we English should avoid the sins of the Dutch (whatever they were), prepare our defenses, and pray to God to protect us. These formulas enable the text to end, but they do not generate its vitality, which derives instead from the energy of the violence and chaos it struggles simultaneously to express and control.

Gascoigne did not live long enough to hypothesize a "moral concatenation" between the Spanish Fury of 1576 and the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588 or to join with those who saw God's scourging hand at work in it. With the fearful images of the spoil of Antwerp seared into his mind, he made a narrow escape from the city (he was mistaken for a Walloon, and all Walloons were being killed on sight) and took up his pen to record his experience for the Privy Council and the English reader. For the ten months of life that remained to him, he returned to his project of writing pious works of moral instruction, issuing his final book, entitled *The Grief of Joy*, a series of poems elaborating on the vanity of human wishes. In *The Spoyle of Antwerpe*, spurred by his confrontation with the astonishing realities of war, Gascoigne had briefly resorted to his earlier literary techniques for exploring actual experience in all its complexity. Despite its ill-fitting moralistic frame, the pamphlet should be ranked, along with Gascoigne's best poems and *The Adventures of Master F. J.*, among the small group of early Elizabethan writings that

anticipate a modern vision and appeal directly to a modern—or post-modern—sensibility. □

Notes

1. On the quasi-autobiographical nature of Gascoigne's narrative and certain other Elizabethan works, see Gottfried.

2. For a thorough discussion of Gascoigne's career in these terms, see McCoy.

3. For an account of the struggle of Gascoigne and others of the early Elizabethan younger generation with the moralism of the established authorities, see Helgerson.

4. A similar disjunction between a providential and moral framework and an actual narrative of the Dutch wars also marks *A Description of the Warres in Flaundres*, by Thomas Churchyard (1578).

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Before Wars

"I once returned to Rome from Auschwitz,
full of indescribable terror,
only to fall in love with a young Roman woman
a few days later.
While I was embracing her,
I continued to think of Auschwitz
and of what I could do to help stop the evil.
I was ' playing' simultaneously
with terribly serious things
and with lighthearted, amusing ones,
and only by approaching the serious things, too,
as a game, with a sort of lucid nonchalance, day by day,
did I manage to accomplish anything at all."

Upon the low mock mantelpiece
glazed with mirror tiles
into which my three year old son
toasts morning cereal with regimental flair,
four cut glass German goblets
form a family aftermath—ruby, cobalt,
two aqua-green. I inherit
my occupation-Army Major-father's
penchant for orderly collection,
remember my mother's fears:
that fabled British Army WAC, cultivated
through thirty moves and married years
until both (mother and her well groomed
"other") died, twinned suicides,
though separate by water and by years.
Image strong enough perhaps

still to haunt breath-dusted
crystal bowls with pale gold rims:
brunette, crisp uniform, ancestral accent,
serious games, essential lies.

The souvenirs, unsheathed, escape
Icelandic wool and fox fur lined
footlockers. Newspaper shrouds
proclaim old columned news
in codes of Japanese.
For years, the Hummel figurines—
clean-limbed imitation Aryan forms
danced across lacquer tables
upon our borrowed tatami floors.
My mother novelized her life.
With each unpacking, told tales:
silver spoons sold for survival
in the Rhineland "and the awful
hungered eyes"; told the metal weight
of a Korean gunner's shell turned to a vase,
necessary trophy of inlaid mother-of-pearl
from her "and-this-is" hoard;
told of a friendship plate—
bold warriors Kabuki style
stride down its three foot face—
exchanged politely for a Western
wedding cake, sent back,
returned again, retained.

Secret design of the twenty-eighth move,
born last and nobody told back home,
to save all worry about conditions
in the dawn of the atomic world.
For proof, I have a silver birth cup,
engraved with full-haired women in robes,
brocade obis, plum blossom fans. I
tended it myself, answered to Wendy-Chan,
took sentiment's place of honor

on her crowded china cupboard shelf,
votary to their world-on-the-move,
their excitable, almost love.
When, more often, she was not herself,
I never saw her cry, until the day,
vacuuming behind, she tripped the entire
hutch of wood and a rain of souvenirs fell,
pieces and fragments on hardwood floors
of that, our final house.

* * * *

"This country is so beautiful,
when the sun is shining on the mountains,
farmers in their rice paddies,
with their water buffalo, palm trees, monkeys, birds
and even the strange insects.
For a fleeting moment
I wasn't in a war zone at all,
just on vacation . . . . "

The President says
the purpose of the summit
is to assure
there will never be another war.

On a summit, it is hard to imagine war
while water buffaloes shine encouragement
like winter suns and the palm trees dance ads
across the easily deceived eyelid.

Monkeys, who doesn't want to own
one? Momentarily, we did,
donated to my father's
divorce apartment, it bit and flew

through the house scolding, like a wizened
comrade of colonizing guilt. I caught

it in a pillowcase and held it, squirming,
frantic heart. Remember? Like a party game,

groping beneath a bed sheet put on
to blunt the outlines of cocktail-
triggered 1950s folk—is it her or him,
the one I am meant for, the one I want?

Remember? Childhood summers,
traveling the war-strong highways?
Or some of us did, in white collar
Silverstream packs, webbed patio chair prides.

Back then, my father claimed to know
Westmoreland, maybe Ike: we wanted
a President who looked war in the eye
and said he'd win. Or why else vote?

Reading *Dear America* on a summer
night, I cry and feel sick of my skin,
my tribe, my whipped up frenzy—why
read ahead to decipher foredoomed

codes: KIA, MIA, or, anticlimax, "today
an electrical designer with an architectural
firm in NYC" before reading the words?
Children always die. Or live . . . .
. . . .*for a minute it wasn't a war zone at all* . . . .

From a summit, we think we see,
but don't see water buffalo sloshing
circles of water in rising humidity. Insects
we have never imagined test tense surfaces.

Monkeys, our much maligned doubles—feast,
fight, escape chattering through high jungle;
frankly, they just yack and yack, jeering:
never again, never again, never again .

****

"What if he came home? What would
he be like today? When I played
high school football, I always hoped
that one day a man would walk up to me
on the practice field and say,
Hi, I'm your dad."

Mother kept lists of infidelities,
Father kept making
or catching the pass.
What do I have against sports?
Just this: the myth of winning;
the brawny pat on the butt;
the way such talk goes around
and over and beyond but never gets at;
legions of men in formation
who go down on the fields of war
until Guerrilla tactics echo on
ghetto ball courts.
And the shouts at night of man's aspiration
may be plain urban murder, or may
engender this hero's son
who dreams they would play
together just once.

Rosie the Riveter raised four alone
those years
then gave up her job
with thanks when he came home.

Mother's manic lists inform:
his mustering out pay covered
birth expense of the *other one*.
Second, ghostly family—
photos, letters, unexpected body

gracing the unstable earth
to mock her everyday.
We met once.

"That one day a man
would walk up to me . . . "

Father dead,
and with him several
very certain generations.
May we give
unacquainted grandsons
what discouragement we can
for such manly and
terrible training.

****

"Yes I do think our landing on the moon
was quite an achievement . . . . I really
sweated out the time between the landing
and the takeoff once they were up there.
I only hope man doesn't go off
and louse up the rest of the solar system
with his pollution and family quarrels
like he has Mother Earth . . . .
The light is getting bad now—
and for obvious reasons
there'll be no light after dark,
so I've got to sign off. I'll mail you this
when I get off the hill in two more days.
If you've got time and want to,
I'll let you write me (honest)
All letters accepted cheerfully
and answered when possible.
When not possible to answer all letters,
I'll answer in spirit."

I was a girl, ignoring news,
on a California beach,
boyfriends looking for low draft numbers
or stationed in White Sands
sending turquoise jewelry.
So, what was the moon to me?
Much like my father's stories—
men in air-filled uniforms
would save us all,
and the hit-parade
of KACY 1520 would keep on coming.
Of course, I too later
could cry at isolate
footsteps on the cratered scape,
but girls can cry at anything
at seventeen. And boys,
they seemed then
to leave from other cities,
to not come home.

"Do you remember the picture
that I had taken in front of the house
just before I went on active duty?
Well I found it in the bunch of pictures . . . .
and it no more looks like me
than the man in the moon.
Now I seem to be about twice as big
and three times as old."

My father argued enlistment
and solidarity,
from the summit of separation,
from the bunkers of remarriage.
Step-brothers turned the music
up loud, sang: "Fuck yourself."
Escalation on every front,
TV adolescence, a new and skew ecology:
small pledges re: paper products;

muted dialogs between conscience
and commerce. Adversity always
helps Americans reinvent themselves.
"I'll send a crate with my steel cot
and wall locker
and at least one more footlocker.
If I have too much stuff
to go in one footlocker
I'll buy another."

In my teens science fiction
held the most alluring promise
and the most foreboding death:
astronauts marooned as the capsule
drifts into unplumbed depths.
In the safe trajectory of books,
note how these men
always regain
the cut glass bowl of Earth.
"The light is getting bad—
and for obvious reasons
there'll be no light after dark . . . . "

My three year old
toasts morning cereal.

The President says
the reasons for the summit.

I continued to think
of what I could do to stop the evil.

"We are supposed to go about 60 miles
north of Pusan to a town by the name
of Haso-ri.
The only thing holding us here now
is politics."

Only day by day,
do I manage to accomplish
anything at all.

Ruby, cobalt, aqua-green
what can be pieced
with materiel
from memory's highest shelf?

"And please God
it won't be so long now
until I can be with you again.
Then we will have thirty days
to enjoy ourselves
and for me to get acquainted
with my daughter.

This country is so beautiful.
Do you remember the picture?
The light is getting bad.
The only thing holding us here now
is politics. And please God
it won't be so long now.

Notes

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"I'll send a crate" and *"Do you remember . . . . "* and *" And Please God"* V-Mail letters, Robert Loomis Bishop to Lillian Hagen Bishop, written from Iceland, 1940-1943. *"The only thing that is holding us now . . . "* Letter written aboard the Gen. Randall, Docked at Pusan, 27 December, 1950. From Robert Loomis Bishop to Lillian Hagen Bishop.

materiel—weapons and equipment of armed forces in combat

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