CHAPTER 4
Of language

Speech is not natural to man saving for his only ability to speak, and
that he is by kind apt to utter all his conceits with sounds and
voices diversified many manner of ways, by means of the many and fit
instruments he hath by nature to that purpose: as a broad and voluble
tongue; thin and movable lips; teeth even and not shagged, thick-
ranged; a round-vaulted palate; and a long throat; besides an excellent
capacity of wit that maketh him more disciplinable and imitative
than any other creature. Then as to the form and action of his speech,
it cometh to him by art and teaching, and by use or exercise. But
after a speech is fully fashioned to the common understanding and
accepted by consent of a whole country and nation, it is called a lan-
guage, and receiveth none allowed alteration but by extraordinary
occasions, by little and little, as it were, insensibly bringing in of many
corruptions that creep along with the time; of all which matters we
have more largely spoken in our books of the original and pedigree of
the English tongue. Then, when I say language, I mean the speech
wherein the poet or maker writeth, be it Greek or Latin, or, as our case
is, the vulgar English; and when it is peculiar unto a country it is
called the mother speech of that people—the Greeks term it idiomata—
so is ours at this day the Norman English. Before the conquest of
the Normans it was the Anglo-Saxon, and before that the British, which,
as some will, is at this day the Welsh, or, as others affirm, the Corn-
ish. I for my part think neither of both as they be now spoken and
pronounced.

This part in our maker or poet must be heedfully looked unto, that it
be natural, pure, and the most usual of all his country; and for the
same purpose rather that which is spoken in the king's court or in the
good towns and cities within the land, than in the marches and fron-
tiers, or in port towns, where strangers haunt for traffic's sake; or
yet in universities, where scholars use much peevish affectionation of
words out of the primitive languages; or finally, in any uplandish
village or corner of a realm, where is no resort but of poor, rustic, or
uncivil people. Neither shall he follow the speech of a craftsman or
carter or other of the inferior sort, though he be inhabitant or bred in
the best town and city in this realm, for such persons do abuse good
speeches by strange accents or ill-shaped sounds and false orthogra-
phy. But he shall follow generally the better-brought-up sort, such as
the Greeks call charientes: men civil and graciously behaviored and
bred.

Our maker therefore at these days shall not follow Pietr Plowman
nor Gower nor Lydgate nor yet Chaucer, for their language is now out
of use with us; neither shall he take the terms of northern men such as
they use in daily talk—whether they be noblemen or gentlemen or of
their best clerks, all is a matter—or in effect any speech used beyond
the river of Trent: though no man can deny but that theirs is the purer
English Saxon at this day, yet it is not so courtly nor so current as our southern English is; no more is the far western man's speech. Ye
shall therefore take the usual speech of the court and that of London
and the shires lying about London within sixty miles, and not much
above. I say not this but that in every shire of England there be gentle-
men and others that speak, but especially write, as good southerm as we
of Middlesex or Surrey do, but not the common people of every shire, to
whom the gentlemen and also their learned clerks do for the most part
condeiscend, but herein we are already ruled by the English diction-
aries and other books written by learned men, and therefore it needeth
none other direction in that behalf.

Albeit peradventure some small admonition be not impertinent, for
we find in our English writers many words and speeches amendable;

11. haunt resort to frequently.
12. peevish silly, perverse, capricious, querulous, or vexing.
13. primitive languages i.e., Latin and Greek.
14. uplandish inland, remote.
15. orthography usually a term for spelling.
16. charientes [Gk.] graceful, elegant, or witty ones; wealthy citizens, gentlemen.

Plato uses it for those who make witty and sarcastic remarks [Republic 5.432b], while
Aristotle uses it for the wealthy members of the state [Politics 4.10.1297b10]. At 5.18.276
Puttenham defines the trope he calls chariantism as the "pryv nip, or a mild and ap-
peasing mockery"; this word means "wit" in Greek and defines the essential quality pos-
sessed by those labeled charientes.

17. all is a matter it is all the same.
18. condeiscend lower oneself gracefully (to speak with in their language); contempt is
not implied.
19. There were at least six quasi-
lexicographical works dealing with English
to which Puttenham might be referring
[printed before 1589]; [1] John Palsgrave's
Leslarcissement de la langue francaise
word Lord Steward. But methinks for my own opinion this word mai-
ordomo, though he be borrowed, is more acceptable than any of the
rest; other men may judge otherwise. Politician: this word also is re-
ceived from the Frenchmen, but at this day usual in court and with
all good secretaries, and cannot find an English word to match him, for to
have said a man politic had not been so well, because in truth that had
been no more than to have said a civil person. Politician: is rather a sur-
veyor of civility than civil, and a public minister or counselor in the
state. Ye have also this word conduct, a French word, but well
allowed of us, and long since usual; it sounds somewhat more than this
word "leading," for it is applied only to the leading of a captain, and not
as a little boy should lead a blind man, therefore more proper to the
case when he said, conduct, of whole armies. Ye find also this word
idiom, taken from the Greeks yet serving aptly when a man wanteth
expressly such unless it be in two words, which surplusage to
avoid, we are allowed to draw in other words single and as much sig-
nificent. This word significative is borrowed of the Latin and
French, but to us brought in first by some nobleman's secretary, as I
think, yet doth so well serve the turn, as it could not now be spared.
And many more like usurped Latin and French words, as: method,
methodical, placation, function, assu timid, refining, compen-
dious, prolix, figurative, inveigle. A term borrowed of our common

29. Maiordomo derives from medieval Latin major domus, "the chief of the house," and although it originally meant the chief of official of the royal household under the Merovingian kings of France, it came to mean the head servant in any wealthy household. In English it was applied to a steward or butler, and Puttenham uses the word of the first recorded. "Maitre d'hôtel" (or maître d'hôtel in modern French) refers to the chief steward running a nobleman's house (this hôtel).

30. Puttenham's notion that the poets were the first lawmakers and politicians at 1.3-97.

31. Conduct Original spelling is retained to preserve literary form. Puttenham's stress on the primarily military meaning of this word may seem slightly eccentric. According to Randle Cotgrave's Dictionary of the English and English Tongue (1611), the term had the more general meaning of "conducting" or "leading." The French word, however, derives from the Latin concurrere, which had both the general meaning of "con-

ducting" and the more specific ones of "leading a military troop" and the "consec-
tural payment" one received for that activity. In Italian the comparable term is condotta, which has both of those meanings and from which is derived condottiere, or "mercenary captain."

32. sounds somewhat more is both more specialized and more elevated

33. unless it be in without using.

34. Puttenham seems to be saying that the word idiom desires to be naturalized in English because what it means can be expressed only by using a circumlocution involving two words or perhaps more, it is unclear which two words he is thinking of here.

35. significative meaningful.

36. usurped taken, seized. In order to de-
scribe the borrowing of terms from foreign languages Puttenham uses a word that had a distinctly political meaning in the period and that underscored the illegitimacy of the seizure involved. His choice of this word seems consistent with his general theory of figures as being "abuses, or rather trespases, in speech." [7.3-38]

37. Placation propitiation.

38. assu timid sublimizing, refining, making

fine or thin.
lawyers—impression—also a new term, but well expressing the matter, and more than our English word. These words, numerous, numerosity, metrical, harmonical, but they cannot be refused, especially in this place for description of the art. Also ye find these words, penetrate, penetrable, indignity, which I cannot see how we may spare them, whatsoever fault we find with inkind words for our speech wanteth words to such sense so well to be used. Yet instead of indignity, ye have unworthiness; and for penetrate, we may say pierce, and that a French term also, or broach, or enter into with violence, but not so well-sounding as penetrate. Item, savage, for wild; obscure, for dark. Item, these words, declination, delineation, dimension, are scholastic terms indeed, and yet very proper. But peradventure (and I could bring a reason for it) many other like words borrowed out of the Latin and French were not so well to be allowed by us, as these words: audacious, for bold; facundity, for eloquence, eggregious, for great or notable; implete, for replenished; attemptat, for attempt; compatible, for agreeable in nature, and many more. But herein the noble poet Horace hath said enough to satisfy us all in these few verses:

Multa renascentur quae iam cecidere cadentque
Quae nunc sunt in honore vocabula si viole usus
Quem penes arbitrium est et vis et norma loquendi.43

Which I have thus Englisht, but nothing with so good grace, nor so briefly as the poet wrote:

Many a word yfall’na shall eft44 arise
And such as now been held in highest prise45
Will fall as fast, when use and custom will,
Only umpires of speech, for force and skill.46

39. inkind ostentatoiously learned, pedantic.
40. implete full (from Lat. implere, "to fill up").
41. attemptat (from Lat. attemptare or attemptare, "to strive for, to attempt.
42. compatible from Lat. compatiri, "to suffer together or mutually," hence "congruent or agreeable with."
43. Horace, Ars poética 70-72, the last two lines are also cited at 2.15.310. Modern editions of Horace’s poem have ius for vis.
44. yfallen, eft archaisms for “fallen” and “again.” Such locutions were sometimes used (as frequently in Spenser) to convey the feel of ancient dignity.
45. prise both price and prize, both of which mean “worth or value.”
46. when . . . skill whenever use and custom wish to do so, they being the only umpires of speech (i.e., they alone will decide whether words will survive) because of their (i.e., use and custom’s) force and power.

C H A P T E R 5

Of style

Style is a constant and continual phrase1 or tenor of speaking and writing, extending to the whole tale or process of the poem or history, and not properly to any piece or member of a tale, but is of words, speeches, and sentences2 together a certain contrived form and quality, many times natural to the writer, many times his peculiar3 by election and art, and such as either he keepeth by skill4 or holdeth on by ignorance, and will not or peradventure5 cannot easily alter into any other. So we say that Cicero’s style and Sallust’s were not one, nor Caesar’s and Livy’s, nor Homer’s and Hesiod’s, nor Herodotus’ and Thucydides’, nor Euripides’ and Aristophanes’, nor Erasmus’s and Budaecus’s styles. And because this continual course and manner of writing or speech sheweth the matter and disposition of the writer’s mind more than one or few words or sentences can show, therefore there be4 that have called style the image of man (mentis character),5 for man is but his mind, and as his mind is tempered6 and qualified,6 so are his speeches and language at large,6 and his inward conceits7 be the mettle7 of his mind, and his manner of utterance the very warp and woof of his conceits,8 more plain, or busy9 and intricate, or otherwise affected after the rate.8 Most men say that not any one point in all physiognomy is so certain as to judge a man’s manners8 by his eye, but more assuredly, in mine opinion, by his daily manner of speech and ordinary writing. For if the man be grave, his speech and style is grave; if light-headed, his style and language also light; if the mind be haughty and hot, the speech and style is also vehement and stirring;9 if it be cold and temperate,9 the style is also very modest; if it be humble or base and meek, so is also the language and style.

And yet peradventure9 not altogether so, but that every man’s style is for the most part according to the matter and subject of the writer, or so phric chain linked with how the mind is "tempered" (earlier in the sentence).

1. phrase manner of speech.
2. words . . . sentences i.e., individual words, phrases or clauses, and syntactic units (but also sayings: Lat. sententiae).
3. peculiar special or exclusive characteristic.
4. there be i.e., there are (those).
5. mentis character mark of the mind.
6. tempered and qualified composed and endowed with certain qualities.
7. mettle Elizabethans did not distinguish by spelling, as we do, the words for the material substance of metal and mettle as a quality of disposition or temperament. The Art spells this term “metal” here. In addition to the clear sense of "disposition," Puttenham may have meant to build a secondary meta-

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ought to be, and conformable thereunto. Then again may it be said as well that men do choose their subjects according to the mettle of their minds, and therefore a high-minded man chooseth him high and lofty matter to write of; the base courage, matter base and low; the mean and modest mind, mean and moderate matters after the rate. Howsoever it be, we find that under these three principal compositions [if I may with leave so term them], high, mean, and base style, there be contained many other humors or qualities of style, as the plain and obscure, the rough and smooth, the facile and hard, the plentiful and barren, the rude and eloquent, the strong and feeble, the vehement and cold styles, all which in their evil are to be reformed, and the good to be kept and used. But generally to have the style decent and comely, it behooveth the maker or poet to follow the nature of his subject; that is, if his matter be high and lofty, that the style be so too; if mean, the style also to be mean; if base, the style humble and base accordingly. And they that do otherwise use it, applying to mean matter high and lofty style, and to high matters style either mean or base, and to the base matters the mean or high style, do utterly disgrace their poetry and show themselves nothing skilful in their art, nor having regard to the decency, which is the chief praise of any writer.

Therefore, to rid all lovers of learning from that error, I will, as near as I can, set down which matters be high and lofty, which be but mean, and which be low and base, to the intent the styles may be fashioned to the matters, and keep their decorum and good proportion in every respect. I am not ignorant that many good clerks be contrary to mine opinion, and say that the lofty style may be decently used in a mean and base subject and contrariwise, which I do in part acknowledge, but with a reasonable qualification. For Homer hath so used it in his trilling work of Batrachomyomachia, that is, in his treatise of the war betwixt the frogs and the mice; Vergil also in his Bucolics and in his Georgics, whereof the one is counted mean, the other base, that is, the husbandman's discourses and the shepherd's. But hereunto serveth a reason, in my simple conceit. For first, to that trilling poem of Homer: though the frog and the mouse be but little and ridiculous beasts, yet to treat of war is a high subject, and a thing in every respect terrible and dangerous to them that it alights on, and therefore of learned duty asketh martial grandiloquence, if it be set forth in his kind and nature of war, even betwixt the basest creatures that can be imagined. So also is the ant or pismire, and they be but little creeping things, not perfect beasts, but insects, or worms; yet in describing their nature and instinct, and their manner of life approaching to the form of a commonwealth, and their properties not unlike to the virtues of most excellent governors and captains, it asketh a more majesty of speech than would the description of any other beast's life or nature, and perchance of many matters pertaining unto the baser sort of men, because it resembleth the history of a civil regiment, and of them all the chief and most principal, which is monarchy.

So also in his Bucolics, which are but pastoral speeches and the basest of any other poem in their own proper nature, Vergil used a somewhat swelling style when he came to insinuate the birth of Marcellus, heir apparent to the Emperor Augustus, as child to his sister, aspiring by hope and greatness of the house to the succession of the empire and establishment thereof in that family. Whereupon Vergil could do no less than to use such manner of style, whatsoever condition the poem were of, and this was decent, and no fault or blemish, to confound the tenors of the styles for that cause. But now when I remember me again that this eclogue (for I have read it somewhere) was conceived by Octavian the Emperor to be written to the honor of Pollio, a citizen of Rome and of no great nobility—the same was disliked again as an implacable nothing decent nor proportionable to Pollio's fortunes and calling—in which respect I might say likewise the style was not to be such as if it had been for the emperor's own honor and
those of the blood imperial, than which subject there could not be among the Roman writers a higher nor graver to treat upon, so can I not be removed from mine opinion, but still methinks that in all decency the style ought to conform with the nature of the subject.

Otherwise, if a writer will seem to observe no decorum at all, nor pass how he fashion his tale to his matter, who doubteth but he may in the lightest cause speak like a pope, and in the gravest matters prate like a parrot, and find words and phrases enough to serve both turns, and neither of them commendably? For neither is all that may be written of kings and princes such as ought to keep a high style, nor all that may be written upon a shepherd to keep the low, but according to the matter reported, if that be of high or base nature. For every petty pleasure and vain delight of a king are not to be accounted high matter for the height of his estate, but mean and perchance very base and vile, nor so a poet or historiographer could decently with a high style report the vanities of Nero, the ribaldries of Caligula, the idleness of Domitian, and the riots of Heliogabalus. But well the magnanimity and honorable ambition of Caesar, the prosperities of Augustus, the gravity of Tiberius, the bounty of Trajan, the wisdom of Aurelius, and generally all that which concerned the highest honors of emperors, their birth, alliances, government, exploits in war and peace, and other public affairs: for they must be matter stately and high, and require a style to be lifted up and advanced by choice of words, phrases, sentences, and figures, high, lofty, eloquent and magnific in proportion. So be the mean matters to be carried with all words and speeches of smoothness and pleasant moderation; and finally the base things to be holden within their tether by a low, mild, and simple manner of utterance, creeping rather than climbing, and marching rather than mounting upwards with the wings of the stately subjects and style.

33. pass care.
34. tale narration.
35. vile morally debased, as often with such rulers as Nero or Caligula.
26. The evil Renaissance reputation of Tiberius visible in Jonson's Sejanus is rejected by modern scholars, who regard the scandals of debauchery as later inventions, but the positive view was available to Puttenham: the emperor's Roman gravitas is not absent in Suetonius, and is clear in Tacitus, who thought him a good prince and an old-fashioned Roman until he retired to Capri and Sejanus took over. It should be noted, however, that Puttenham did at least a partial translation of Suetonius' Life of Tiberius, of which a single page survives (PRO, SP 12/126/67), and that page, which corresponds to chapters 58-61 (with omissions) of Suetonius' work, stresses Tiberius' wanton cruelty, not his gravitas.
37. magnific glorious, splendid.

Chapter 6

Of the high, low, and mean subject

The matters therefore that concern the gods and divine things are highest of all to be couched in writing, next to them the noble gests and great fortunes of princes and the notable accidents of time, as the greatest affairs of war and peace. These be all high subjects, and therefore are delivered over to the poets hymnic and historical who be occupied either in other laudes or in heroic reports. The mean matters be those that concern mean men—their life and business, as lawyers, gentlemen, and merchants, good householders and honest citizens—and which sound neither to matters of state nor of war, nor leagues, nor great alliances, but smack all the common conversation, as of the civiler and better sort of men. The base and low matters be the doings of the common artificer, servingman, yeoman, groom, husbandman, day-laborer, sailor, shepherd, swineherd, and such like of homely calling, degree, and bringing up.

So that in every of the said three degrees not the selfsame virtues be equally to be praised, nor the same vices equally to be displeased, nor their loves, marriages, quarrels, contracts, and other behaviors be like high nor do require to be set forth with the like style, but every one in his degree and decency: which made that all hymns and histories and tragedies were written in the high style; all comedies and interludes and other common poetics of loves and such like in the mean style; all eulogies and pastoral poems in the low and base style. Otherwise, they had been utterly disproportioned. Likewise, for the same cause, some phrases and figures be only peculiar to the high style, some to the base or mean, some common to all three, as shall be declared more at large hereafter when we come to speak of figure and phrase. Also some words and speeches and sentences do become the high style that do not become the other two, and contrariwise, as shall be said when we talk of words and sentence. Finally, some kind of measure and concord do not beseech the high style that well become the mean and low, as we have said speaking of concord and measure.

But generally the high style is disgraced and made foolish and ridiculous by all words affected, counterfeit, and puffed up, as it were a wind-ball carrying more countenance than matter, and cannot be better resembled than to these midsummer pageants in London, where to make the people wonder are set forth great and ugly giants marching as if they were alive and armed at all points, but within they are stuffed
full of brown paper and tow,⁹ which the shrewd boys underpeering do guilefully discover and turn to a great derision.¹⁰ Also all dark⁶ and unaccustomed works, or rustic and homely, and sentences⁶ that hold too much of the merry and light, or infamous and unshamefast,¹¹ are to be accounted of the same sort, for such speeches become not princes nor great estates,⁸ nor them that write of their doings, to utter or report and intermingle with the grave and weighty matters.

9. tow the unworked stem or fiber of flax.
10. Castiglione uses this image to describe bad princes pulped up with self-love: "[T]hey are... like the Colosses that were made in Rome the last year upon the feast day of the place of Agone, which outwardly declared a likeness of great men and horses of triumph, and inwardly were full of tow and rages" [Hoby 263; for the original, see Castiglione 47.454]. For discussion of such festivities and pageants, see Bergeron, Stephens, and Laroque. For data on the construction and operation of such pageant figures, see Nichols 1489-90. This comparison stages a clash between a more traditional mentality in the Renaissance that expressed itself in such civic pageantry and a more skeptical, perhaps modern, mentality that is evident in the irreverent behavior of the "shrewd boys" as well as in the author's recounting of their activity. The passage also registers a play between the guile of the boys who undo or undercut the pageant and the pageant's beguiling the minds and eyes of the audience. For Puttenham's linked discussion of decorum, see 3:23.
11. unshamefast immodest.

CHAPTER 7

Of figures and figurative speeches

As figures be the instruments of ornament in every language, so be they also in a sort abuses,⁶ or rather trespasses, in speech, because they pass the ordinary limits of common utterance, and be occupied of purpose to deceive the ear and also the mind, drawing it from plainness and simplicity to a certain doubleness, whereby our talk is the more guileful and abusing.¹ For what else is your metaphor but an inversion of sense by transport,² your allegory by a duplicity of meaning or dissimulation under covert and dark³ intentions,⁶ one while speaking obscurely and in riddle called enigma; another while by common proverb or adage called paronomia; then by merry scoff called ironia;⁰ then by bitter taunt called sarcasmus; then by paraphrase or circumlocation when all might be said in a word or two; then by incredibly comparison giving credit, as by your hyperbole; and many other ways seeking to inveigle⁶ and appassionate⁷ the mind! Which thing made the
decadent, since the word means literally a "bearing or transporting across a boundary." Puttenham examines metaphor in 1:17; see the discussion and notes there for his habitual odd usage of inversion. All of the other tropes mentioned here receive close treatment in 3:18.
3. appassionate impassion.

1. abusing deceiving. Cf. Quintilian 9.1.2-3; note that Quintilian says that figures would be errors (vitia) if they were intended by the speaker or writer and were not aesthetically pleasing to the hearer or listener.
2. an inversion of sense by transport a transposing or alteration of meaning by a change [from literal to figurative]. Puttenham's definition of metaphor contains a certain redundancy, since the word means literally a "bearing or transporting across a boundary." Puttenham examines metaphor in 1:17; see the discussion and notes there for his habitual odd usage of inversion. All of the other tropes mentioned here receive close treatment in 3:18.
3. appassionate impassion.